



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 17 September 2013

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 17 September 2013

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Pastor Mark Osa Igiehon, Jesus House, City of God, Aberdeen.

Pastor Mark Osa Igiehon (Jesus House, City of God, Aberdeen): As a citizen of Scotland, I criss-cross the land on the Lord's business. With over 10 years of hearing Scotland's heart, I firmly conclude that Scotland is much loved and blessed by God. This is evident in our incredible people, beautiful country and God's help throughout history.

God entrusted Scotland with the eternal project of taking the good news in Christ to nations. We remember Mary Slessor and other great Scots who went out transforming peoples, like those of Nigeria, by the simple Gospel. We remember our Scottish King James, who commissioned the King James Bible—the most read book in the world. Those evidences lead me to conclude that Scotland is God's favourite country.

Today, Scotland stands at a threshold of great opportunities and great dangers. We are in a global recession so pervasive that some have described it as a biblical famine. Government has to do more with fewer resources. Today, Parliament is tasked with deciding grave questions of constitution, faith and morality—questions that no generation in recent memory has had to answer. Today, the church across Scotland is in crisis.

Intensifying those challenges, I see a country that increasingly thinks that we no longer need God. The Lord is the perfect gentleman and respects our wishes. If we ignore him, he will ignore us and leave us to our own devices, whims and caprices.

Scotland needed him in previous generations and we need his help even more today. With God's help, Parliament can lead this generation to safely navigate the affairs of Scotland across the present unparalleled challenges, to land this ship of state into safe harbour for the next generations.

I see a bright future for Scotland because of God's love for Scotland. You are today's leaders. He will guide you, with foresight beyond

generations, to make Scotland the light of the nations.

I pray that, Lord, you be our salvation and our help in Scotland. For you members of Parliament, entrusted with high affairs of state, we pray that you will seek the Lord in humility for godly wisdom to make generationally enduring decisions for Scotland and for good stewardship of the high affairs of Scotland and that, at the end, you will give a good account to the people of Scotland and to your maker.

To the most high God be glory throughout Scotland today and always.

Amen.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Renewable Energy (Pentland Firth)

1. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what benefits the recently announced development in the Pentland Firth of the largest tidal array in Europe will bring to the marine renewable energy industry. (S4T-00448)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): This is a significant milestone for the marine industry in Scotland and sends a positive message to the wider supply chain. MeyGen is working closely with Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to maximise the local content of the project, having committed to investing in local businesses and skills. We are already seeing benefits as a result of MeyGen's activities. The company has spent £1 million in the Highlands since 2010, recruited staff locally, and taken part in a successful supply chain networking event in Thurso, which was attended by 40 businesses.

Mike MacKenzie: I welcome the benefits of such tidal projects, but does the minister share my concerns that the benefits of wave and tidal technologies may not be fully realised until the matter of disproportionate grid connection charges for island generators is addressed and unless a suitable contracts for difference strike price for wave and tidal generators is set?

Fergus Ewing: Mike MacKenzie is absolutely correct that if all the islands—the Western Isles and the Orkney and Shetland islands—are to achieve their enormous potential, there must be the right support for them, and the evidence suggests that that means three island CFDs. In addition, it is essential that we properly incentivise the wave and tidal sector, as Mike MacKenzie rightly argues. That is at the very top of my priorities. I welcome the Department of Energy and Climate Change consultation that will be published on 18 September, but we believe that the proposals need to be improved if we are to realise the enormous potential that the islands have to offer for renewable energy.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): How quickly does the minister envisage the roll-out of further projects in the Pentland Firth site taking place? Does he believe that there is now potential for exporting this home-grown technology to other parts of the world?

Fergus Ewing: I understand that the first stage in the MeyGen project will be to assemble the offices that it requires onshore in Caithness.

Possibly next year or the year after that—depending on things such as the weather and the rate of progress—there will be an initial phase in which up to six turbines will be placed in the water.

On the nature of those schemes, the important thing is to demonstrate their efficacy and to learn from the real-life experience of trying them in the extremely testing conditions of the Pentland Firth and Orkney waters. However, we expect that, as Scotland is currently in the lead and there are several other projects, with due encouragement and support from the Scottish Government, the local authorities, the Crown Estate and the United Kingdom Government, many other projects should follow apace. To respond to the question, I confirm that we expect that the technologies that are developed in Scotland can be exported throughout the world in due course.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):

The news is most welcome for my constituency as the next step in offshore renewables development. What benefits can MeyGen bring from the development in the long term once the arrays have, we hope, proved a success? Could it lead to more jobs in, for example, a data centre, which could provide a lot of sustainable work for many more people in Caithness than the construction phase?

Fergus Ewing: I acknowledge Rob Gibson's campaigning on the issue. Indeed, he has probably been campaigning since before some members of the Parliament were born—although not Alex Johnstone, I have to say.

Rob Gibson has made a serious point. The project is huge: it is the biggest tidal project in Europe. It has been consented in Scotland, and it has enormous potential to generate jobs and opportunities in Caithness, in particular in Scrabster, where the Scottish Government has invested approximately £20 million in a new deepwater quay. The port of Scrabster has now signed a memorandum of understanding with MeyGen to ensure that Scrabster is the location for the deployment and maintenance of the project's initial phase. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has estimated that the project will create up to 100 jobs for the assembly, deployment and maintenance of the six turbines, the bulk of which will be in the Highlands and Caithness.

I will be happy to meet Mr Gibson to discuss with him the data centre idea.

Dangerous Dogs

2. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to prevent attacks by dangerous dogs. (S4T-00452)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I am aware of weekend reports of a dog attack on an eight-year-old girl in Dundee. The local constituency MSP, Shona Robison, has already raised the matter with me and I appreciate the concerns that have been raised. I am sure that the Parliament's sympathies go to the girl and her family as she recovers from her ordeal. There is obviously an on-going police investigation.

More generally, we are clear that owning a dog brings certain responsibilities, and irresponsible dog owners who allow their dogs to be out of control should be subject to appropriate controls and sanctions. That is why, in 2010, the Parliament extended the criminal law so that a dog could not be dangerously out of control in either a public or a private place. The extension to include private places means that an owner must be responsible for their dog at all times and in all places. The Parliament also gave local authorities new powers to require the microchipping of out-of-control dogs through the creation of the dog control notice regime for use by officers who are authorised by local authorities.

More recently, I attended the Justice Committee last week to seek its approval for increased penalties to be available to our courts when they deal with cases involving dangerously out-of-control dogs.

Jenny Marra: The cabinet secretary talks about appropriate controls and sanctions, but those come after the attack. He talks about dog control notices, but is he aware that Angus Council, in my region, has issued only one such notice since the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 came into force, and Dundee City Council, in whose area the attack took place at the weekend, has issued none? Does the cabinet secretary plan to review the 2010 act to see exactly how effective it is?

Kenny MacAskill: No. What we seek to do is to build on the 2010 act. Indeed, those south of the border are currently seeking to do that. I pay tribute to Christine Grahame, who was instrumental in bringing the act in.

We realise that changes have to be made because of court decisions down south, and that is being addressed. As I said, I appeared at the Justice Committee to support the legislative consent motion so that we can ensure that the actions and character of the owner are taken into account as well as dealing with matters relating to guide dogs and assistance dogs, where additional measures are clearly required. We have a good basis in the 2010 act, and that is recognised by those south of the border who now seek to replicate it, but we have to be ever vigilant.

With regard to the particular matters relating to Dundee and Angus, it is for local authorities to

decide to whom to issue a dog control notice. Having been involved in the debate when the bill went through the Parliament, I am conscious that it is a question of deed, not breed and that the overwhelming majority of dog owners are responsible. It is the minority that are irresponsible who have to be targeted and dealt with.

Jenny Marra: There are frequent dangerous dog attacks that the 2010 act is not preventing, and most of them are on children. They include the attack in Dundee at the weekend and a vicious attack in Arbroath this summer. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is now time to consider preventative measures such as muzzling and leads, because the sanctions that his Government has put in force are just not working?

Kenny MacAskill: The member was not in the Parliament in 2010, but the whole purpose of the dog control notice is so that a council can decide whether to insist on microchipping, muzzling or a variety of other measures. This is a matter on which we have to encourage local authorities. If Ms Marra is unhappy with the attitudes and actions of the local authorities, she should raise the matter with them. I believe that we have a sound basis in law that we are seeking to build on, and indeed it is an approach that is being followed south of the border.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I am sure that the cabinet secretary shares my concern about any attack on a child or indeed any person. Does he also share my concern about the increasing attacks on guide dogs and assistance dogs? Will he confirm what the latest position is regarding the LCM on the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill and say whether there will be an amendment from the Scottish Government to make such an attack an aggregated offence?

Kenny MacAskill: The purpose of my appearing at the Justice Committee was to move support for the LCM to ensure that, with the changes that are being made south of the border, which replicate our 2010 act, matters that are not currently provided for in Scotland—particularly the point that Dennis Robertson made about assistance dogs—will be covered. It is entirely unacceptable that these dogs should be subject to attacks. We have to ensure that the legislation provides for that, and I assure the member that we have sought to include the matter. The timescale is now, to some extent, subject to matters south of the border, but I will be happy to keep him advised as matters progress.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): A number of people who are involved in the dog rescue sector have put it to me that there are many dangerous feral dogs as a result of indiscriminate breeding of animals, particularly in

socially rented properties. People have expressed concern that, in time, there will be a very serious or fatal attack. I raised the issue of indiscriminate breeding of dogs in a members' business debate last week. Will the cabinet secretary liaise with the environment and housing ministers and arrange a cross-party meeting between ministers and interested MSPs to discuss the issue?

Kenny MacAskill: I am always happy to take members' comments on board. We have been working closely across the Government—my colleague Paul Wheelhouse responded to last week's debate.

I think that we can say that it is a minority of dog owners who allow their dogs to behave in the manner that has been described. The maxim in the 2010 act was deed, not breed. I am sad to say that sometimes the issue is not the animal but the owner. To some extent, that is a matter not for legislation with regard to animals but for action against individuals. I am more than happy to engage with Ms Milne on the matter.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his references to the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010—the bill proposal was initiated by Alex Neil and continued by me.

As the cabinet secretary knows, there have been more than 1,000 investigations in the period of just more than a year since the 2010 act came into force. However, Jenny Marra has a point. The act is not well enough publicised, to ensure that there is intervention at an early stage, before a dog gets to the point at which it is dangerous. Does the Government have plans to publicise the act? Can it help in any way in that regard?

Kenny MacAskill: We seek to work with local authority partners, given that they must deal on the front line with many of the matters that we are considering. I meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regularly, and when I next do so I will be more than happy to take on board the positions of Ms Marra and Ms Grahame and point out to Harry McGuigan and others who deal with community safety that there is some dissatisfaction in the Parliament—although not necessarily among Government ministers. I am also more than happy to take on board the views of Ms Grahame and Ms Milne on how we further publicise the 2010 act.

We are talking about a small minority, but there have been incidents, as Ms Marra said, which are tragic and can have fatal consequences. It is therefore appropriate that everyone, at every level, should do everything that they can do. I think that we have a sufficient legislative base. That base is being built on, and we need to ensure that the

theory behind the legislation is implemented in practice.

Opencast Mining

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-07712, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on opencast mining in Scotland, coaling and restoring. Members will be aware that there is a live court case before the Court of Session, on restoration. You should take care to avoid mention of the details of that case.

I call Fergus Ewing to speak to and move the motion. Minister, you have 14 minutes, but we have a bit of time in hand, so the Presiding Officers will be flexible.

14:18

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will keep your advice very much in mind.

As members know, the coal industry in Scotland has been experiencing a very tough time. Coal prices are low and operating costs are high, and two of Scotland's largest producers have folded in the past 12 months, which resulted in the loss of 732 jobs, which the communities in which they were located could ill afford to lose.

I am determined to work to find a solution that will take the sector through this difficult time, and I have set up a cross-party national task force to tackle the issues. The task force is chaired by me and by Professor Russel Griggs, who has for the past year been working hard behind the scenes with all interested parties in the coal sector.

The task force brings together many interested stakeholders: the local authorities that are affected; Scottish Government energy and planning officials; operators; trade unions; the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust; the Coal Authority; and United Kingdom Government departments such as the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Scotland Office. There is also representation from many of the parliamentarians who represent affected areas.

The task force's remit is simple and straightforward, with two objectives: first, to secure employment and protect what jobs we can for our rural communities in a more secure and sustainable way than has happened before; and, secondly, to help ensure that appropriate restoration takes place.

With regard to some of the progress that the task force has made thus far, on employment, I am pleased to report to the chamber that 153 former Scottish Resources Group employees have now gone into work; 117 of them are from East Ayrshire, the council area most affected by redundancies, and 36 are from Lanarkshire. I am

also pleased to report that Hargreaves has restated its plans to employ around 300 people in Scotland in its first six months of full operation and that that estimate might rise to around 500 people in the next 12 months.

Secondly, on training, the task force set up a short-term working group to look specifically at training and qualifications. Thanks to the pile of joint working that the partnership action for continuing employment—or PACE—team, the operators Hargreaves, the Department for Work and Pensions and Skills Development Scotland have done together, 184 former employees have started training through the Scottish Government employability fund, which has resulted in the awarding of 97 qualifications. I am pleased to report that Hargreaves has now set up a driver training centre at its site at Broken Cross in South Lanarkshire with the capability to train 50 drivers per week.

Thirdly, on Office of Rail Regulation track access charges, members will appreciate the key importance of ensuring the industry's commercial viability, but that viability was put in doubt by the ORR's proposal to hugely increase track access charges to, I believe, £4.04 per 1,000 gross tonnes per mile. Those charges have now been reduced to £1.04 and will not be fully implemented until 2018. I thank all the parties that played a part in that. Had the task force not existed, I do not think that it would have happened, but I also recognise that the UK Government and the transport minister Keith Brown played their part. There was cross-party recognition of this threat and, to be fair, there was a commensurate response, for which we are grateful.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: Not just yet.

Fourthly, the task force is focused not just on jobs but on restoration, which is part of the legacy left behind with the demise of ATH Resources and SRG and is causing concern to all the affected councils. Earlier this year, I announced the creation of the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust, an independent body that has been created specifically to assist councils and other parties in the restoration of opencast sites across Scotland. Its primary role will be that of facilitator, not funder, and it will seek to bring together all the relevant parties to tackle restoration issues. Indeed, I am pleased that councils are already coming forward and receiving practical assistance from the SMRT in their restoration plans.

Restoration is a complex problem that did not arise only yesterday and will not be solved tomorrow, but I am pleased that the councils in Scotland, notably East Ayrshire, Fife, South

Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Midlothian, are working through each case on a site-by-site basis. In Fife, for example, a restoration plan has been worked out at the ex-ATH site at Muir Dean and the restoration task is out to tender. That will also help to create jobs, and is a good example of partnership involving the council, the UK Coal Authority, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, local landowners and the bond provider, all of whom came together to ensure maintenance of the site while the restoration plan was developed.

In Dumfries and Galloway, restoration of the Glenmuckloch site has been made possible only by the coaling of an extension site. Continued coaling can secure employment while allowing restoration to happen; as excavation goes forward, the soils and overburden that are uncovered are used to restore that which is left behind. It took a great degree of innovative and pragmatic thinking to get to that position with the Glenmuckloch site. None of this is easy, but that example shows that solutions can be found if all the parties are prepared to work together. There are productive ways of carrying out restoration and we have to look at each site on its own.

In addition to the restoration measures that I have mentioned, we are exploring whether the levy that is paid to the Coal Authority could be applied for restoration. That is the levy per tonne of coal that is mined, which is currently 17p per tonne. I understand, from information that was provided to the most recent meeting of the coal task force by, I believe, the Coal Authority, that only 1p out of that 17p goes to the Coal Authority and that 16p goes to the consolidated fund. We are talking about several million pounds. Therefore, I have written to UK energy minister Michael Fallon to ask whether that money can be made available to restore the opencast sites in Scotland, as it comes from the coal that has been mined in Scotland.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Does the minister think that taxpayers' money should be used to fund the legacy that has been left by a failed coal mining industry? Does he think that that is a good use of public funds?

Fergus Ewing: I do not know what Mr Rennie is referring to. We do not apply taxpayers' money. I was referring to a levy that is paid by the industry to the UK Government. It has absolutely nothing to do with taxpayers' money. Unless Mr Rennie can enlighten us about where that alleged subsidy comes from in the opening speech that he is about to make—and I invite him to do so—that will be one of the many far from robust arguments that we will hear from him this afternoon.

I am happy to take an intervention from Mr Harvie now, if he wants to intervene.

Patrick Harvie: A few moments ago, in talking about the track access charges in particular, the minister said that he thinks that it is important to ensure that the industry remains commercially viable. Surely, the phrase “commercially viable” implies that an industry is able to bear all its own costs, whether those are the costs of running its business, the costs of transporting its goods, the costs of accessing the rail network or the costs of the restoration of all sites, which it has imposed on communities up and down Scotland.

Fergus Ewing: Mr Harvie makes several assertions, but I do not think that they stack up because the coal industry is not subsidised. If Mr Harvie wants to argue otherwise, we will hear from him in his closing remarks. I put it to him—

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: Well, hang on. I am answering this chap, first.

I hope that Mr Harvie and Mr Rennie will address the issue squarely. It seems to me that the amendment that they have co-signed would inevitably have the effect of destroying the opencast industry in Scotland, which would lead to the almost immediate redundancy of several thousand people and the total destruction of the opencast industry in Scotland. Who is going to invest in Scotland's coal industry if there is a moratorium? Nobody is. Moreover, if that were to happen, what would the effect be? The coal-fired power stations would still need coal, but it would come from Colombia and Russia. How would that be good for the environment? I look forward to the explanation of those issues this afternoon.

Let me return to more effective regulation. Every site is different. There are rules in place to ensure compliance, monitoring, enforcement and financial assurance but they need to be made to work more effectively and must be tailored to each site. More effective regulation is the principal way of improving confidence in the sector. Therefore, the time is now right to consult on the options that are available to secure a more effective approach to restoration. There is a role for the Scottish Futures Trust to advise on the financial aspects, and there may also be a role for an independent compliance monitoring unit or for a local authority shared service. I shall ensure that the forthcoming consultation reaches out to all those with a genuine, productive and positive interest in sustaining the industry in Scotland and the communities that are dependent on it.

The story of the Scottish opencast sector over the past year demonstrates what can be achieved in difficult circumstances when we work together and all relevant stakeholders, including political parties, pull together. That we still have an

opencast industry is testament to those efforts, although substantial challenges remain—no one can doubt that. Not least of those challenges is to ensure that we get the best restoration solution possible for every site.

However, I believe that, with the trust that has been built up in the task force and the joint working across parties in the chamber—especially the Labour Party and the Conservative Party—we can work together to find a better future for the opencast industry. I hope that the Labour amendment, which we will support, will also be supported by the Conservatives so that we send out a very clear message that the three parties are almost unanimous in seeing a future for the industry rather than its destruction.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the substantial contribution made by the open cast coal mining industry to the Scottish economy; supports the work of the Scottish Coal Industry Taskforce, carried out in partnership by the Scottish Government, representatives of the UK Government, local authorities, parliamentarians from across the parties representing all of the affected areas, and the industry itself, to preserve employment in open cast coal mining and address challenges of restoration, and welcomes moves to identify improvements in the regulatory regime of the industry.

14:30

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

The current situation with opencast mining is a complex issue. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. The precariousness of the industry must be addressed, and the challenge of restoration must be at the very heart of that process.

This week, the Scottish Government announced that it has granted consent to MeyGen Ltd to develop the largest tidal turbine array in Europe and the first commercial project off these shores. Scotland has great potential to have a successful marine renewable energy industry and a renewables-focused energy sector. Our future energy needs must be met by a low-carbon economy, and we support Government and industry efforts to grow that side of our energy economy.

However, we need to be realistic. We are in a transitional phase. Our current and short-term energy demands need to be met. Coal is still part of our energy mix, not least when we have Longannet coal-fired power station to feed, which produces energy for 2 million people a year. We need to get the balance right between investing in the plant to provide energy security and improve environmental performance, and shifting our dependency to more sustainable long-term energy delivery.

Regardless of whether we support opencast coal, we cannot deny that the opencast coal sector has made a contribution to the Scottish economy. It is estimated to have supported around 4,500 direct and indirect skilled and well-paid jobs, primarily in economically depressed areas: 75 per cent of Scottish Coal's direct employment was in rural areas such as South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire, where alternative employment opportunities could be limited. We should not underestimate the impact that the demise of deep coal mining had on those areas, but although Scottish opencast coal output has been in the range of 5 million tonnes to 8 million tonnes per annum over the past 10 years, with a third of the UK's total opencast coal production in 2010 being mined in Scotland, the industry has been facing increasing pressures. The influx of cheap overseas coal, particularly from Russia, has made it increasingly difficult to compete in the market and to make the economics of the activity in Scotland stack up.

The recommendation by the ORR on track access charges for rail freight added further pressure to the sector. The subsequent proposal to take coal out of Glenmuckloch on the local road network rather than by rail is causing great concern for the local community. The inability of the sector to absorb or adapt to any kind of pressure, even in an uncertain economic climate, indicated that all was not well.

Although the collapse of Scottish Coal earlier this year has been the headline story, for MSPs across the chamber who represent areas in which opencast mining takes place, the sector has been vulnerable for a while. In my region, ATH Resources underwent a number of restructurings, with staff either being made redundant or having to work in a very uncertain situation, until the company collapsed earlier this year. My colleague Helen Eadie, who represents the area, will say more about the on-going concerns, but the community deserves to have confidence that environmental concerns, including concerns about mine water pollution, will be dealt with. It is welcome that the Coal Authority has accepted responsibility for managing water discharge, but the site, like others, is still waiting for a permanent solution, and communities are stuck in limbo. It is vital that such situations are resolved as soon as possible.

I know that Fife Council is working with partners to secure a solution for all the Fife sites, and that it takes restoration extremely seriously. Other colleagues will talk about the situation in East Ayrshire, which is desperate. The Scottish Government must respond to those concerns.

After this year's bad news, we are in a period of uncertainty in which it has been important to

respond quickly to the pressures and to work together to provide a route through this time. We recognise the calls for an independent inquiry, but we believe that, at this point in time, we need to be focused on addressing the immediate challenges. Labour is focused on the employees and the need to secure future employment opportunities, and to highlight restoration and associated environmental concerns.

Elaine Murray and I accepted an invitation to participate in the opencast coal task force, which has provided a forum to discuss the broad challenges facing the sector and take forward some immediate concerns around aspects such as training, restoration and the purchase of assets. There is a case now for adopting a more strategic response to the situation. If the task force is to serve a long-term purpose, it needs to adopt a more scrutinising role for the sector. The minister's announcement today of a consultation on more effective regulation is welcome, but there are opportunities to improve the system at the moment through the Scottish planning policy. The task force has also considered a limited application of state aid. Will the minister give more details today on the potential for some form of compatible aid, particularly where it could support environmental protection?

I thank RSPB Scotland and Friends of the Earth for their briefing paper, and the Scottish opencast communities alliance for its paper. The challenge of restoration is huge, and the criticisms of some of the agreements are justified. However, we must recognise that the situation does not always fail and that there are some positive examples of restoration. The restoration of sites is part of planning consent, and restoration bonds were put in place to cover the costs, if necessary.

Part of the work of the task force has been in establishing whether the bonds are sufficient for meeting restoration costs. It is fair to say that the picture across Scotland in that regard has varied. It has been estimated that the shortfall across Scotland may be £100 million or more. A combination of factors has led to that situation, but we must ensure that there is accountability and responsibility going forward.

We cannot have a situation in which communities that have lived alongside an opencast site cannot have confidence in restoration. In addition, as the RSPB has highlighted, if restoration does not happen at mines that fall within European sites protected under a habitats directive, that could be in breach of European Union wildlife law. Recently, the Court of Session accepted an application by the administrators KPMG to divest the assets of liability for restoration costs. I understand that the Scottish Government, along with SEPA, Scottish

Natural Heritage and local authorities, is appealing that decision.

The issues of the viability of uncommercial or low-productivity sites and their future, as well as the risks of their being abandoned, was addressed at the first meeting of the task force, with SEPA raising its concerns. The task force wrote to KPMG raising concerns over cherry picking because of fears about the future of the less lucrative sites. How do we address the future for those sites? What about the restoration of sites that are not attracting commercial interest or which have an inadequate bond? Local authorities are not in a position to carry the burden of significant restoration work. It is fine to say that companies must meet the responsibilities—I agree fully that they must be pursued relentlessly—but we must be realistic about the bankrupt state of some of the sector.

We need to have credible solutions. The RSPB and Friends of the Earth have rightly raised concerns that opencast coal is not the only sector requiring restoration bonds. Landfill sites and future unconventional gas works will face similar challenges, so it does not look like a problem that will go away.

There are calls for a moratorium on opencast development. In the current circumstances, I am not convinced that a formal moratorium is necessary. Local authorities are well aware of their responsibilities and the challenges that they face in dealing with existing sites, without having to approve future work. The leader of Fife Council, Alex Rowley, said recently:

“Given the condition of the industry and the worldwide drop in coal prices and our experience here in Fife and indeed across Scotland I am saying that we have to be very careful with any future consents.”

Alex Rowley raised the issue of bonds at the most recent meeting of the Scottish coal task force, which the Scottish Government set up, and asked the coal companies present whether they would be able to raise adequate bonds on future sites. The answer was plainly no. There is a real understanding across the local authority sector that local authorities must be extremely cautious because in some cases they are living with previous bad experience.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Claire Baker: I am sorry, but I am really pushed for time. The member will have a chance to sum up at the end of the debate.

Opencast coal has been controversial, as energy projects often are. We have recently had debates over proposed unconventional gas and biomass projects. We must be confident that the regulatory system is robust enough and fair to all

interests and that there is accountability for decision making.

Scottish planning policy 3 is being finalised, with five new principal policies covering sustainable economic growth, sustainable development, engagement, climate change and place making. In light of current events, that must be robust and meet the justified concerns of communities. The final draft that the Parliament considered recently did not address adequately the concerns that we are now seeing around future applications and it did not provide the necessary confidence for community protection and restoration, as well as for any developer's responsibility. Regardless of the regulatory review, the Scottish Government must revisit Scottish planning policy in the light of current circumstances.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): Will the member take an intervention?

Claire Baker: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): If you wish.

Derek Mackay: Does Claire Baker welcome the fact that I have extended the review of Scottish planning policy until June next year in order to undertake a number of consultations—not least the consultation that has been announced?

Claire Baker: I welcome that. I hope that Derek Mackay will look carefully at our amendment and recognise where we identify weaknesses in opencast restoration.

The Scottish Government recently established the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust, which is well intentioned, but there are concerns about the lack of detail on how it will work. It is an independent organisation that was formed to help to facilitate the process for communities and other stakeholders that are involved in dealing with the legacy of opencast coal sites. Its role is to offer advice, expertise and—when appropriate—funding to facilitate plans to restore derelict sites.

The trust is not a grant-awarding body and its funds are limited. It is not yet clear what advice or sources of funding it can offer. It has been recognised that restoration offers the potential for job creation. The process could have multiple benefits for communities. The trust has said that an innovative or creative approach is needed to using the resources that are in place for each site, but it is unclear how that will operate. Until a project is under way, it is perhaps difficult to appreciate how the process will work, but that does not provide the confidence that is needed for all partners.

I look forward to the debate. I will move the amendment in my name as a positive contribution

to the way forward in the interests of communities, our environment and meeting our future energy needs.

I move amendment S4M-07712.2, to leave out from “to preserve” to end and insert:

“including relevant trade unions, to preserve employment in open cast coal mining and address challenges of restoration; welcomes moves to identify improvements in the regulatory regime of the industry including appropriate protection for communities and the environment, and, in light of concerns about restoration and remediation of sites, calls on the Scottish Government to address this issue in the final Scottish Planning Policy so that local authorities are given clearer guidance to enable them to address this issue when considering whether to give planning consent for proposals.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Willie Rennie to speak to and move amendment S4M-07712.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie.

14:41

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Patrick Harvie and I have come together today to try to amend the Government's motion, and I have returned from my party's conference in Glasgow to participate in the debate. Those are two unusual steps, but they are necessary to make the case against the Government's misguided actions. I apologise to the chamber for not being able to stay for the summation of the debate, as I am required back in Glasgow.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention on the basis that he is leaving?

Willie Rennie: In a second.

Far from getting tough with the industry, as we have read in the papers and heard in the news this morning, the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism needs a reality check. He is desperately propping up failing mines. That risks further environmental damage, to compound the damage to which communities have already been exposed.

I support the Scottish Government's renewable energy and climate change ambitions, with world-beating targets. However, after my experience of the Scottish Government's failure to meet the past two sets of annual targets and now its approach to the collapse of the opencast coal mining industry, I am beginning to doubt its commitment to the environment.

The world price of coal has dropped as a result of American operators dumping coal on the world market because of the dramatic increase in fracking in the United States. The technology that is used in fracking looks as if it will be extended rather than limited in the years ahead, which could depress coal prices further.

Even if the price does not go down, it is unlikely to increase sufficiently to deliver a long-term resurgence for the industry here. The industry knows that, and so does its insurance market. That is why Hargreaves has created hivecos for each of its sites. Hivecos are small entities that do not contaminate the wider Hargreaves company if they fail. It is clear that Hargreaves does not have the confidence to take the mines involved directly into its company; it wants to keep them at one remove in case of a future collapse.

Fergus Ewing: Surely the point is that Hargreaves is investing a substantial amount of its money in coaling in Scotland. To avoid doubt, do Mr Rennie and Mr Harvie accept that their amendment, which calls on the Scottish Government to put an immediate halt to new opencast coal development, would terminate the opencast coal sector in Scotland?

Willie Rennie: The minister is wrong: that would not be the effect of the amendment, which—as he knows—relates only to new applications. He is trying to misinterpret what the amendment says.

Hargreaves is limiting its liability by creating the hivecos, so that if they collapse there will be no effect on the wider company. That does not inspire me with confidence. If Hargreaves had confidence in the sector, it would have taken the mines into its operations fully and not half-heartedly.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: No, not just now.

That is also why the insurance companies have, to a great extent, closed the bond market for opencast coal. They know that there is a high chance of companies collapsing again, and they believe that the risk is far too high. We should hear their warnings—we need to listen to what those people have to say—but it seems that the Government is not prepared to listen to them.

It is desperate of the Government to keep the industry alive even though that creates more significant problems for the future. The problems just now are already severe. There are mines dotted across the country that have been left derelict, with polluted water and massive spoil heaps that dwarf communities. The failed coal companies did not put enough bonds or sufficient funds in place to cover the restoration costs.

A report that was published last week showed that the situation in East Ayrshire is now far worse than was first thought. The minister did not mention that situation—which I think deserves recognition—in his opening remarks.

In west Fife, five years ago, I was repeatedly told—

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

I was repeatedly told that the lessons of the past had been learned. Planning applications were granted and new opencast mines were opened, but five years later many mines have been left derelict. That is not acceptable. The Scottish Government seems determined—

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

The Scottish Government seems determined to ignore those lessons again. That is why I am concerned that it is seeking to provide financial assistance to Hargreaves through Scottish Enterprise—

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

I would like to hear what the minister has to say in his summing up—I will look at the *Official Report* later—about Scottish Enterprise's financial contribution to Hargreaves. Whatever the sum is, I question—

Fergus Ewing: I can answer that.

Willie Rennie: If the minister can explain, that would be helpful.

Fergus Ewing: Scottish Enterprise deals with things independently and looks at every company in the same way without fear, favour or discrimination. Any other approach would be illegal.

How can Willie Rennie say that, if there is no more coaling, there can still be an opencast industry? If there is to be a halt on further opencast mines getting permissions, how can he argue that that is anything other than a mass P45 for the 4,500 people who are employed directly or indirectly in the sector?

Willie Rennie: That is a huge distraction by the minister, who does not recognise that he has failed to learn the lessons of the past. He needs to look to the past to learn lessons for the future, but he refuses to do so.

The minister is also looking at trying to get money through the licensing fees that have been paid to the UK Government. That money could be used for other things, but the minister wants to use it to pay for the legacy—the failed legacy—of the mining industry in Scotland. He wants to clear up the companies' mess and give them more money to create more mess in the future. That is a very short-sighted attempt—

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: I am afraid that I am running out of time.

Of course I want us to clean up the mines, but we should not do so at the cost of the future environmental legacy. The minister should be working to resolve those problems. The pay-as-you-extract scheme shifts responsibility from the industry to other people. If we do not get sufficient funds together from the scheme that the minister proposes, we will end up with the state or communities having to pick up the tab for future failure.

I have some simple asks for the minister. He needs to recognise that—as with the situation in East Ayrshire—we need an independent inquiry into the collapse of the industry. All new planning applications should be halted, the pay-as-you-extract scheme should be abandoned and no public funds should be invested in Hargreaves.

If the Government wants to restore its environmental reputation, which has been severely damaged by this episode, it needs to take those reasonable steps.

I move amendment S4M-07712.1, to leave out from “contribution” to end and insert:

“environmental destruction caused by the open cast coal mining industry in Scotland; notes that the costs of restoring current and former open cast sites far exceed the sums available through restoration bonds; notes that the market for coal mined in Scotland is declining as renewable technologies are adopted and emissions restrictions are introduced; believes that an independent inquiry is needed into the regulation of this industry and that no public money should be spent further subsidising an unsustainable industry with a record of evading its responsibilities; considers that a low-carbon economy can only be one that reduces and ultimately ends its economic reliance on fossil fuels, rather than seeking to exploit all possible sources, and calls on the Scottish Government to call an immediate halt to all new open cast coal developments and to ensure that the industry fulfils its legal and moral obligation to society by bearing the full cost of the necessary environmental restoration.”

14:49

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the Government's motion and the opportunity to debate this very important issue that touches communities across Scotland.

When I saw the Government's motion, I thought that this would be a consensual debate with parties across the chamber coming together to agree a way forward for an industry that employs so many people. I did not reckon with Willie Rennie breaking through the ring of steel around the Liberal Democrats' conference in Glasgow and making his way along the M8 to join us in concert

with Patrick Harvie, with their joint scorched-earth approach to the coal industry.

Perhaps I will have to check the television clips from the 1980s of the famous confrontation during the miners strike and, if I look closely, I might see a youthful and diminutive Patrick Harvie joined by a youthful Willie Rennie on the picket line with placards that urge the National Coal Board and Margaret Thatcher's Government to go further and faster in closing down the coal mines than they had planned. We should reject such a pseudo-Thatcherite approach and support the coal industry in Scotland because it has an important role in driving Scotland's economy.

In addition to the sums extracted and the thousands of jobs that are provided in regions such as my own in Fife, it is worth noting that, even today, around 40 per cent of Scotland's electricity comes from coal. It forms one part of a broad energy mix that provides us with security of supply and stability of price, and it is likely to retain that status for many years to come.

As the minister said, however, we have seen an unprecedented collapse in the Scottish opencast mining industry. It has suffered at the hands of a perfect storm, with rising costs and falling global prices creating pressures that have overwhelmed even well-established companies—but coal still has a future.

As demand in the expanding economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China—the BRIC countries—increases, we can also point to a growing market closer to home. Following its Government's decision—one with which I fundamentally disagree—to close its nuclear plants, Germany is going down the road of opening six new coal-fired power stations this year, with more in the pipeline before 2020. It is utterly misguided to be closing down low-carbon energy sources to replace them with high-carbon sources, but it disproves the line in Patrick Harvie's amendment that says that

“the market for coal ... is declining”.

It is quite the opposite. The world market for coal is far from declining. There are still great opportunities there.

Patrick Harvie: Unless Murdo Fraser is going to go in the same direction as some of his Westminster colleagues and call for the scrapping of climate change legislation, it is clear that coal use in energy generation will mean increasing costs if we have anything like an energy policy that is capable of achieving the targets. Does he not accept that coal will be an increasingly expensive product to burn?

Murdo Fraser: There is, of course, no disagreement that coal produces more CO₂. All

that I was doing was pointing out a factual inaccuracy in Patrick Harvie's amendment: demand for coal across the world is not decreasing. If Patrick Harvie is concerned about CO₂ emissions, I suggest that we look at what has happened in the United States, where fracking for shale gas has substantially reduced not just CO₂ emissions but costs to the consumer and to industry.

Let us get back to the point in hand: what do we do about the mining industry in Scotland? I welcome the creation of a coal industry task force by the minister, and I am privileged to be a part of it. As the motion points out, it is an excellent example of constructive partnership working between a diverse assortment of public bodies at the UK, Scottish and local levels joining with industry and trade union representatives. We should be pleased with the progress that is being made even in the short time that the task force has existed.

The key issue that we have to tackle is the troublesome question of restoration, as the minister said. With proper oversight, the issue should not have arisen. The Scottish Government's 2010 Scottish planning policy document indicates that

"Planning authorities should require a financial guarantee to ensure adequate restoration and aftercare".

That says "should", not "may" or "can". Those agreements should be in place before planning permission is granted. We know that that sometimes did not happen in the past, and it is now clear that existing restoration bonds have been insufficient to meet the bills for projects that have recently collapsed.

Many local communities were initially sceptical about having opencast mining in their back yards and they are now concerned that they will have to pick up the bill, perhaps through their council tax, for the restoration of the landscape to its original condition.

There have been various suggestions about how we should deal with the question of restoration guarantees for the future. The central principle should always remain that the minimum of cost should fall to the taxpayer because these are commercial operations.

Concerns have been expressed previously about the possibility of pay-by-extraction schemes, the suggestion being that those schemes would by no means guarantee the restoration costs throughout the entire lifetime of a project. I have a great deal of sympathy for those concerns.

I also appreciate that we are walking a very fine line between providing appropriate assurances that all foreseeable eventualities are prepared for

and placing insurmountable burdens on a productive industry. There is a balance to be struck between providing necessary regulation and ensuring that opencast mining continues to provide much-needed jobs and revenue in different parts of the country that have perhaps faced a difficult economic situation in recent years.

I welcome the work that is being done by the coal industry task force and the discussions that are taking place under the auspices of the restoration bond working group. We look forward to seeing more details.

I am heartened by the creation of the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust and the initial cash injection that it has received. We recognise that restoration projects are far from straightforward, so sharing expertise and providing support and a point of contact for stakeholders to seek advice will, I hope, ensure improvements in restoration strategy and techniques across Scotland.

The objectives that the Government has outlined in the motion are sensible and reasonable. We share with the Government an appreciation for the work of the industry and the need for a positive approach to its current problems. We fundamentally disagree with the approach that the Liberal Democrats and the Greens have taken in the debate because we believe that opencast mining in Scotland has a future; the responsibility now falls to us to provide the correct structures to secure that future. I am pleased to support the Government motion and the Labour amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move to open debate, I remind members that we have a little time in hand that will allow for a judicious amount of interventions. Adam Ingram—six minutes or thereabouts, please.

14:57

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): The subject matter of the debate is of vital interest to the communities that I represent in East Ayrshire.

The scale of coal operations in this area is very significant. In 2012, opencast coal production in East Ayrshire represented 15 per cent of the total coal production of the UK—that is including underground mining. For opencast mining alone, East Ayrshire produced more than 25 per cent of all UK coal and 53 per cent of the coal produced in Scotland. Consequently, the economic and environmental impacts of these activities are highly significant.

The collapse of two out of the three coal companies operating in the coalfield can only be described as disastrous. The full economic impact

of the crisis that is being visited on local communities is currently being assessed in detail and, as I understand it, a report will be published by East Ayrshire Council later this week. What we know now is that some 311 East Ayrshire residents and former Aardvark and Scottish Coal employees have been made redundant and that many more jobs in the local supply chain are under threat.

In these circumstances, coalfield communities must not be left in the lurch as they were in the 1980s with the wholesale closure of the deep mines. We must diversify the local economy and realise opportunities to develop existing businesses and attract inward investment.

The minister will be aware of the efforts of East Ayrshire Council and Scottish Enterprise to create a proposition for economic initiatives that will require Scottish Government backing. I hope and trust that that will be forthcoming. However, so long as a viable coal industry can be sustained, we should be lending our efforts to that purpose as a priority. I am grateful to the minister for his strong leadership in that regard and for his swift action in establishing a coal industry task force, mobilising all those—national agencies and local authorities alike—who could provide support in getting people who had lost their jobs back into work.

In my view, the minister has also done well in establishing a good working relationship with remaining reputable companies in the mining sector, particularly Kier mining and Hargreaves Surface Mining Ltd, which have now acquired certain former Scottish Coal and Aardvark sites. Hargreaves has managed to maintain coaling at the Aardvark sites and recruitment is under way to restart operations at the Scottish Coal sites. I understand that as a consequence, as the minister mentioned, 300 to 500 jobs will be created nationwide over the next year.

That said, it would be idle to pretend that the legacy from previous opencast operators is nothing other than a bitter one. In particular, it appears that Scottish Coal failed to fulfil its obligation in a number of areas. For example, it quickly became apparent to the PACE and local response teams that Scottish Coal had failed to train and certificate levels of competence in its workforce in a way that would have allowed employees to secure equivalent jobs outwith the company. Thankfully, Skills Development Scotland, with the assistance of the Mineral Products Qualifications Council and Hargreaves, is ensuring the acquisition of the crucial “red tickets”, as they are called.

The issue of restoration—or, more accurately, the lack of restoration—is proving to be far more problematic. What is clear is that both Aardvark

and Scottish Coal failed to restore sites, as they were obliged to do under their original planning consents, and that restoration bonds were not sufficient to cover the costs of restoration put in place. The local planning authority is equally blameworthy in that failure, given its duty to monitor and enforce, where appropriate, planning conditions.

That is a galling outcome, given the time and effort that I recall was put into drawing up East Ayrshire’s opencast coal subject plan some 10 years ago. There were adequate tools in the toolbox to ensure that problems did not arise, but they were not used effectively. I support East Ayrshire Council’s investigation of the matter. I am sure that the review, which is being independently conducted by the former chief planner Jim Mackinnon, will inform Scottish planning policy, which is currently out to consultation.

I also welcome the minister’s announcement of a consultation on more effective regulation of the industry, particularly with regards to the financial assurance of restoration guarantees—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always bearing in mind that this is a matter for the courts.

Adam Ingram: Presiding Officer, I do not think that this specific matter is for the courts.

It is unacceptable that East Ayrshire has been left with a notional bill of £161 million to restore former opencast sites to a state that was agreed at planning consent, but the total restoration bond coverage amounts to only something like £29 million. Clearly, we need alternative restoration plans that, as a minimum, make unrestored sites safe and make good any on-going environmental pollution. I am hopeful that the recently formed Scottish Mines Restoration Trust will facilitate implementation of those plans.

Equally clearly, we need a functioning industry to ensure that such a task can be achieved. Closing down the industry would remove the workforce, the equipment and the expertise that are required for the job. Therefore, the Green amendment, which the Liberal Democrats are supporting, is akin to an exercise in cutting off our nose to spite our face. That amendment should be rejected.

15:04

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): This is an important debate for many communities across Scotland. I want to focus on how opencast mining impacts on communities, on jobs and the economic future for families and communities who are affected, and on the challenges—past and present—of restoration.

Scottish Labour's amendment welcomes the moves towards identification of improvements in the regulatory regime for the industry, including appropriate protection for communities and the environment. I hope that the minister will take that into account in the forthcoming consultation. It is a relief to many people that the Scottish Government will shortly hold a consultation on more effective regulation.

As we all know, mining communities across the Scottish coalfield were devastated by the closure of deep mines, and then were subjected to the environmental effects of a new form of coal gaining—opencast. That was and still is an environmental justice issue. The issue has come back into public awareness because of the collapse of major companies.

Practices that are far from perfect still take place. As founding convener of the Scottish opencast action group in the early 1990s, I fought, along with others, to get the guidelines changed to protect communities better. In those days, perimeter fences came close to people's gardens, but that changed because a 200m buffer zone was negotiated. Is that enough? We argued that dust does not stop at the perimeter fence, and that has not changed.

We worked with the Scottish Wildlife Trust and others to identify how to protect precious local environments such as Ponfeigh Burn in South Lanarkshire, where local residents played as children, courted, pushed buggies and then walked with a stick in later years.

Noise was a concern in the early 1990s, and it still is. Only last week, a constituent told me that the noise from the Broken Cross site is manageable for his family by day, but not by night. Back then, road safety was also an issue, with coal lorries on roads such as the A70 in Clydesdale. Talk of taking the coal off the roads and on to rail has rarely become a reality. The cumulative effect of sites was a matter that was addressed, but should it be revisited?

The SOAG and other groups also broached the issue of restoration bonds. The Scottish Government consultation, along with the task force sub-group, will be the focus of a hard look. In the days of the Opencast Executive, before privatisation, some people argued that bonds worked. Others believed that, somewhat like bus deregulation, the legislation at the time was suspect, with all the strength on the side of the operators.

The court direction on whether administrators can

"abandon or disclaim the sites and former sites, thereby transferring ownership"—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that you are venturing into areas that are sub judice. Please be aware of the risks that are attached to that for yourself in so doing.

Claudia Beamish: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

That direction was deeply disappointing, as I said at the time, and the appeal by SEPA, South Lanarkshire Council, East Ayrshire Council and others is anxiously awaited by councils and communities alike. If the appeal fails, those communities cannot be left amid a broken industry. Whatever the mistakes of councils as regulators in allowing work to proceed with insufficient funds, communities cannot be expected to languish in such circumstances.

Councils cannot be expected to solve the problem alone. Obviously, the costs would be prohibitive, and the effect on other services would be dangerous for already deprived communities. It is necessary to get together people who have valuable experience to advise on the issue. However, as the minister said, the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust is a facilitator, not a funder. Is that right, given the enormity of the task? Further Scottish Government support is needed.

Since the times of deep mining, mining communities' contribution has been at the core of UK prosperity. In the spirit of the United Kingdom, which is best represented by the pooling of resources to help the challenges of those who are in need, those communities and that broken industry must go to the mender of last resort. The UK Government might have to play its part in funding restoration and, in the end, not just in relation to the Coal Authority. If that happens, consideration should be given to the benefit to communities and local environments as restoration proceeds.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that you are steering into areas that are matters in an open case. Please be aware of that.

Claudia Beamish: Thank you for your advice, Presiding Officer, but my understanding is that I was talking about the possibility of the UK Government helping with funds. The Scottish Government should recognise that that is one of the strengths of being in the United Kingdom. In the words of Gordon Brown,

"we have a partnership where we pool and share resources so that when there are areas of great need, we intervene to help them."

Looking to the future of restoration, I think that, although there has been much bad practice over the years, there have also been good models, as members have highlighted.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Does Claudia Beamish recall that the closure of the mining industry in the 1980s was by the UK Government?

Claudia Beamish: I certainly do and I disassociate myself from anything to do with that because I was not part of that Government. In fact, I was fundraising and supporting the miners.

As the hole got deeper, the bonds got higher in some places, such as West Lothian. In the case of the Heartlands development, worked by Ecosse Regeneration, work was signed off by the compliance officer and reports were made to the compliance liaison officer.

It would also be useful for the task force to examine in more detail—I know that it has already started—the operations of Kier and H J Banks. I understand that, in those cases, no outstanding sites have been left unrestored.

The combination of progressive restoration and sufficient bonds must be the way forward. Midlothian Council is currently considering phased restoration as an option. East Ayrshire Council's independent inquiry has been welcomed by RSPB Scotland.

I am aware of calls for a moratorium, but I am absolutely clear—although this is not Scottish Labour's position at the moment—that whatever the application criteria may be in the future, no site in Scotland should be consented unless there is a sufficient bond for outstanding work on any previous site being worked by the same company.

Scottish Coal employed 350 people directly in South Lanarkshire. I am sure that the whole Parliament recognises the challenges that are faced by those who have been made redundant. I am aware of the support that PACE has offered and I welcome the driver training centre at Broken Cross. Some of those who have been made redundant have taken the opportunity to open businesses, and to diversify, but there is still a pressing need for support. In the longer term, for recovery, there is a need to broaden the business base.

There must also be a clear strategy for a just transition to a low-carbon economy, as my colleague Claire Baker highlighted in her opening speech. The targets that have been agreed by Parliament will help to address climate change and fuel poverty at once, as our industries in the energy sector adapt.

In the longer term, we have an obligation to ensure that people who are in jobs in the exploitation of fossil fuels are offered training in transferable skills, and to ensure that some of the opportunities for manufacturing and installing the range of new technologies for energy and energy

efficiency come to the beleaguered communities that are in need of our support.

15:12

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): As the Scottish National Party MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to the debate. The importance of the coal industry to several parts of the Mid Scotland and Fife region—in particular, the kingdom of Fife—is well-known. It is part of the fabric of Fife and of the area's economic and social history.

In the present day, that interest is focused on the coaling that can still be carried out and on the concomitant jobs. It is also focused on the restoration of sites, which involves not only the vital environmental clean-up but—we hope—local jobs. The fact that the Scottish Government has recognised those two key objectives is to be welcomed. As we have heard, that is manifest in the minister's establishment of the Scottish coal industry task force, which is co-chaired by him and the hugely respected Professor Russel Griggs. The membership of the task force is, rightly, wide. It has worked, and is working, collaboratively to find solutions to the various problems with which it has to deal.

I will highlight two of the task force's successes that have already been referred to. The first is the successful lobbying of the Office of Rail Regulation on freight access charges to ensure that the original massive proposed hike of an additional charge of £4.04 a tonne was reduced to a proposed increase of £1.04 a tonne. Had the increase been implemented, the original proposal would have had a disastrous consequence for the viability of the coal industry and the prospects for the future development of clean coal electricity generation in Scotland and, therefore, for jobs.

Another success story for the task force concerns the need to ensure that the skills and experience that had been acquired by former employees of SRG who were made redundant could be duly recognised, absent the existence of any formal qualifications. That is important for the individuals concerned.

The successes to date have shown how practical steps that have been taken across the sector with everyone working together can make a real difference in improving the prospects for those who currently work in the industry and those who have had to seek alternative employment.

Of course, as we have been hearing from many members this afternoon, alongside the task force, the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust has been set up. That body, of course, is independent and has been tasked with facilitating innovative and

dynamic solutions to the problem that we face with respect to restoration. I welcomed the setting up of the body, for it is implicit that, in finding solutions, one council cannot simply seek to act alone without input from other people. Councils must work together across the areas that are affected, and must bring together the public and private sectors in order to pool expertise and share best practice across the sector. That is a worthwhile approach. It is axiomatic that there is no identikit fix for each site. The specificities of each site must be taken into account in order to find solutions. It is also obvious—at least, in the real world—that the complex issues that are involved require solutions that it will, inevitably, take some time to come up with.

Sadly, there is no magic wand that we can wave at the issue in order to fix it overnight. That has been recognised by many people, including Fife Council, which—as Claire Baker mentioned—has been involved in the discussions for quite some time through the task force and with a variety of stakeholders. As we have heard, a tender has now been issued for restoration works at the Muir Dean site by Crossgates. That is credit to the hard work of everyone who has been involved, including all the officials behind the scenes. It is the hard work of those individuals that will make the difference, not the issuing of soundbites.

It is a pity that Willie Rennie did not consider that staying for the entirety of the debate was a priority in his diary, given that we are talking about the future of the coal industry in Scotland and its importance to people in Fife. It is also a pity that no other Liberal Democrat has sought to participate in the debate. If Mr Rennie had had the courtesy to take interventions from back benchers—several of us tried to intervene—I would have asked him whether his new Liberal Democrat policy to end coaling, which would turf thousands of people out of their jobs, is a Scotland-only policy that would not be applicable in the rest of the United Kingdom. With just about one year to go to the independence referendum, I do not think that the people of Scotland have got much to look forward to, if that is the Liberal Democrat vision for the future of the people of our country—including those who work in the opencast coaling sector.

I welcome the announcement today by the Scottish Government on whether we can seek to recover the levy that is paid by the coal industry to the Coal Authority—most of which, as we have heard, goes to the consolidated fund. That money could be well used to help with restoration works in Scotland. I hope—the Liberal Democrats' opposition to such a move notwithstanding—that we might get support from some of the other parties on that issue.

I also very much welcome the Scottish Government's decision to consult on how we can secure better regulation and, therefore, a more effective approach to restoration. In my view, that is the practical way forward, and that is how best we can seek to find solutions for communities in Fife and elsewhere.

15:18

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I will support the motion as amended by Claire Baker. I acknowledge the minister's recognition of the complexity of what we are discussing this afternoon, and his case-by-case approach in relation to the problem that it raises. I also acknowledge all that Adam Ingram said in terms of the issue's impact on East Ayrshire Council, in particular, and I will flesh out some of those impacts, in order that the minister might consider them further.

There are currently 1,468 hectares of abandoned, disturbed and unrestored land across the East Ayrshire Council area. Some 524 hectares of land are classified as voids; a void can be a chasm 50m deep, with water at its bottom. What does that area look like to us? It has been described elsewhere as being like 4,000 football pitches. Both classifications represent a real health and safety danger to the public, and both categories dampen any future economic development opportunities.

In 2012, the Scottish Coal Company Ltd approached East Ayrshire Council to seek a business rates holiday. That was another clue that something was going badly wrong in the company. East Ayrshire has for generations suffered the disruption that accompanies opencast mining. It has provided the location and much of the workforce, and it has suffered the inconvenience. To this day, East Ayrshire continues to pay for the presence of the industry in its midst. All of that was done to provide coal and, thereby, energy for Scotland's and the United Kingdom's economic wellbeing.

No one volunteers to have an opencast mine development on their doorstep. The industry is dirty, dangerous and dust laden. However, without opencast mining, East Ayrshire would be even poorer than it currently is. That is saying something, given the jobs that have transferred out of the area and the paucity of inward investment. East Ayrshire has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the country; some 12.2 per cent of young people are out of work there. That compares with 7.2 per cent in Scotland and 6.1 per cent in the UK.

The current SNP council has failed in its duty of proper governance to provide a level of

accountability and responsibility on the part of SCCL and other companies. However, in fairness, successive local authority administrators have failed in that regard.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Including Labour.

Graeme Pearson: Including Labour. However, that does not mean that the people of East Ayrshire should bear the burden of fixing the problem on their own.

We need a commitment to an annual mining plan for each area that is affected by developments, and we need annual checks to ensure that an environmental audit has verified compliance with environmental conditions. I welcome the minister's commitment to more effective regulation for the future, but it is just as important that the Government offer its colleagues in East Ayrshire Council some financial comfort now so that it can begin the rebuilding of that blighted area to give it any hope of competing in the future.

The current Scottish Government's stance appears to abandon East Ayrshire Council to deal with the costs of repairing the landscape and dealing with the voids. If that happens, the per capita cost across the council area will equate to between £1,600 and £5,000. Current estimates of the costs were mentioned earlier—they are up to £161 million. Other estimated costs are between £71 million and £113 million. In either case, that is far too much for the council to bear on its own, given that guarantee bonds to cover the work appear to total somewhere around £28.5 million. Who is to bear those costs? Apparently, it is not the companies. East Ayrshire Council would need to allocate a third of its entire budget to repair the property.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I understand that the allocation of costs is a matter for the court, so please keep off that subject.

Graeme Pearson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

In its report, East Ayrshire Council acknowledged that the

"previous enforcement of these matters has not been to the standard expected and thus the monitoring of these matters by the Planning Authority requires to be more robust now and in the future."

The Scottish coal industry task force has met on four occasions with the minister as its chair. Will the minister state precisely how he intends to deal with the financial tsunami that East Ayrshire Council faces? Some 311 employees of Aardvark and SCCL have been made redundant in the chaos. What will the Government do to support those innocent hard-working victims?

Remaining assets are being picked over by private interests. Is it ethical, decent and honest to expect the communities of East Ayrshire to bear responsibility for the clean-up, or will the Government step forward and assist?

Some 2.5 million tonnes of the 4.8 million tonnes that has been extracted in Scotland came from East Ayrshire. In fact, more coal is taken from East Ayrshire through opencast mining than is taken from the whole of Wales, and the amount is almost the same as is taken in England.

The situation is scandalous and it is an embarrassment to East Ayrshire Council and the UK and Scottish Governments. The pressure will continue to be unfairly faced by the people of East Ayrshire if no solution is provided in the short term. What discussions will the Scottish Government have with the UK Government to ensure that the situation is not repeated? Can the minister assure me that East Ayrshire will get enterprise zone status to assist the area in reclaiming its future? Will he reconsider his previous decision to offer the area no financial contribution to repairing the environmental damage that has arisen? We should remember that it is 4,000 football pitches in size. It needs some kind of response.

15:25

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this debate because, although there is no significant production of coal in the Highlands and Islands, it is still widely used there as fuel. For that and other reasons, I am sorry to say at the outset that I cannot support Mr Harvie's amendment.

Most of our homes across the Highlands and Islands are off the gas grid, and electric heating, although convenient, can be prohibitively expensive. Many people across the Highlands and Islands are therefore dependent on fossil fuels—a fact that Mr Harvie might find inconvenient. Of course, he is keen on renewable energy generation. I share and possibly even exceed his enthusiasm for renewable technologies, but the fact of the matter is that, as Claire Baker suggested, renewable energy generation is not yet sufficiently developed to provide low-cost heating across the Highlands and Islands. I believe that, ultimately, it will be—and the sooner the better—but even in my most optimistic moods I have to accept that it may not be the case for a few years yet. I am sure that Mr Harvie would agree that the UK Government's inordinate delays in finalising energy market reform do not help to achieve that aim.

Patrick Harvie: I go along with some of what Mike MacKenzie says, but will he at least accept that, if we were talking about protecting coal for

the small number of households that need to use it because they are not on the gas grid and it is their only fuel source, we would be talking about a minuscule fraction of the amount that is actually extracted in Scotland?

Mike MacKenzie: My argument is only one small argument that Patrick Harvie may not have considered that is very relevant to the Highlands and Islands. I intend to make more such arguments and hope that he will listen to and consider them.

Members will know that Scotland's rural areas and, in particular, our islands suffer fuel poverty to a greater degree than do urban areas. On some of our islands, fuel poverty has reached the unacceptable level of 50 per cent due to a combination of factors, among which are fuel transport costs, low wages and hard-to-insulate homes. For good reasons, coal remains the fuel of choice for many people.

On the island where I live, we have an annual coal day when we all work together to bring the year's supply of coal across. Only a few years ago, we achieved that by dint of hard manual labour. Our community of only 60 souls uses about 60 tonnes of coal a year. Each bag would have to be handled at least six times—down piers, and on and off boats and dumpers—before it reached our homes. Nowadays, we have an easy time. Technology has solved most of that back-breaking problem for us. Now, we use an all-terrain fork lift—a machine that just was not around only a decade or so ago—and we let the hydraulics do the heavy lifting.

I therefore cannot agree with Mr Harvie and Mr Rennie that we should just close down Scotland's coal industry. Just as technology has solved our back-breaking coal delivery problem, so carbon capture and storage and other clean coal technologies will solve the pollution problems of coal and other fossil fuels.

Patrick Harvie: Will Mike MacKenzie take an intervention on that point?

Mike MacKenzie: No. I have already taken an intervention.

The effect of Scotland's climate change legislation will be and should be to create that imperative, but to do so in a way that does not destroy jobs or industries. We should and can rise to the technological challenges in that regard. Equally, I cannot believe that it is beyond our wit or ability to provide a regulatory framework that ensures that environmental damage is minimised and that the landscape is properly restored when an opencast mine is exhausted.

I did not expect to be upstaged by Mr Fraser on this, but it seems that Mr Harvie would indeed shut

down opencast coal with the same relish with which Margaret Thatcher shut down coal mining—without regard for jobs, livelihoods or communities. I welcome the Scottish Government's approach which, by contrast, challenges our ingenuity to solve problems in ways that will preserve jobs and leave open energy options for the future.

15:30

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): More often than not, members welcome a debate when they stand up to speak. This debate is welcome, if only because it serves to underline the tough and serious economic situation that faces the coal industry and, more important, its communities. This is not the time or place for some people who have had and have a role in all of this to start pointing the finger. I welcome the Government motion and the Labour amendment; I oppose Mr Harvie's amendment.

Some 20 months ago, my Mary's hairdresser in Ayr asked me what would happen to opencast mining in East Ayrshire, where her husband worked—he was to be made redundant. At the time, I probed a bit but not enough. I fell short.

The companies involved also fell short, in not communicating in a clear, open and appropriate way. In an article on 27 January, the *Sunday Herald* reported:

"Private companies are planning a massive expansion of opencast coal mining in Scotland, according to information released by the UK government's Coal Authority."

The article went on:

"More opencast mining is also planned for East Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, the Lothians, Falkirk and the Scottish Borders".

Those plans fell drastically short.

The companies allegedly also fell short in not meeting their corporate or community obligations or taking action to ensure a positive long-term environmental impact. It appears that more emphasis was put on cost pressures than on regulatory responsibilities or obligations.

The planning authorities fell short, in not meeting their regulatory responsibilities and failing to ensure that restoration bonds were in place and sufficient to secure restoration.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am not au fait with the situations in East Ayrshire and Lanarkshire, but I am aware of the situation in Falkirk. Does the member agree that if an applicant for an opencast mine has previously failed to reinstate a site, the local authority should refuse planning permission for future sites until the previous site has been reinstated?

Chic Brodie: I understand the emphasis that Mr MacDonald puts on the issue. We must consider the whole situation, but in general I have some sympathy with his point.

The planning authorities apparently fell short, in not monitoring restoration bonds and companies' responsibilities. It is regrettable that the regulatory review group did not carry out reviews, which might have highlighted the potential problem earlier.

If any situation demonstrated the need for the early enactment of a revised planning policy and the need for the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill, to ensure that economic growth and sustainable development work in tandem, this is it. However, I welcome the review that East Ayrshire Council—for whose councillors, officers and chief executive I have the greatest respect—commissioned, which is looking at the management, implementation and monitoring of processes in relation to new developments.

Of course, others have also fallen short. One third of the UK's opencast coal—or 6 million tonnes—is produced in Scotland. That figure has declined by a quarter in the past decade, and half of it goes to service steeply declining demand in England. However, given the problems and challenges that will be faced in respect of electricity provision down south over the next decade, I believe that the situation will change dramatically. The other half of the coal that is produced goes to Longannet, which was subject to Westminster's scurrilous decision to forgo plans for clean coal electricity production.

Unless there is an imminent change of heart and, indeed, technology in respect of carbon capture and storage, an example of which can be seen in the Captain clean energy project in Grangemouth, one has to ask about demand for coal for electricity generation and about the achievement of our Government's emission targets as set out in the second report on proposals and policies. I believe that the minister will fight such a situation tooth and nail.

Although coal has a future and can play a significant part in our energy mix, that future relies on decisions about CCS, on pricing and on UK and worldwide demand.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: I am sorry—I have only a few seconds left.

In such a situation, the future of coal will require stronger planning convictions, monitoring of site plans, restoration, carbon equivalence and validated customer demand and above all community involvement and—I would suggest—community part-ownership.

Given that we all fell short, I do not believe that there is any mileage in finger pointing today. We need to learn lessons from this sad and serious situation. Let us therefore support the industry, Scottish Enterprise, the task force and all the component parts; let us work to preserve employment in the industry both directly and in restoration where we can do so; and let us reskill those who leave the industry. In that respect, I welcome the minister's news about those who have been employed. The energy industry itself is looking for 60,000 people, and that should provide a means of reskilling and retraining those who have felt the most impact, particularly in East Ayrshire.

We must ensure that this whole exercise leaves a permanent environmental legacy and that we encourage the industry to embrace and work with new technologies. For example, the improved technology used on solar farms is significantly driving down costs and even mitigating the impacts of weather. We should also look at geothermal energy and create community district heating networks from the warm water in our disused coal mines. There are certainly investment opportunities available in such areas.

When one door closes—even partly—another opens, and we need to walk through this particular door. Coal is facing financial and environmental challenges, but it has a future sitting alongside other energy sources in a balanced energy mix in Scotland.

15:38

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this afternoon's debate and to support the motion as amended by Claire Baker.

I represent Cowdenbeath, and I am sure that most would agree that over the years Fife as a whole has played a massive role in coal production. Indeed, at one time, Fife had at least 61 mines; they were predominantly deep mines, but it had its share of opencast mines. As a result, I welcome the minister's comments about the work of the task force and, indeed, his news about Muir Dean. The situation at Muir Dean is considerably complex, largely because the Coal Authority is refusing to assume complete responsibility for the pumping of the nearby Fordell day level. Given that it appears to be legally obliged to oversee such pumping activities, the situation is troublesome and of real concern and I am pleased that progress seems to have been made.

Westfield, which is known to many, was one of the biggest opencast operations in the whole of Europe, but the legacy for the local community in Fife is that it remains one of Europe's biggest

unrestored sites. From 1961 to 1967, 40 per cent of all Scotland's opencast coal production came from the site, and Westfield perhaps summarises all the problems associated with the industry and how it impacts on people.

The Westfield story is important. The Government appears to be entering a new era in which it is seeking to persuade the public that, given a strong regulatory system, in which proposals to exploit new sources of energy such as methane, coal bed methane and underground coal gasification are assessed, approved and monitored, they should trust the planning system and support such proposals. However, the history of the Westfield site and of other unrestored opencast sites in Scotland, England and Wales—when it is written—provides a salutary warning about whether the public should place such trust in the planning system's ability to properly regulate the exploitation of energy resources.

I have followed with interest the Scottish Parliament's briefings from Professor Russel Griggs OBE, chair of the regulatory review group and co-chair of the coal task force. The industry's contribution to the Scottish economy is £450 million per annum and the coal industry estimates that for Fife that has translated into millions of pounds and many jobs. However, I very much hope that when the planners in Fife, in particular, look at the issues that are of significance to local people when considering the way forward, they consider using the unrestored sites not for only one specific purpose. The plans in Fife should be much more flexible. Until now, the Westfield site has been designated only for converting waste to energy, which is a big mistake because that cuts out many other potential developments.

A recent report refers to
 "a 392 hectare unrestored opencast site"
 and states:

"Of the future prospect for this site, Jim Birrell, Senior Manager, Development and Buildings wrote, in a report made to the Executive Committee of Fife Council in August 2013 that the site had

'Long mining history. Long-held community expectations regarding restoration—unlikely to be realised. Other uses on site—energy related.'

In contrast, this report highlights the long term cost, past, present and future that have been realised by the communities living close to this site, which serves as a testament to what can happen when the priority is to exploit energy resources by unconventional means."

That must be changed through the cabinet secretary's work. Our Scottish plans must allow for flexibility in such cases.

A particularly pleasing presentation that Professor Griggs gave us showed the work in East Ayrshire, at the Hannahston site near Drongan,

which was an unrestored site with a restoration bond shortfall. That work was particularly creative. The site was fully restored to community woodland using funds generated from the granting of planning permission for housing development. That was very imaginative, and other examples were cited in that presentation.

There is a role for the task force in lobbying. The cabinet secretary, along with every parliamentarian in the chamber and every committee that can get this work under its belt, needs to lobby Europe for a change in policy. Thirty years or more ago in Fife, we were able to use European regional development funding—which we are not allowed to use any more—to tackle pit bings on a site known as Lochore meadows. The photographs of that site—Fife Council will give members a presentation of them if asked to do so—show how those pit bings stood then and how the fantastic Lochore meadows park looks now. That cost hundreds of millions of pounds to develop, but it was done with European funding. We need to make Europe work for us and ensure that, when it comes to setting agendas in Europe, we put such issues on the table when we meet. We want to be able to use European funding to address them.

I totally agree with Annabel Goldie—sorry, I mean Annabelle Ewing. She talked about Willie Rennie's opportunism in his approach to the debate. Today is not the only time that he has been opportunistic. Who was running in the Kelty coal race at election time? The people of Kelty know—aye, it was Willie Rennie. "Opportunism" is Willie Rennie's middle name. The Kelty coal race makes me remember that. We should not let him off with it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: At some point, you should be drawing to a close, please.

Helen Eadie: Okay—I will leave it at that. Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

15:45

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): As the member who, as minister, took the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 through the Parliament, I place that issue at the heart of my remarks.

I will start with carbon capture and storage. Helen Eadie and I are Europe enthusiasts, but CCS is one area in which Europe is not doing well. We do not have a single CCS facility in the whole of the EU. The number of CCS plants in China is now in double figures, and even the United States—which is not the most obvious climate change champion given its engagement on the issue—is making progress on it.

The need to tackle climate change was something that united us when we took the legislation through in 2009, and it continues to do so to this day. Although we share objectives, when it comes to means I differ substantially from the two minority groups in the Parliament that are behind the amendment that stands against the consensus that is represented by the majority.

It is worth responding to what Mike MacKenzie said. I remember that, when my brother and I were water bailiffs in 1968, we brought coal into our bothy by sea—we had half a ton of it to keep us warm over the summer. Remote and rural communities often depend on coal in an important way.

I want to talk about the positives that can be derived from opencast mining. On 1 November 2011, at the invitation of the River Nith salmon fishery board, I made a ministerial visit to see the positive impact that the opencast industry was having on the environment. I will contrast that with poor examples, as well. The industry there had redirected the Nith on several occasions but, in its restoration, had improved the water flow. It had improved the embankments on the river by moving fences out to keep beasts from polluting the river and had put in trees to improve the riverside environment. In addition, it worked with the salmon fishing industry to suspend blasting operations at times when the salmon were spawning. The result of that was a fourfold increase in the number of salmon that reached the upper reaches of the Nith. The collaboration between the opencast mining industry there and the champions of environmental excellence representing the salmon fisheries in the area was highly successful. Would that that were the universal experience. Clearly, it is not.

We know of the difficulties that were caused by the proposals to increase track access charges, which would have put £4 on each tonne that was carried. Fortunately, those proposals were mitigated. I am not sure that that was a great advert—as Claudia Beamish would have us believe—for cross-border collaboration. It was an issue that was of vital economic concern to us but of comparatively little concern to the larger UK. Fortunately, the arguments against those proposals swayed the day. Today's debate is another example of rational argument prevailing.

It is worth looking at what opportunities exist for the industry in future. It is, of course, important that we get to an energy mix that is fully sustainable, but we will get there in stages. We must continue to exploit non-renewable resources. We must use fungible resources as an intermediate technology en route to a fully sustainable energy mix. Such resources are part of the economic mix.

If we destroy the economy, we destroy the economics that will be necessary to take us to a fully renewable future in which we have dramatically reduced our climate change footprint, in line with the legislation that we have passed. So, the economy and doing the right thing for the environment are inextricably linked and cannot be separated, unless we decide to close down the whole of the human race and all our activities. Well, fair enough: a sterile world without us on it would indeed be relatively free of climate change impact. However, what would that be worth to us or, indeed, to the world and all that lives in it?

As I have described, restoration by the coal industry is, at its best, very good indeed, but at its worst, it is unacceptably bad. It is right that the Parliament focuses on the bad, because that is where we wish to effect change. We must ensure that the industry has the opportunity to generate the funds that will enable it to do restitution. Like others, I drive from time to time up the M90, and we can see the impact of today's opencast mining and recognise that it will be substantially expensive to make good what has been done, although we cannot quantify it.

It is perhaps worth extending the hand of friendship to political colleagues across the chamber, so I congratulate Claire Baker and her colleagues on working effectively with the minister and putting aside some of the tribalism that sometimes contaminates debate in here—through gritted teeth, I say that I even extend that to Murdo Fraser on the Conservative benches.

The Scottish Parliament has not always been kind to the miners. In 1701, we passed the Habeas Corpus Act of Scotland, the purpose of which is relatively self-evident, which specifically said that

“this present Act is in no way to be extended to colliers”.

In other words, they excluded colliers from freedom, and they remained in enslavement to the owners until an act of 1799. Today, we have an opportunity to unite in a positive way that does some good for the coal industry while simultaneously propelling us closer to meeting the climate change objectives that we all agreed on in June 2009.

15:52

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): For a very long time, I have campaigned for a balanced energy policy and have been concerned that we do not throw all our energy-producing eggs into the renewables industry or, on the other hand, reject out of hand the potential contribution that the civil nuclear energy industry could make in ensuring security of supply.

I have very real concerns that the contribution that domestic coal reserves can make to securing energy supply is being hampered by the negative perceptions of the industry that are regularly cultivated by its opponents. The regular omission of the role that the future deployment of carbon capture and storage technologies could play in reducing the overall carbon emissions from coal-fired power stations conveniently allows those negative arguments to be slanted against carbon energy sources.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael McMahon: I will take one in a minute.

Those were the concerns that I had coming in to this afternoon's debate. Having heard the debate so far, my concerns have moved on, and I appear to be on the same side of the argument in favour of the Scottish coal industry as the Conservatives, who did so much to try to destroy it in the past. However, I am concerned to see Willie Rennie and Patrick Harvie competing to reach beyond the grave and grab Margaret Thatcher's handbag to finish off the coal industry in Scotland.

I will take you now, Patrick.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Full names, please.

Patrick Harvie: If the member does not mind, I will respond to his former point, not the latter.

He mentioned CCS. I have always been a bit mebbes aye, mebbes naw about CCS. However, can the member tell us, now that the Longannet project has been rejected, the Hunterston project has been withdrawn, the Grangemouth project has not been selected as one of the two bidders for the DECC competition and the white rose project at Drax is the UK's only coal-fired CCS project, with a fifth of the capacity of Longannet, whether it is not clear that if CCS does work, it will be applied to gas, not coal?

Michael McMahon: What I will not do is throw my hands up in despair and rule out the potential of those technologies being used to offset some of the concerns of opponents of coal. We must have a positive agenda. We can work towards and share the same objective without necessarily having to agree on the direction for going forward.

I genuinely welcome the Scottish Government's efforts to overcome the negative mindset against the surface coal mining industry. I recognise the contribution that the extraction of indigenous coal supplies could make to driving economic growth and achieving energy security.

Just as I have said that it is wrong for opponents of opencast to close their minds to its potential, I fully recognise that genuine issues relate to the

restoration of sites, protection for local communities during excavation and other major considerations, which Claudia Beamish and Graeme Pearson outlined. The consultation that the minister announced, which will look at the regulation of sites that is required, will benefit by building up the confidence that communities need when plans for opencast mining emerge in their areas.

As other members have said, the collapse of Scottish Coal has raised a variety of issues in relation to the restoration of opencast mines and environmental concerns. I recognise the importance of the Scottish coal industry task force in identifying solutions to the problems that the coal industry faces and I look forward to seeing what emerges from the consultation in that regard.

I come from a community that was built around mining and I am the grandson of a coal miner, so on no account would I wish to diminish the importance of deep coal mining in developing the history and psyche of Lanarkshire and Scotland as a whole. However, I am aware that many miners wanted a better prospect for their sons than a life spent howking coal hundreds of feet underground.

According to many industry analysts, open-pit mining is cheaper, safer and mechanically easier to operate. Open-pit mining poses some dangers to mine workers, but it has safety advantages over shaft mining, as open-pit mines are not subject to cave-in accidents and open-pit miners are not exposed to the same explosive poison gas dangers as deep-shaft mine workers are. Open-pit mining will never be completely safe, but it is safer than shaft mining in some ways.

It is more than a little disappointing that, at a time of increasing demand, Scottish Coal failed to take proper advantage of the potential for the commercial viability of opencast mining and missed the major opportunity to increase activity and output that was available in Scotland. Across Britain, surface coal mining directly employs about 2,000 full-time workers and creates an extensive supply chain.

The loss of such employment in areas that already have extremely limited opportunities for skilled and permanent employment is a major challenge as, in addition to providing well-paid and skilled jobs in economically depressed areas, the surface coal mining industry generates significant funds for local economies and provides significant tax contributions via rates to local authorities. Apart from those obvious economic benefits, the surface coal mining industry plays a significant role in the rejuvenation of derelict land. In my constituency, there was an opencast mine adjacent to the former mining village of Legbrannock, which was James Keir Hardie's home for a number of years. That site is now

home to a fine 18-hole golf course designed by Sam Torrance, which is—unsurprisingly—called Torrance park.

It is regrettable that a major manufacturing firm in my constituency has been adversely affected by the liquidation of two of its largest opencast customers in the Ayrshire coalfields and has lost significant customers for the product that it manufactures. As with coal extraction, reparation work will require the use of that firm's product.

The facility in my constituency has endured long periods of short-time working, so I hope that the input of any taxpayer funding can be used to ensure that equipment that is used in the restoration process is manufactured here in Scotland rather than by overseas competitors. I welcomed the opportunity to have a brief conversation with the minister about that last week. I hope that he will look favourably on my request for a meeting to discuss that company's prospects in relation to the work that I hope will arise when restoration works are progressed.

15:59

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): It is a disgrace that the Liberal Democrat leader has left the chamber. We were kind enough to listen to his point of view in the debate, but it appears that he does not want to listen to ours.

I thank our minister, Fergus Ewing, for his considerable efforts over a number of months to save as many jobs as possible in the industry, and I welcome his announcement today that he will consult on establishing more effective regulation of it.

I also thank my friend and colleague Adam Ingram, whose contribution led the open debate. As many members will know, Adam was at the heart of all the discussions that took place as events affecting his constituents unfolded over the summer, despite his own illness and the tragic passing of his wife, Gerry. The Parliament should recognise that commitment, which goes well beyond what should reasonably be expected of anyone. *[Applause.]*

Members: Hear, hear.

Willie Coffey: I also acknowledge the role that my colleague Aileen Campbell played in the task force in her capacity as the local member for Clydesdale.

When we last debated the issues facing the opencast industry back in January, in Adam Ingram's members' business debate, the warning at that time concerned the ORR's proposal to introduce the additional freight levy. If anything was going to finish off the industry, it would have been that. Thankfully, as some members have

mentioned, the ORR stepped back from that and listened to the pleas of many members of the Parliament and of our colleagues in councils throughout Scotland.

It is worth remembering the importance of the industry to Ayrshire, which had approximately 700—or 60 per cent—of the industry's jobs before the crisis occurred. Those were good, well-paid jobs. The number of jobs lost is similar to the number lost at Johnnie Walker in Kilmarnock when Diageo left in 2009. Ayrshire has had to take quite a blow and we really cannot afford the prospect of two major industries closing down.

The opencast output from Ayrshire last year was more than half the overall tonnage in Scotland, and a quarter of the entire UK tonnage, which emphasises the industry's importance not only to Ayrshire, but to Scotland and the rest of the UK. It is surely not a serious option to halt all new production, as proposed by the Greens and Liberals, who seem to say anything these days just to get noticed.

I am grateful to East Ayrshire Council for providing some helpful information in advance of today's debate, and I welcome to the chamber Councillor Roberts and Councillor Primrose, who are visiting us from East Ayrshire today.

I can report that a substantial document and set of recommendations will be presented to the council on Thursday. The steps to recovery outlined in that document from East Ayrshire will greatly assist other councils and the Scottish Government in planning the essential restoration work that must be completed. That will be of huge service in the long run.

Chief among the figures that are presented in the report is the current estimated total cost of restoration, which could—as several members have mentioned—be as high as £161 million. We know that the restoration figure is notional, and is based on costs that were outlined in the original planning consents, but it shows the extent of the problem that has been building for many years.

The council has agreed, as Adam Ingram pointed out, to carry out an independent review, which will be led by Jim Mackinnon. The scope of the review will be to examine all the circumstances that have led us to the current position. It may not be comfortable reading for officers and members—past and present—of the council, but it will be an essential piece of work nevertheless.

With regard to statutory bodies, a clearer—and perhaps a strengthened—role must be carried out in future by organisations such as SEPA, SNH, the Forestry Commission and others. Hindsight is a wonderful thing—with which we are all blessed, of course—but, looking back at the history of opencast applications and subsequent monitoring,

one could ask whether enough was asked of or done by our agencies to help us to protect the public interest and the environment. Perhaps there can be strengthened roles and responsibilities for those bodies in the future, and I invite the minister to give that some thought in his conclusion.

Ayrshire almost lost another industry over the summer: a historic and important industry that continues to make a vital contribution to our local and national economy. With some deft footwork and no little skill, our minister, together with colleagues in both Parliaments and in the councils, averted that disaster. We have made very good progress, but we have by no means reached a happy ending as yet. We are indebted to East Ayrshire Council for the work that is being undertaken there, and I am sure that all Scotland will reap the benefit in years to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move on, I remind members to use full names when referring to each other.

16:04

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I welcome the minister's statement and thank him for the update on what is, by anyone's standards, the very difficult task of balancing employment issues with environmental issues and the interests of communities that lie in the proximity of opencast mines, let alone with the financial issues at this difficult time for the coal industry.

As the minister said, two of the largest mine operators in Scotland have folded within 12 months. The decline of the coal-mining industry in Scotland during the past 50 years has been quite rapid and the events of this year prove that we still have a considerable way to go before the industry can offer any form of security to its employees and other stakeholders.

To my knowledge, my constituency of North East Fife has never been home to any collieries, but that is not to say that the industry has not had a significant effect on the area. In the past, tens of thousands of men from around Fife would have been employed in what was the kingdom of Fife's or, at least, west and central Fife's largest and best-known industry. The historic age of mining in Fife was brought to life in the film "The Happy Lands", which was screened at the festival of politics this year and earlier this session.

In more recent times, long since the industry's heyday as mentioned by Helen Eadie, opencast surface mining in Fife alone yielded 171,500 tonnes of coal in the first quarter of this year. That is more than 15 per cent of Scotland's total output in the same period, and more than 7 per cent of the combined UK total. It also employed 145 workers. It is therefore beyond doubt that the

industry remains a considerable force despite clear downward trends during the past few decades. Those jobs would be put at risk by Patrick Harvie and Willie Rennie if their amendment was passed.

Most members will have welcomed the minister's announcement of the creation of the Scottish coal task force following the demise of Scottish Coal. The task force's remit is to secure employment and to ensure appropriate restoration work. Those tasks are extremely important and I welcome the work that the task force has undertaken thus far, including the way in which it acted as a platform for stakeholders to come together this summer to convince the Office of Rail Regulation that its proposals for freight charges would have devastated the industry in Scotland. Success in making the ORR reverse its decision almost certainly saved hundreds of jobs across Scotland and helped to strengthen the industry for the long term.

It is not just jobs that we need to protect, important as they are. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to do all that we can within the powers that we have to ensure that the landscape is protected for now and for future generations of residents and visitors alike. Much has been said about the damage that is often left behind when operations at opencast mines wind up. Talk of scars on the landscape is understandable. It is worth bearing in mind the fact that our landscape is a huge asset. Nature-based tourism is worth £1.4 billion to the Scottish economy every year, and it supports around 39,000 full-time equivalent jobs. According to SNH, 40 per cent of all tourist spending in Scotland is nature related. In addition, we must remember how adversely communities that are in close proximity to opencast mines can be affected when the mine is active and when operations have ceased.

As other members have rightly pointed out, restoration is a complex business and there can be no one-size-fits-all approach. Different agreements between operators and local authorities, different access rights and different topography and water tables, to name but a few variables, must all be taken into consideration. I am aware that flooding is a particular issue in Fife and I am pleased to note that Fife Council has been active in working with operators, SEPA and SMRT to look at mitigating flooding effects in the short term, and agreeing on the details of resolution for the longer term.

On clean-up costs, the minister and other members have talked about the problems that are so often associated with bonds with local authorities, be it their absence or their inadequacy for dealing with the scale of the clean-up and the costs involved in restoring the mine to as close to

its original state as possible through landscaping or the like. That has clearly been a major problem around Scotland, and I am aware of cases in other parts of the country, such as Midlothian and East Ayrshire. I am encouraged to note that Fife's current post-1998 opencast mines have significant bonds in place, by and large. Whether they are adequate is not, however, entirely clear at this stage.

I am delighted to hear that the minister has recognised the need to do something about this in the immediate short term, and the creation of the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust to assist and guide the restoration process is a welcome step indeed for stakeholders and the communities affected.

Notwithstanding our collective best efforts, there is still a problem that needs to be addressed in the longer term. Across Scotland, we must learn lessons from the bond problem. It seems that for many years—going back decades—bonds were sought but rarely insisted upon. I listened with interest to Claire Baker's comments on Alex Rowley's statement on that issue and I also welcome Derek Mackay's comments on the Scottish planning policy.

The case for stronger regulation has been well and truly made and I am sure that the minister's announcement today that the Scottish Government will shortly be consulting on better regulation will offer a great deal of comfort for all stakeholders in the coal industry, especially those who are affected most when clean-up is put on hold due to a lack of funds.

Most of us agree that opencast coal mining remains an important industry in Scotland. Coal is not a clean fuel and work is certainly needed to maximise carbon capture and storage technology, but abandoning the opencast coal industry would be an ill-considered move that would cost jobs.

I welcome the Labour amendment to the motion.

16:10

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): Coal mining is not perhaps the first industry that people would associate with my constituency in Dumfriesshire but it has played an important part in the economy in parts of my constituency, with deep mining having been important in Canonbie and Rowanburn—the last of those collieries closed way back in 1922—and more recently in Upper Nithsdale, where the Fauldhead mine in Kirkconnel closed in 1968 but employment in deep mining continued until the demise of the industry during the 1980s.

Opencast mining has continued to be one of the very few sources of well-paid skilled employment

in Upper Nithsdale, although it has not been able to provide the number of jobs that were previously provided in deep mining. Nevertheless, in an area where the local economy was decimated by the demise of the deep mining industry, those jobs have been very important.

That is why there was so much local concern when ATH Resources, which operated the Glenmuckloch mine—the only remaining opencast mine in Dumfries and Galloway—went into administration in December last year, with the potential loss of 60 very important jobs.

The news was not unexpected, because in May last year, share prices in ATH had halved, plans for an extension of the site had had to be put on hold and 11 workers had already been made redundant. Fortunately, however, there had been early discussion between various parties with an interest in the site, including the landowners Buccleuch Estates, who were understandably worried about the possibility that restoration would not happen. Indeed, it was noted that the bond did not cover the costs of restoration at that time.

ATH was honest about what was happening and came forward to talk to people about its problems. We also had important discussions with Dumfries and Galloway Council and with the Scottish Government, which recognised last year that the problem was not a one-off and that what was happening at ATH was the beginning of a problem that then manifested itself in problems at Scottish Coal.

I put on record my personal thanks to one of my constituents, Professor Russel Griggs, for his hard work in facilitating discussions and keeping me informed in confidence on the progress of those discussions—a confidence that I respected during that period. I was very grateful for being kept up to date on what was happening on behalf of my constituents.

As a result of the work that was done prior to ATH going into administration, the remaining 60 jobs were not lost, work continued on the site and Hargreaves purchased the debt. A restoration plan has now been agreed, which interestingly includes forestry, carbon capture and the development of renewable energy sources. Indeed, they are looking at a hydro scheme that would be able to store energy from wind turbine schemes, which would be an interesting development on that site. There is now hope for job creation on the site instead of job losses.

Restoration is, however, dependent—as the minister said—on the extension of the opencast site to fund it. If there was no extension there would be no restoration and there would be no jobs. In my view that would be a lose, lose, lose situation for my constituents.

I believe that the transformation from the serious threat of job losses in an area where unemployment is high to a good news story with the potential for further job creation is due to the various stakeholders and partners being prepared to sit round the table together to seek a resolution to both the employment and restoration concerns before the situation turned into a disaster.

Of course, that does not mean that everyone will live happily ever after. The resolution is still at an early stage and many of us will be keeping a close eye on developments. As Claire Baker mentioned, one issue of concern is the application by Hargreaves to Dumfries and Galloway Council to use the local road network to take coal to the railhead at New Cumnock. That may not affect my constituents as much as Adam Ingram's constituents, but I, too, have significant concerns about increasing heavy-vehicle use of the A76 road, which already has a number of issues.

The Scottish Coal story, however, is less encouraging. The workforce knew that the company was in trouble, but the sudden announcement on 19 April this year, at the end of a shift, that the company was going into administration with the immediate loss of 590 jobs was shocking, even though 450 workers—including 45 of my constituents who worked in East Ayrshire—had been placed on notice of redundancy the previous month. The workers had been in discussions with management but were receiving very little information. MSPs, including me, MPs and local councillors had all been seeking information with the intention of facilitating any meetings that might help, but everyone was kept in the dark. National Union of Mineworkers president Nicky Wilson spoke for many of us when he said that he was disgusted with the way in which the workers had been treated. PACE, too, had not been informed of the forthcoming announcement, so it was unable to make contact with the workers prior to their being made redundant. That made the work of the PACE team considerably more difficult.

Most of those workers are still out of work, but I hope that, as the minister said, within the next six months 300 of them will be back in employment. The workers also discovered that the company had not appropriately accredited their skills, so their opportunities of obtaining employment in other industries such as construction were seriously compromised. I am pleased that so much progress has been made on accrediting the skills of those workers with the MPQC through the opencast mining task force, as the minister mentioned in his opening speech.

The purchase of some of the sites by Hargreaves provides hope that some sites will resume production shortly. Of course, there

remain serious concerns about the future of the coalled-out sites, which were previously in the ownership of Scottish Coal but disclaimed by the administrators—I will be very careful in what I say about that because of the on-going legal issues. However, it is true that, as others have said, the sums of money required to restore the sites runs into millions and at present there is no indication how such sums of money might be obtained. That must remain a concern for us all.

Finally, I agree with Adam Ingram that the Upper Nithsdale area needs a regeneration strategy that takes us away from overreliance on coal and develops other jobs and training opportunities in what is an area of high unemployment. We need to focus on that going forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate is Colin Beattie.

16:16

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Coal is certainly no stranger to my constituency of Midlothian North and Musselburgh, where a proud tradition of coal mining goes back centuries. Coal was the economic life-blood of the area until the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher destroyed our coal industry and devastated our coal communities. Over the years, I have spoken to many ex-miners and listened to their always interesting and sometimes hair-raising tales of what life in the pits was really like. After a while, I can almost begin to believe that I have experienced the undoubted camaraderie and the ever-present danger of the day's work. Coal mining was never a safe occupation, as the risk of injury and even death was a constant companion down the pits.

Today's debate is on the opencast mines that are the successors, as it were, of the old deep pits, although it sometimes seems that we are moving backwards many years in time to a period when shallow opencast was common. Inevitably, much of today's discussion is on liability for the restoration works at the end of the life of the opencast mine, but there are also other aspects to consider.

First, I congratulate the minister on the work that has been done so far to protect and preserve employment. In these days of recession, every job is a prisoner. The work of PACE in particular appears to have been very effective. I have no doubt that every opportunity has been taken to save jobs in what were exceptional circumstances, but we must look forward to the future to ensure that the jobs are still there in 20 or 30 years' time.

How to preserve a sustainable coal-mining industry in Scotland for the long term is a

formidable challenge, particularly pending the implementation of real clean coal technology, including carbon capture.

The key issue in considering the sustainability of the industry is the glut of cheap coal on the international market. The economics surrounding what is a relatively inefficient and crude means of extracting fuel from the ground are at the moment uncertain. Coal can be produced much more cheaply in Poland and South Africa. Most recently, the collapse of the coal industry in Scotland is linked to fracking in America. The resulting surplus in energy supplies has caused a collapse in the demand for coal and the flooding of the UK market and others with cheap American coal that the Americans cannot sell in their home market.

Fracking is in the process of being licensed in the UK by the Westminster Government, which controls the licences. My understanding is that a general licence to frack in the North Sea is in process. Leaving aside my particular dismay at that development, let us continue to focus on the economics of coal. Fracking destroyed the viability of the coal industry in America by flooding the market with relatively cheap fuel. Can fracking in the UK have a different end result? Will there not also be a flood of cheap fuel into the UK market? Longannet might close in 2020, so where will the coal industry sell its bulk product in Scotland?

Murdo Fraser: Just so that we are clear, is Mr Beattie saying that cheaper energy is a bad thing?

Colin Beattie: I am not saying that cheaper energy is a bad thing for the economy in general, but we are discussing the coal industry and its future. Clearly, the price of energy is a key factor in that discussion.

There are uses for coal and its by-products other than as a bulk product for Longannet power station, but nothing that would support the cost of opencast pits. To survive, the coal industry needs a long-term plan that goes beyond looking at its current extraction opportunities. I am pleased that the minister is realistically engaging with stakeholders to find a viable way forward.

Another important issue to consider—or, more correctly, other important stakeholders to consider—is the local communities in which such developments operate. In my constituency of Midlothian North and Musselburgh, there is widespread and well-organised opposition to opencast coal mining. I have to say that I am sympathetic to the arguments against having such projects close to communities.

Another real challenge for the industry and the planning authorities is to reassure communities on the well-documented health concerns. Considerable evidence exists to show that people living in the close vicinity of such a development

suffer from a higher level of respiratory ailments than those elsewhere. Studies in Douglasdale between 2004 and 2009 showed that chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in affected areas affects 2.7 per cent of the population compared to the UK average of 1.5 per cent. That cannot but be a concern, and it needs to be addressed as part of the engagement.

Many of my colleagues in the Parliament share my concern about the threat to the restoration of opencast coal sites. In my constituency, I have an example of a well-restored site at part of the Shewington works, but I now fear that the remainder of the site will not receive the same treatment. Like many, I am shocked by the possibility that companies might be able to walk away from the liability to restore worked areas, given that planning permission and community support were conditional on such works taking place. It is difficult to believe that the courts would support a proposition that is so little in the public interest—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you please be very careful with the sub judice elements?

Colin Beattie: I will be, Presiding Officer.

That proposition might well create an unwelcome precedent. Let us hope that the appeal that was heard last week reverses the decision, because otherwise the impact will be—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I have to ask you to move on and finish your speech without discussing the pending case.

Colin Beattie: Very well, Presiding Officer.

The action that the Scottish Government has taken to create the restoration bonds working group is genuinely welcome. In the long term, such restoration works will undoubtedly create employment and do a creditable job. However, the documented shortfalls in the bonds that have previously been provided by opencast operators leave cause for concern that local authorities, communities and the Government might be left with an unwelcome and expensive legacy of the opencast coal industry.

There is no doubt in my mind that the industry needs better regulation, for its own sake as much as for the communities within which it seeks to operate. Better compliance monitoring at sites and, for once, an enforcement policy that has teeth would make a huge difference. I firmly believe that the Scottish Government is doing the right thing by engaging with the industry and other stakeholders to preserve jobs and to consider a sustainable future for the industry. For my part, I want to see a continuing and flourishing coal industry in Scotland that respects and works with

local communities. I commend the minister and the Scottish Government for their work on the issue to date.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we turn to the closing speeches, I once again remind members that there is a live court case and that members should take great care if they mention any details of that case in their speeches. I say that for members' benefit.

16:24

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Many members who have spoken may be quite pleased to know that this has been a depressing debate for me to listen to. However, there have been one or two lighter moments, such as Murdo Fraser describing me as a neo-Thatcherite. I thought that I was the only one who could make the lady spin in her grave quite so much, but I should really take lessons.

Another lighter moment was when Stewart Stevenson began his speech by talking about his commitment to climate change legislation but, within two minutes, deploying arguments of which James Delingpole would be proud.

As for the minister, over our many exchanges over the years, I have come to learn that the more animated Fergus Ewing's ham outrage at my position, the more reassured I feel in the strength of that position.

In his speech, the minister failed to deal directly with the central question of who pays. That is not simply a matter for current issues—which I will avoid, Presiding Officer—but goes back a long time. The list of Scottish opencast operators that have collapsed is a long one: J Fenton & Sons, RJB Mining, Caledon Coal Company, Millstone Grit & Fireclay, Coleston Mining, William Grant (Mining) Ltd—the list goes on. It is not a new problem.

It is also an issue for the future because Fergus Ewing, as well as other members on the other side of the chamber, said that restoration is possible only if we allow the creation of an even bigger problem for the future—restoration can only be paid for by even further destruction. That is simply not an argument that we should accept.

The minister said that he wants to engage with all those who have a constructive interest in sustaining the industry. Would that he was so concerned to sustain the environment that the industry has destroyed and is still destroying. He is deeply concerned to avoid the industry's destruction but seems content to ignore its destructiveness.

Claire Baker focused on jobs, as did many members—understandably so. Like communities

the world over that have been forced to live with the environmental harm caused by a destructive industry, many in Scotland have been forced to become economically dependent on the industries that have so degraded their environments.

For a time, the Labour Party seemed to understand that and made an effort to engage with the concept of environmental justice. I urge it to return to that position. Let us be clear about jobs for the future of Scotland—not for the past. A low-carbon, low-energy, resource-efficient economy would be dramatically more job rich than the one that we have now.

A comment was made about Alex Rowley saying that we should be extremely careful with future consents. Surely, at the very least, such care means not giving consent until the restoration issue has been resolved.

Murdo Fraser seemed concerned about feeding the coal-fired power stations that are still part of our energy mix. The reality is that they are reducing their demand, whether through conversion to biomass at Drax, through importing less sulphurous coal because of the necessary environmental regulations that have been put in place or, in some cases, because they will simply be closing down. The Scottish market for coal will be gone before long, and the English market for Scottish coal will be in terminal decline. We should not seek to prop up the market for the sake of it.

Elaine Murray: I am slightly puzzled by Patrick Harvie's assertion, because two companies are currently considering the revival of the deep mines at Canonbie, which actually produce a good-quality coal. I am sure that those companies would not be interested if there was no future for the industry.

Patrick Harvie: As far as I am aware, Longannet is scheduled for closure by 2020. That is included in the Government's national planning framework.

The view of the Scottish opencast communities alliance as circulated to members is clear and it—and not only the industry's view—deserves to be heard in the Parliament. It also deserves to be heard around the table at the task force and at the restoration trust. Representatives of the communities ought to have a seat at the table with the full freedom to communicate properly with the communities that they represent.

Mike MacKenzie, Michael McMahon and others made comments about carbon capture and storage. I dealt with the reality that CCS is likely to be applied to gas, not coal, if it can be shown to work. However, even if it were to be applied to coal, the possible future availability of CCS technology could be used to justify burning coal

only once that technology becomes available—it cannot be used to justify burning it now.

The issue of fracking has been mentioned, and its economic impact on the market has been discussed—most recently by Colin Beattie. However, fracking and coalbed methane raise for me another concern. Will that industry lead to yet another iteration of the same problem? Will operators be held to their future environmental responsibilities or will communities in the likes of Airth and elsewhere be told—as opencast communities have been told already—that bonds have fallen short or that companies are off to court to try to abandon their responsibilities?

It seems to me that the case is very clear for an inquiry, not only into the finances of restoration but possibly into the breach of European environmental law. In order to comply with European environmental law, the Government must either ensure that the obligations are met in full by the industry and that the industry is held tightly to those obligations, or pick up the tab from public funds. Those are the two choices, and if the Scottish Government is not minded to hold such an inquiry, at the very least the case is clear for the Auditor General to hold an inquiry into the finances of this entire situation.

It seems to me that the question that has not been addressed by the minister but which needs to be asked is this: why are we continuing to support an industry that routinely trashes the environment, is openly contemptuous of environmental laws, facilitates the biggest polluters in the country and has no future? That question remains to be answered.

16:31

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Let us take a moment to draw breath, pause and apply some common sense to the discussion.

I do not have to tell you, Presiding Officer, that the Conservatives have a difficult relationship with the coal industry—and, perhaps, a more difficult one with the Scottish coal industry. We have heard a number of times today about the impact that the previous Conservative Government might have had on the industry. However, as many may have heard when I spoke in the debate in which we paid tribute to Margaret Thatcher earlier this year, I am one of the people who believe that it was Arthur Scargill's determined drive to bring down a Conservative Government that cost us our deep mining industry. If we look at the mines, even in the Edinburgh area, that were closed down and were never reopened due to flooding that arose as a result of a lack of maintenance, we realise that there is a more complicated story to be told here.

The truth is that Scotland is a country that is well endowed with energy sources, and that coal was one of the biggest of those. Scotland's coal reserves are still immense, and they will be exploited in different ways as time goes on. The deep mines are gone and, in recent years, opencast mining has been what has enabled Scotland to maintain its huge coal production. Now, however, we have hit a problem. The value of coal has undermined the industry, creating all the problems that we are addressing today.

Some options have been brought forward during the debate, such as taking action to push up the price of coal. Unfortunately, we cannot consider that as a route by which we can deal with the problem because, as we know—as many of us have repeatedly pointed out in the chamber—energy costs are already too high. Whether someone is in fuel poverty or is involved in an industry that is trying to maintain its position in the world market, energy costs are absolutely key to the long-term future. We must therefore consider how we can proceed in a way that will ensure that we can keep energy cost-effective in Scotland.

There are alternatives to what we are doing with coal. We could, of course, go down the road of carbon capture and storage, which would deal with the problem of carbon dioxide emissions. There are also those who believe that, in the long term, we might find a way in which to exploit our coal reserves by bringing the energy up and leaving the carbon where it is. However, for the long term, we have to deal with the problems that we have been discussing today.

A number of members have contributed to that discussion. There was a detailed—in fact, at times quite moving—speech by Adam Ingram, who talked about the situation in East Ayrshire. East Ayrshire had a very successful opencast mining industry, which the collapse of Scottish Coal and Aardvark has, of course, significantly undermined. I pay tribute to the way in which East Ayrshire Council has taken up cudgels and gone ahead and prepared its own report, “Opencast Mining in East Ayrshire—Steps to Recovery”, which will be published on Thursday this week, I believe. I look forward to hearing the ministerial reaction to that report to see whether it can offer a way in which we can deal with the collapse of opencast mining. On behalf of the Conservatives, I also particularly thank Councillor Tom Cook of East Ayrshire Council, who has been our contact in the area and has kept us informed about what is going on.

We have heard interesting arguments, sometimes in the same speech. Claudia Beamish faced both ways on the priority of coal. She reminisced with a good degree of warmth about the good old days of the miners' strike and then talked about the importance of not allowing coal to

contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and global warming.

Claudia Beamish: The member missed my point, which was that the need for jobs in the coal industry for beleaguered communities must be recognised now, but for the future, the range of options has to be looked at in relation to the shift from fossil fuels to a low-carbon economy, and people need support in that shift to be trained or retrained.

Alex Johnstone: Indeed, but the one thing that we cannot do is both at the same time.

Patrick Harvie's contribution to the debate has been substantial, and I turn to the main issues that surround the Green and Liberal Democrat amendment. Patrick Harvie objected to subsidies for rail transport—perhaps that was a first on his part. We must remember that we cannot sacrifice the jobs of the many people who depend on the industry simply to take us towards his green revolution.

A member mistook Annabelle Ewing for Annabel Goldie—surely nobody else could make that mistake. I entirely agree with Annabelle Ewing, whose position was that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work in these difficult times for opencast mining. The answer to the problem is complex, which is why the minister must take the matter forward in the way that he set out in his opening speech. It is, of course, important that we all work together.

As my colleague Murdo Fraser pointed out in his opening speech, the Conservatives will support the Government motion and the Labour amendment. We are prepared to go forward with a united front. It is a disappointment to me that the Greens and the Liberal Democrats have taken a quite isolated position. Try as I might, I cannot work out how they believe that that will help at this difficult time. To call on the Scottish Government to

“call an immediate halt to all new open cast coal developments and to ensure that the industry fulfils its legal and moral obligation”

is a contradiction in itself. If we kill the industry stone dead, which is what I believe that action would do, we will simply be left with the problem that the liability for clearing up the mess of opencast coal mining may be attributed to one or other of the individuals involved, but nothing will be done if there is no money and there are no companies.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude now, please.

Alex Johnstone: To take the matter forward, we must ensure that the industry survives and is encouraged to accept its responsibility.

I commend the actions of the Government and the minister and look forward to seeing how the matter works out in the longer term. In the meantime, the Government will have our support at decision time.

16:39

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): This pragmatic debate has reflected the complex challenges that we all have to face, and it has indicated that we need to work together in the interests of our constituents. I believe that members have engaged in the debate with that appetite and that overall attitude.

Although we need to be pragmatic, we also need to have a few points of principle in mind. To me, the Parliament should be guided by our principles of sustainable development in considering how we run our economy now and the long-term impact of our economy, but also how we factor in environmental and social issues and social impacts. Environmental justice has to be a key part of that world view, and that was ably demonstrated by both Claire Baker and Claudia Beamish.

What has happened in our coal industry should worry us all. The question mark over jobs and stability in the industry, which Claire Baker mentioned, has been coming for some time, and it represents a double whammy for local communities. Jobs have been lost by some of our most disadvantaged communities that already have much higher rates of unemployment, as Graeme Pearson mentioned. The loss of commitment to and funding for restoration projects has been a body blow for many of those communities, which are now deeply worried about their future. The bonds and guarantees that were undertaken and given by companies, without which planning permission would not have been granted, have to concern us in the Parliament.

That is why our amendment focuses on the need for the Scottish Government to review the policy advice in the draft SPP that closed for consultation this summer. We wanted to make a positive contribution to the debate and to flag up the fact that, because the planning minister has extended the time before the relevant policy is concluded, we have a chance to look at that section.

We also wanted to flag up that discussions about the future of the coal and other extractive industries need to include the trade unions that are involved—both those on the mining side and those in relation to transport. It is concerning that, as well as losing jobs in the coal sector, we have seen contracts going away from rail haulage and reverting to road transport. At its very start, the

Parliament focused on transferring transport from road to rail, and it is bad news for local communities to see a move back.

Our amendment refers to what happens next in planning. The establishment of the task force was welcome, but we all need to put our minds to the key issue of the way forward on restoration in relation to both existing sites and the long-term development of new proposals. There are currently problems with pollution—and Helen Eadie was absolutely right to raise them as they are worrying communities now, even before we look at future issues. That is why, although we have not called for a moratorium, we have called for guidance to be addressed in the new SPP. That is crucial, because the existing document is short on help for local authorities, which have seen the agreements that they had made blown out of the water. With companies going bust and their successor companies attempting to shelve their obligations to carry out restoration work, communities are rightly angry. We need that guidance from the Scottish Government.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: Not just now, thank you.

Today's announcement is important, and we need to seize the opportunity. I ask ministers to consider continuing the task force's inclusive approach as they move forward. It is vital that all voices are drawn into the discussion, including those of communities and local authorities. We need to learn from good practice as well as from failure, and it is important to take on board Claudia Beamish's comments on best practice in West Lothian and Midlothian.

The issues of site surveys and restoration guarantees are also crucial. In future, sites need to be run to the best of standards, and they need to be progressively and appropriately restored. It is important that local authorities have the capacity to tap into specialised financial advice, because we all know that the current financial settlement for local authorities is seeing them lose staff. Those are key issues that we need to address.

I ask the minister to consider the Scottish opencast communities alliance's suggestion that local authorities should be allowed to introduce fees for monitoring and enforcing mineral consents. The alliance points out that such work is complex but underfunded.

When the planning minister suggested earlier this year that local authorities should be allowed to raise the cost of planning fees, Labour agreed. The work is expensive, and it is important that planning authorities are properly funded to carry it out. I know from representations from the East Ayrshire Labour group that people are worried that

the council simply does not have the resources to deal with a crisis on the scale of the one that it faces.

As Graeme Pearson said, the council will discuss the matter this week. The paper from council officials says that the council is seeking support from the UK Government and the Scottish Government to find a way to support the restoration of sites in East Ayrshire.

If Willie Rennie had taken interventions when he was in the chamber, mine would have been to say that he surely cannot rule out the involvement of the UK Government. My colleague Sandra Osborne MP raised the issue with the UK Government. Given that 48 per cent of the UK's opencast coal comes from Scotland, we surely need positive engagement from the UK Government on the issue. Communities have been devastated because of the unsustainable financial settlement from the Scottish Government in this year's budget, and yet Willie Rennie tells them not to speak to the UK Government. Governments at every level need to work together to see what practical support they can give local authorities and the communities that we represent.

It is welcome that cumulative impact will be a material issue for planning authorities under the new planning guidelines. However, we need to ask what weight the Scottish Government will give to the existence of a site for which there are no commitments on restoration in a locality that would be affected by a new proposal. Will a local authority be expected to refuse planning permission until the existing site has been dealt with? Will the issue be reflected in authorities' consideration of planning applications?

The issue is important, because communities have a right to know what kind of environmental protection they can expect in such circumstances. Local authorities need to find out to what extent the Scottish Government will back them in planning decisions if companies are not happy about how their applications have been dealt with. Local authorities need to be confident that the Scottish Government will back them up.

We need a transparent policy framework and an approach that is valid, fair and enforceable. I would be interested to know to what extent ministers have discussed the issues with local government and the UK Government and what role they envisage for the Coal Authority and DECC. The intergovernmental challenges are acute in this context and need to be taken on board.

We need to get it right, because it is about challenges not just for the coal industry—although that has rightly been the focus for most members in this debate—but for other extractive and

environmental industries. Restoration principles apply whether we are talking about fracking, biomass or coal. RSPB Scotland and Friends of the Earth Scotland were right to put the issue on our agenda in their joint briefing.

Our economy is still in difficulty and access to money is an issue for companies. Borrowing has become more expensive, so it is a challenge for local authorities to measure accurately long-term financial viability. There are issues to do with global changes, and local authorities need support and strategic advice. We need to work collaboratively across the Parliament on the issue.

As Helen Eadie said, ERDF funding was powerful and facilitated restoration projects that have successfully turned round communities.

We need to consider the issues in the long run. We will need new jobs as our economy moves on to lower-carbon energy sources. That is why the issue is not about a choice between low-carbon energy and support for our coal industry; the challenges go hand in hand. Labour members are up for a discussion, to ensure that we work with local communities and Governments at all level to meet the challenge. We cannot leave things to fall as a result of the failure of market forces.

16:49

Fergus Ewing: I start by welcoming to the public gallery Councillor Jim Roberts, a member of the task force, together with his colleague Councillor Stephanie Primrose. They have sat through the whole debate this afternoon. I also pay tribute to their colleagues on the task force, including council members from various parties and trade union officials. Without their contributions, rooted in the community and experienced in the industry, we would not be where we are now and we would not have achieved the successes that we have achieved.

There have been four or five meetings of the task force. Derek Mackay and I were grateful for the invitation extended by the chief executive and convener of East Ayrshire Council to see for ourselves some of the impacts that they have in the opencast mines. We spent the best part of a day doing that, contrary to what Mr Rennie, who is not here, implied in his statement.

I welcome and thank all those members of the task force across the parties in this chamber for their contribution. I do not think that I have ever chaired a bigger task force—at one point, there were nearly 60 people on it. I do not know whether I can prune the numbers, if there are any volunteers.

Looking forward, I have planned a number of strands of work with all parties in this chamber in

an open and co-operative fashion. First, I am due to meet bondholders to discuss some of the difficulties that have arisen. I will be working closely with the councils in that regard. Secondly, the litigation is sub judice but I will continue to engage with the liquidators as is appropriate.

Thirdly, I will continue to explore with the UK Government whether any of the substantial contribution that the industry pays to the Coal Authority, which amounts to a great number of millions of pounds—I believe from recent figures that the levy is 17p a tonne, although only 1p of that is in fact funded to the Coal Authority—can be used in part to meet the restoration costs. Many members have rightly said that the industry has responsibility. The industry has made a contribution but, at the moment, I am not sure exactly what the contribution has done, where it has gone or what it is for. The vast majority of it has gone straight into the consolidated fund. I am not making any political points, but I think that the Parliament would expect me to pursue that issue—and pursue it I will.

Lastly, in respect of the work going forward, we will hold at least two further meetings of the task force, and possibly more, as required—we will see. In addition to that, I confirm that we have asked Scottish Enterprise, in a letter from me to Lena Wilson at the outset of these problems, following the administration of the two companies, to look particularly at the predicament facing East Ayrshire. Adam Ingram, who has worked tirelessly in the task force, asked for that assurance and I have given it to him. I will personally attend meetings, the detail of which Mr Ingram and I have already had some discussions about.

Willie Coffey was right to highlight that the Ayrshire communities have already been affected severely by the aftermath of the Diageo closures. Mr Swinney, who is here in the chamber, and I recognise the severe predicaments faced in East Ayrshire and, at a strategic level, the need not only to diversify into other areas but to work with the existing employers.

On Claire Baker's remarks and the comments in the Labour amendment about planning, we believe that the current policy is quite clear. We have consulted over the summer on slight amendments, and we feel that the issue is the operation of the policy locally, which would benefit from further advice and guidance. Following the debate, Mr Mackay will write to Claire Baker with as much detail as we have at the moment. We will explore that issue further during the consultation process.

In August, despite the issues of redundancies in the sector, Scottish opencast mines produced 448,000 tonnes of coal. By contrast, only 332,000 tonnes were produced last month in England. The industry sustains 1,500 direct full-time jobs and

3,000 indirect full-time jobs. It contributes around £0.5 billion to the economy per annum. Last year, Scotland produced 4.8 million tonnes of coal. At least 12 million tonnes of reserves remain, and possibly much more.

The industry provides average salaries of £42,000, which is well above the Scottish average of £22,000. One wonders where on earth jobs offering such salaries would be found were the industry to be closed, as the Liberals and the Greens would have it if their amendment were approved—which, fortunately, it will not be.

In the winter, coal regularly generates around 45 per cent of the UK's electricity—a point that was made by Conservative, Labour and SNP members—and more than half our coal is exported to England, contributing to the UK's electricity generation system.

Alex Johnstone: The minister is slightly ahead of himself. Coal going to England is not technically an export yet.

Fergus Ewing: Well, I am an optimist.

Contrary to what Mr Harvie said, Longannet coal power station is expected to keep generating electricity until 2023. Mr Harvie is also wrong to say that there will not be a community representative on the SMRT—it is recruiting one at the moment, as I thought he was aware.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: No. I will give way to Mr Harvie in a minute. I ask him to hang on for a second.

When CCS becomes commercially proven, that will allow clean coal thermal generation to continue for many years to come. When I attended the EU Council of Ministers meeting with the UK delegation in November 2011, there was a presentation by the lady who heads up the International Energy Agency. Her analysis pointed out—and I have never seen any information from anyone that contradicts this—that unless CCS as a technology is applied to power stations throughout Europe, it is extremely difficult to see how the EU emissions targets can be achieved.

If one thinks about it, the proposition is straightforward. A substantial proportion of carbon emissions derives from generation electricity from gas and coal. If emissions from that generation are abated, that will make an enormous contribution to reducing our emissions target. If they cannot be reduced, either fossil fuels must cease to be used—as Mr Harvie wants but which is not possible in the short term as we transition to a low-carbon economy—or we must have CCS technology.

I find it difficult to understand the position that Mr Rennie and Mr Harvie have adopted. Since

CCS is a sine qua non of achieving reductions in carbon emissions, why are they opposed to it? My quandary is even more acute given that I found out, when the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute came to this country in the summer and I hosted a reception for it, that the equivalent of the WWF in the USA supports carbon capture and storage. As that is the route for reducing carbon emissions, why are Mr Harvie and Mr Rennie opposed to it? It would allow their objectives to be achieved—in fact, it is the only way in which their objectives will be achieved.

Patrick Harvie: Is the minister going to give way? He is misrepresenting me.

Fergus Ewing: I suppose that I will give way, as I am a good sport.

Patrick Harvie: I am glad that the minister, who is such a good sport that he has spent the last few minutes misrepresenting my position, has chosen to give way. He knows that I am not opposed to CCS. However, there is a serious question mark over whether it is technically and commercially viable. If it is viable, when it is available we may be able to burn coal without CO₂ emissions.

I return to the point about the community representative, which is what I wanted to intervene on the minister about. Can the minister give us an assurance that the community representative will be entirely free to communicate about all issues with the communities that they represent? Otherwise, they will be completely incapable of doing the job.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I know that that was a lengthy intervention, but if you can finish by 5 o'clock, minister, that would be appreciated.

Fergus Ewing: I cannot give that assurance to Patrick Harvie, because it is not up to me to constrain people's individual contributions—I would not attempt to limit liberty of expression. Anyway, the SMRT is independent of the Government, so it is within neither my power nor my desire to prevent it from speaking out as it sees fit. What a ludicrous suggestion.

It is plain and absolutely clear to all those who have contributed from the SNP, Labour and Conservative benches that we see in Parliament today something that I cannot remember ever having come across before in 14 years of membership of the Parliament. Not just Mr Harvie but one of the putative major parties, the Liberal Democrats, have proposed in their amendment a measure—the halting of further coaling—that would have the effect of closing down a whole industry in Scotland. I cannot remember any putative major party putting forward an argument that anyone who is capable of logic can see would have the inevitable consequence of redundancy

notices being handed out to thousands of people in our country. It is a matter of profound regret that the Liberal Democrats should adopt such a policy, and I wonder whether their UK colleagues would agree with it.

I close by paying respect to all the workers in the industry and assuring them that, on my watch, there will continue to be surface coal mining in Scotland.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-07712.2, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S4M-07712, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on opencast mining in Scotland, coaling and restoring, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 106, Against 6, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-07712.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-07712, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on opencast mining in Scotland, coaling and restoring, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 6, Against 106, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-07712, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on opencast mining in Scotland, coaling and restoring, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 105, Against 6, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the substantial contribution made by the open cast coal mining industry to the Scottish economy; supports the work of the Scottish Coal Industry Taskforce, carried out in partnership by the Scottish Government, representatives of the UK Government, local authorities, parliamentarians from across the parties representing all of the affected areas, and the industry itself, including relevant trade unions, to preserve employment in open cast coal mining and address challenges of restoration; welcomes moves to identify improvements in the regulatory regime of the industry including appropriate protection for communities and the environment, and, in light of concerns about restoration and remediation of sites, calls on the Scottish Government to address this issue in the final Scottish Planning Policy so that local authorities are given clearer guidance to enable

them to address this issue when considering whether to give planning consent for proposals.

Disabled People in Politics

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-072555, in the name of James Dornan, on disabled people in politics. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication by the Independent Living in Scotland project of the report, *Politically (in)correct - representation of disabled people in Politics*, which reported on a pop-up think tank that took place in Glasgow; considers that ensuring that the country's parliaments and councils reflect the diversity of society is just, makes them more effective and enhances their legitimacy; is concerned that, while society is increasingly diverse, representative bodies do not reflect that diversity; understands that one in five people in Scotland are disabled, yet only a handful of elected officials identify themselves as disabled; believes that this is the result of a number of issues, such as a general lack of support for disabled people to participate in society and be active citizens, the lack of role models for disabled people in political office, that the physiology of political activities presents barriers to disabled people's participation and, while a major route into politics is via political parties, support for disabled people to engage in the party political process can be patchy; considers that to make progress it is important to demonstrate to disabled people that politics is for them by looking to support and resource capacity building and engagement and properly fund access requirements; congratulates the Independent Living in Scotland project for bringing this issue to the fore in its recent Solutions Series pop-up think tank; wishes success in progressing the solutions suggested, and looks forward to further progress on what it considers this important issue.

17:05

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

I welcome the many visitors here tonight, including those from the British Deaf Association Scotland, West Lothian College, Inclusion Scotland and Renfrewshire Council, and, of course, a couple of my Twitter friends, who are up in the gallery as well. It is nice to see you here. I thank those in the independent living in Scotland project—Pam Duncan in particular—for all the hard work that they have done in ensuring that people with disabilities have their voices heard loud and clear.

I am delighted to bring to the chamber this members' business debate on independent living in Scotland's report "Politically (in)correct—representation of disabled people in Politics". It is just one of the reports from independent living in Scotland's "Solutions Series", which is an initiative on pop-up think-tanks that bring people, including stakeholders and policymakers, together to discuss the solutions to specific barriers to independent living. Other reports in the series include "Personalisation and independent living" and "Rights to reality—implementing Article 19 of

the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCPRD) in Scotland." Both those reports are well worth a read and can be accessed online at the independent living in Scotland website at www.ilis.co.uk.

However, we are here today to discuss specifically representation of disabled people in politics. I was delighted to take part in the think tank on that subject with a number of different representatives from political parties. The think tank was chaired by Dame Anne Begg and it included Patrick Harvie MSP, along with a number of Glasgow councillors, including my colleague Susan Aitken, as well as representatives from Inclusion Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance, the National Union of Students, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament.

I was hugely impressed with the pop-up think tank idea and I found the event to be incredibly useful and informative. Hearing at first hand of the practical difficulties that people with disabilities face while trying to be part of the political process makes one recognise just how determined people such as Dame Anne Begg and Dennis Robertson have to be to overcome those monumental challenges. However, most of the discussion was about how to make it easier for people with disabilities just to begin to take part in the political process.

One of the clear themes of the think tank and the subsequent report is that disabled people are among the most disenfranchised people in society and can feel that decisions are made about them rather than in conjunction with them. That has never been more important than at this time when we are seeing the harmful impact that the welfare reforms that have been implemented at Westminster are having on disabled people. We can see it in the bedroom tax, changes to carers support and in the move from disability living allowance to personal independence payments. Those changes will mean that 90,000 fewer disabled people in Scotland will receive assistance for their care needs by 2018, and the cost of that loss in entitlement will be £272 million per year by 2018. I have taken those figures from Inclusion Scotland, so members can blame it—not me.

It was strongly suggested at the think tank that it is less likely that policies such as those would have been implemented had there been more MPs with direct experience of disability. However, to be realistic, for the representation issue to be fully addressed it will take years of continued progress before we see the representation that we want. It is therefore crucial that we, as politicians, continue to support disabled people in the fight for fair treatment and a stronger voice.

An issue that came up time and again at the think tank was that the main route into elected

politics is via political parties. It is therefore important that parties have mechanisms and structures in place to support disabled people in getting involved. In my party branch, we ensure that all our meetings are held in places that are accessible to all. We are also currently asking all members whether they have any practical problems in accessing politics at branch level. That includes considering issues such as the timings of meetings, the geography of where meetings are held, whether members need written reports in specific formats and whether they need assistance in getting to branch meetings. We are also undertaking an audit of campaigning skills.

Campaigning has moved on from the traditional door-knocking and leafleting, both of which could be barriers to political participation for some disabled people. We are working on a campaign strategy to ensure that all members of the local branch can make a contribution to political campaigns in a number of different ways, be it for Holyrood, Westminster or the local council, as well as for the independence referendum next year.

However, although it is hugely important to ensure that the political party structure is as friendly as possible to all, we must also engage more disabled people in politics more generally outwith political parties. One of the initiatives that is mooted by Inclusion Scotland is an internship programme at the Scottish Parliament, similar to a programme that is already working at Westminster. As a member who has had a high school internship competition for the past two years to help to engage young people from my constituency in politics, I am supportive of such initiatives, so I have written today to the Presiding Officer to ask whether she will ask Parliament to look into the benefits of introducing such a scheme. In the interim, members could consider bringing about such a scheme through our own offices. I will look at doing something like that in the forthcoming year.

I note that the access to elected office fund, which Westminster runs, assists disabled people to meet the extra costs that they incur in running for office. Will the minister investigate the possibility of introducing a similar scheme for the Scottish Parliament? It is crucial that we continue to consult organisations such as the independent living in Scotland project, Inclusion Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance and many others to ensure that disabled people are given all the help and encouragement that they need to access politics.

One in five people in Scotland and the United Kingdom is disabled, but only a handful of members identify themselves as such. I believe that encouraging and assisting disabled people to take part in the political process would be good not

just for the individuals concerned but for democracy as a whole. Our democracy and decision making are enhanced and strengthened when many different voices and experiences are represented in Parliament. I want a Parliament that allows the people of Scotland to say, "They speak for us." For that to happen, we need to do all that we can to assist all sectors of society to participate.

I look forward to hearing what my colleagues think about the report and how they are trying to empower more people—disabled or otherwise—to enter politics and ensure that decisions that are made in the Scottish Parliament have at their core the best interests and the experience of all our citizens.

17:11

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate James Dornan on securing the debate and on his excellent and considered speech. Like he did, I see many friends in the public gallery. As I have only four minutes for my speech, I will not name them all.

I was struck by the fact that, as James Dornan said, one in five people is disabled. If Parliament truly represented Scottish society, at least 25 MSPs would have a disability, but I suspect that we are well short of that.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I am enormously grateful to Jackie Baillie for taking an intervention. I point out that some of us are quite good at hiding our disabilities. I have not yet learned to lip-read, but I might need to some day. A lot of people are dealing with becoming deaf.

Jackie Baillie: That is a timely reminder that some people with disabilities are not obvious and do not declare themselves as having a disability.

The debate should not be just about representation for the sake of it. It is about what elected representatives can and should do to create a fairer and more equal Scotland that is fundamentally about social justice and equality of opportunity.

I am offended when I see statistics that tell me that 47 per cent of families with disabled people live in poverty; that 33 per cent of disabled people live in fuel poverty; that 47 per cent of disabled people are unemployed; that 44 per cent report barriers in accessing justice; and that 74 per cent experience restrictions in using transport.

Scottish Labour believes that equality of opportunity is a right, not a privilege. It is a basic matter of social justice and human rights, so it is incumbent on all of us to address the challenges that lie behind the statistics. Representation is, of course, part of that, but it is not everything.

Having said that, I commend independent living in Scotland for producing the report and for hosting the “Solutions Series” of pop-up think tanks. I participated in one, which was much fun. We should support much that is in the report, and I hope that the minister will consider and respond to the recommendations. It is clear that we need to do more to break down the barriers to people standing for elected office, but our experience tells us that we need to effect change much earlier in the process.

We support an access to elected office fund and believe that Scotland should have a dedicated fund. We support practical action, such as parliamentary internships for disabled people, and we agree that we need positive role models to inspire and challenge us to respond with a vision for the future. All of that is important.

We should be honest and acknowledge that getting into politics is not as simple as a person turning up and saying that they want to stand; a long, hard slog is ahead of them. We have experienced that. The smoke-filled rooms might be gone, but getting into the informal networks can still be a bit of a mystery and a challenge.

Perhaps our funding and efforts should be directed at engaging people much earlier in the process. There is a place for Government action, but political parties must do much more. That is why I am pleased to announce that, as a first step, the Scottish Labour Party will establish a disabled members’ network, to ensure that there is a real focus on policies that meet the needs and aspirations of disabled people and, in addition, to ensure that we actively encourage representation at every level of elected office—in local government, in this Parliament and in the United Kingdom Government.

Dame Anne Begg, MP for Aberdeen South, is a real inspiration and a trailblazer and is the first permanent-wheelchair-user member in the House of Commons. Nobody would deny that her contribution to the whole country has been immense.

What are we waiting for? We need to take the recommendations, use them as a framework against which to measure progress, and do so in partnership with disabled people’s organisations. Then and only then will we begin to make a difference.

17:16

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I, too, commend James Dornan for bringing this important debate to the chamber, and I thank all the organisations representing people with disabilities that provided the briefings for this evening.

In 2011, we made history in this Parliament. No, I mean not the landslide win by the Scottish National Party, but the fact that we elected our first blind person to the Parliament—it took four sessions of Parliament. Although I am immensely privileged and feel greatly honoured to serve the people of Aberdeenshire West, it was not an easy journey.

My journey into politics goes back a good number of years. It was when I was out campaigning with a certain, much younger John Swinney—who probably had a full head of hair at the time—that he suggested that perhaps I should put myself forward to be vetted. He explained what that meant and I was okay with the suggestion, so I went forward, but then my journey became complicated, because I needed to access information from my own political party. To be fair and honest, information from my branch and constituency was not particularly accessible. Before, I had just been going along to meetings, not particularly wanting to rock the boat, but then for some reason I became a convener and suddenly found that I had to up my game.

Being a blind person in the political world is not a particularly easy journey, and I am sure that David Blunkett found it difficult at times. I am sure that he remembers more than one occasion when he picked up his papers and suddenly realised that the transcript into Braille was not what he was looking for and he was standing up to give a presentation in Parliament.

I, too, went through a difficult journey, as Dame Anne Begg did. I remember Dame Anne Begg on the access panels in Angus, back in the early 1980s, when we were campaigning side by side, trying to get councils to realise the difficulty that people with disabilities had in even getting access to buildings.

I commend the Scottish Parliament because, when I was elected, it probably had everything that I needed to come forward and try to be an equal in the chamber. The staff had done their research. Goodness knows how they knew that I was going to be elected, but they had done their research just in case. They had software programs, but they did not assume that what they had researched was what I wanted or needed, or what would enable me to participate in the chamber; there was no presumption there. They asked the questions: how can we help, what can we provide, what support do you need? That is all that it takes, a simple, simple question: what support do you need?

Every political party needs to raise its game and get people with disabilities into the political arena. However, people with disabilities also have a part to play. It is not just up to the community or to wider society to open the door: people with

disabilities need to knock on that door. People with disabilities need to say, “I want to engage in the political world,” “I want to become a councillor in a local authority,” or “I want to become an MSP at Holyrood.” If such people do not come forward, the door will remain firmly closed.

We have a challenge. I ask all political parties to look at what they are providing and ask whether it is enough. I would say that it is not. They should ask how they support their elected members when they are being elected and whether that support is enough. That might be a subject for another debate.

I hope that by being the first blind MSP, I will open the door for others to become MSPs. I sincerely hope that I will continue to have the support not just of Parliament but of the electorate of Aberdeenshire West, because it is those people who put me here. They elected me.

The selection process is, however, another story and perhaps we need to look at the selection process for our members and, if we want representation by people with disabilities in this chamber, ensure that the selection process is fit for purpose.

17:22

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate James Dornan on bringing this important debate to Parliament this evening, and I add my thanks to independent living in Scotland for publishing its report on the representation of disabled people in politics.

When I first entered the Scottish Parliament, I was determined that I would not be known as the disabled member for Central Scotland. I remember that during the election campaign, a national newspaper ran an article highlighting the fact that Dennis Robertson and I had been selected to run as candidates. I found that quite disturbing because being disabled had never before been a characteristic by which I was defined. I would have thought that the article could have highlighted many things about me, but the writers seemed to be fascinated that we had been selected and that we each had our own disabilities. Having two years' experience under my belt, I now know what the big deal was.

I am proud to be a member of the Scottish Parliament, and I am proud to be a disabled person. Neither title defines me but I embrace them both. No one forced me to become a member of the cross-party group on disability; I wanted to do it because I thought that I could add value to the group, just as I thought that I could add value to the cross-party groups on Malawi and international development.

I am always delighted and honoured to take part in conferences, debates or discussion panels that focus on disabled people, and I enjoy the challenge of those. However, I would be lying if I said that they do not provide me with my own set of challenges. It is a fine balance between being proud of being a disabled member of Parliament and being pigeonholed as one. I want people to look at me and think that I am doing a good job because I am, not that I am doing a good job despite my disability. That, in itself, can prove difficult.

To my cost, I have found that not standing up every few weeks and sharing my latest private health concerns can leave me in a difficult situation. One example of that is campaigning. At the moment, I walk with a crutch when I have to walk long distances, so I cannot take part in the door-knocking sessions that are planned for the upcoming by-election. Of course, I can do other things to help the campaign, but the pressure of having to explain myself to anyone who asks why I am not doing my bit on the ground can be annoying, to put it mildly. I can understand why examples like that, trivial though they might sound to others, can put disabled people off politics. That is why the whips in each parliamentary group should be required to receive diversity training so that they become more aware of the distinct needs of the individuals in their group, and so that we become more inclusive in action and word.

When I was doing a bit of research for this debate, I was concerned to see that so far no disabled person has been selected to represent Labour at the next general election. I found out because the party publishes data on that on its website. Although that is a disappointing statistic—

Dennis Robertson: Is it that no one has put themselves forward or have they not said that they may be disabled? It is the point that Nigel Don made—there could well be a disabled person putting themselves forward but they have not said that they are disabled.

Siobhan McMahon: That could well be, but the point that I am trying to make is that if a disabled person does not have someone to look up to, to see that it happens in society, they are less likely to put themselves forward—as the report suggests.

As I said, although the stats I mentioned are disappointing, my concern is not limited to the Labour Party, as no other party publishes such data so readily. If we are to challenge some of the barriers that are discussed in the report, it is important that all political parties become more transparent about their selection procedures. The Liberal Democrats have a disability association that anyone can join. That is a good example of inclusiveness and more groups like that should be

established by political parties if we are to tackle the problems of disabled people's representation in politics. That is why I am delighted to welcome the news from Scottish Labour this evening.

The Labour Party has a proud history of equality. We are the party that established the first Minister for Disabled People and we are extremely proud of that. It has been suggested that the Scottish Government should look at replicating that and I hope that it gives serious consideration to doing so. I hope that the Government will also look at establishing the Scottish access to politics fund that so many organisations are calling for, as those organisations and I believe that that would be a start towards helping to remove some of the barriers that disabled people face when trying to become more active in politics, in order that it becomes less of a newspaper story when a disabled person is selected to fight a seat at an election in the future.

17:26

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank James Dornan for bringing this issue to the chamber as I believe that it is an area that does not receive sufficient attention.

Often when we discuss the lack of representation in politics the focus is rightly on the need to attract black and minority ethnic groups into local and national government. I make no criticism of that and, indeed, I believe that more needs to be done in every political party to engage with those groups. However, that should not be at the expense of engaging with other groups whose participation in politics should be encouraged and nurtured.

To reflect the diversity of our society, there has to be a greater emphasis on bringing into politics those who live with some form of disparity. That should by no means be seen as tokenism—more as an acknowledgement of the rich experience of life that disabled people have and the contribution that they can make to public office.

The motion lodged by James Dornan welcomes the publication of the independent living in Scotland report on the representation of disabled people in politics in Scotland, which is a comprehensive document that asks some searching questions and suggests some ways forward.

In its report, independent living in Scotland has suggested various factors that might explain why we do not see enough disabled people—whether they are disabled physically or mentally—serving in public life. One area that is identified is something that we in this chamber and many of our party activists take for granted—campaigning. For a less able-bodied person, leafleting and door

knocking—routine to us and part and parcel of being a political campaigner—both present their own barriers. Those barriers should not be insurmountable and it is the duty of all of us to show disabled people that alternatives exist and that they should not be put off because of preconceived notions of what politics involves.

The report goes some way towards addressing those obstructions to participation and one message that we should deliver to each of our party leaders and party machines is that they have a responsibility to drive forward change by putting in place mechanisms to attract disabled people, whether by talent spotting or by making party positions in the voluntary wing more accessible. I am happy to have that conversation with Ruth Davidson and I am sure that James Dornan will not hesitate to take up the issue with the First Minister.

I was also drawn to the idea of disabled people shadowing serving elected members. I believe that there would be huge merit in the Scottish Parliament emulating Westminster in its political internship scheme, which is funded by the UK Government's equalities unit. The briefing from Inclusion Scotland rightly—

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): There are major barriers to people with disabilities accessing politics but there are also major barriers based on a person's class. If someone is working class and disabled, they have two barriers to politics, therefore it is very important that any internship is a paid internship and that people also receive a payment to cover travel to any internship, so that everyone, not just those who can afford to take part, can take part.

Nanette Milne: I take the point, which I certainly think is worthy of consideration. As I said, I think that we would do well to emulate the UK Parliament in that respect.

The briefing from Inclusion Scotland rightly highlights the many benefits of such a scheme not only to the young disabled interns but to the sitting politicians who, by working alongside people with disabilities, might develop a greater understanding of the difficulties that an individual with a disability has to endure. I also believe that such a scheme would enhance the intern's confidence and could help to encourage the individual actively to pursue an ambition to put his or her name forward as a candidate.

The other area in which we lag behind Westminster is in not having a Scottish equivalent of the access to elected office for disabled people fund. The fund gives financial assistance to disabled candidates, whose expenses are often higher than those of an able-bodied candidate—for example, to pay for a sign language interpreter.

Making such a scheme viable and successful again relies on communicating its availability. Perhaps the minister will touch on that in her closing remarks.

I slightly disagree with the report's suggestion that Scottish politics lacks disabled representatives who could act as role models for other disabled people. In this Parliament, we have seen current and former MSPs with disabilities of one kind or another who have never shied away from being open about their disability. There is also the example of my Aberdeen MP colleague, Dame Anne Begg, whose work in championing disabled people's rights and greater participation in politics is highlighted in the report. In Scotland certainly, I do not believe that a "coming out as disabled" campaign is necessary or desirable.

I do not want to end on a negative note, so let me once again congratulate James Dornan on securing this evening's debate. I commend the report to the Parliament.

17:31

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I congratulate James Dornan on securing this evening's debate. Despite the success of politicians such as Anne Begg, Jack Ashley and David Blunkett at Westminster and a few disabled MSPs in this place over the past 14 years, the political representation of disabled people has not improved substantially or to the extent that we should expect.

Disabled people are entitled to believe that the policies that affect them might be drawn up a little differently and be of more value to them if they had more of a say in creating those policies. Starting from such a low baseline, in the short term we might be expecting too much to hope that one in four MSPs might have some form of disability, but there is no doubt in my mind that it would be better if the membership of this Parliament looked a lot more like the society that it represents as soon as possible.

The independent living in Scotland report on disabled people's involvement in politics contains much that cannot be refuted, and I congratulate ILIS on its production. As a member of the cross-party group on disability since the outset and its convener for the past 10 years, I have heard many testimonies from disabled people about the barriers that prevent them from participating in many aspects of life that are taken for granted by the majority.

I have also heard too many examples of the difficulties that people face just as political activists, let alone elected representatives. I have had many discussions with disabled people in my party, so I know that the pool of human resources

from within the disabled community is large—yet it is largely untapped. I have always tried to encourage disabled activists to put themselves forward for selection—members might even know one who was successful, although she never needed much encouragement from me—but I have been left disappointed on most occasions, when party members could not see past the wheelchair or the crutches to see the potential of the candidate before them.

Therefore, I have no hesitation in supporting the recommendations in the ILIS report. In particular—I know that it might hurt some colleagues to hear this—we should follow Westminster's lead by establishing a Scottish fund for access to elected office for disabled people. Even in these straitened economic times, there can be no excuse for ignoring the demands of the disabled community for funding to be found to overcome some of the constraints on them in pursuing candidacy at elections.

I have heard fears expressed that much of the support available is more about patronising people than offering genuine support. There is still too much belief around that disabled people are people for whom things need to be done. We would soon see the value in policy development terms of having more people deliberating on issues as disabled people brought solutions to their own difficulties.

Despite the fact that interest in Westminster's access to elected office fund has been limited, I think that there are grounds for optimism. Over the years, things will change and we will get more disabled people into politics. This is about levelling the playing field rather than giving disabled people an unfair advantage.

The optimism of those with whom I have engaged over the years on the cross-party group on disability has encouraged me to see more and more—and to be much more optimistic now than I might otherwise have been—that there is a great future ahead for those from the disabled community who want to join us here or in council chambers across the country and to start to put forward a strong voice on behalf of those whom we seek to represent.

17:35

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): We are debating an extremely important topic and I, too, congratulate my colleague James Dornan on bringing it to the chamber. However, I cannot help but feel that, in reality, few of us who speak in the debate—with the exception of Dennis Robertson and Siobhan McMahon—can even begin to understand the reason why so few people who are identified as having a disability are actively

involved in politics, let alone contribute on the subject with any degree of authority. That is why, in the main, I will focus my speech not on my thoughts but on the experiences and views of someone who undoubtedly knows what they are talking about.

Councillor Sheila Hands, who represents the Monifieth and Sidlaw ward on Angus Council, is a truly remarkable person, although she would be annoyed to hear me say that, because she does not view her blindness as defining or restricting her—it is simply something that she finds a way around. It certainly does not prevent her from being an exceptional contributor to the council administration, and I have yet to witness an example of it hindering her in discharging her ward duties.

To those who are unaware of the nature of the Monifieth and Sidlaw ward, I explain that, as the local member, I hold surgeries in seven different locations in it so that I can be appropriately accessible to constituents. Because of the area's nature, it makes demands of its elected representatives. However, ask Sheila about the role of councillor and being active in politics and she will talk about how rewarding, rather than challenging, the experience is. Interestingly, she will say that she feels that she has achieved more in changing folks' perceptions of disability in the past year and a half than she ever did in her previous life working in the area of equalities and disability rights. The reason is that, day in, day out, in helping her constituents, she demonstrates to them that disability need not be a barrier to providing successful political representation and that, in return for electing someone with a disability to represent them, they will not get a second-class service.

Among other things, the pop-up think tank's report highlights the need for role models. It asserts:

"Seeing their peers in political positions ... would give disabled people the confidence to try it out. Without such positive role models, the barriers to disabled people's participation in politics may appear to them to be insurmountable."

I agree, and I point to Sheila as an inspiration for disabled people who want to get involved. However, although she is happy to be seen as a role model, she does not want to be pigeonholed as a spokesperson or champion for disability.

I asked Sheila to read the report and give me her candid opinion of its content—mind you, I need not have specified that, as she is not prone to holding back. Like me, she remains to be convinced of the merits of quotas. She pointed out that making it easier for disabled people to get involved will not in itself create the hoped-for surge. As she says, we cannot create a disabled

person who wants to enter politics, as people have to want to get involved in the first place. We can give people confidence to go for it by showing that the opportunities are there, but they have to want to take the opportunity.

Sheila has always had an interest in politics and the independence cause and has been a Scottish National Party member for some years, but it was not until I turned up at her door and asked what she thought she could actively contribute that she took that first step. Stuffing envelopes at her dining room table—with the rest of her family dragged in to assist—was quickly followed by attending first branch and then constituency meetings, after the guy who picked up those envelopes offered her a lift to both. In no time at all, she was branch secretary. When the branch first asked her to stand for the council in 2012, she says that she laughed but, three months later, she was filling in the pre-vetting paperwork. Basic practical and enabling help and encouragement were all that she needed to take those vital first few steps.

Sheila still has difficulties to overcome daily, because those of us who do not have disabilities to contend with do not understand the issues that they can pose. Information technology training for councillors does not take account of the fact that the instruction, "Right click the mouse," means nothing to her when she does not use a mouse. It took until four weeks ago for her to have access to emails on her phone, although every other councillor has had that as a matter of course since they were elected. As she says, we still have some way to go until we replace seeking to adapt things for disabled people—and not always succeeding—with genuine accessibility for all.

Of course, as the report makes clear, in some ways, we have not even got the basics in place to ensure that people with disabilities can compete on a level playing field for roles in politics. However, I do not believe that establishing quotas for disabled candidates would necessarily address the issue, although there would absolutely be merit in doing something along those lines for paid internships and perhaps job shadowing.

In theory, quotas would furnish us with more role models, but first and foremost do not political parties need to get our basic thinking right on how we interact with people with disabilities? Even more basically and at the same time, do not we need to create a society that treats those people better, so that they do not feel let down by and disengaged from it? In reality, might not that situation be creating as much of a barrier to disabled people becoming involved in politics as the practical difficulties that they could face if they did? That is a question rather than a statement because, as I said at the outset, I do not feel

sufficiently qualified to claim to speak with authority on the subject.

I pay tribute to those whose views contributed to the report. There are aspects of it on which I remain to be convinced, but it is undoubtedly a thought-provoking piece of work. As a consequence of reading it, I—and I am sure that other MSPs feel similarly—have been left at least contemplating how I can better engage with disabled constituents and assist those of them who are interested in getting involved in the political process to do so and, I hope, follow in the footsteps of Sheila Hands, whose political journey is, I suspect, far from over.

In Angus, we are fortunate that we have the type of role model that the report calls for more of but, like many other places, we have a long way to go before we can say that the political environment that we shape and within which we operate is genuinely open to all.

17:40

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): Like others, I convey my thanks and congratulations to James Dornan for securing this important debate and bringing the matter to the Parliament. The speeches have been interesting and thoughtful and have shed light on some of the barriers that affect the ability of disabled people to participate in society and, specifically, politics.

As a number of members said, the independent living in Scotland project held a significant pop-up think tank called politically (in)correct in Glasgow in February as part of its “Solutions Series”. That is where the representation of disabled people in politics was raised, and it has clearly had an impact as, among other things, it has led to the debate.

I thank the independent living in Scotland project for the work that it does to support disabled people in Scotland and for being at the cutting edge of ensuring that disabled people's voices are heard in shaping policies and services that affect them. In particular, it has taken an innovative approach to its “Solutions Series” in the on-trend format of pop-up think tanks. It clearly works very well.

The “Solutions Series” has brought together not only people with disabilities but policy makers, public servants, academics and other experts. A number of other pop-up think tanks have been held on issues such as the personalisation agenda, independent living and the topic of rights to reality, which concerns implementing article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Scotland.

We work closely with the ILIS project and other disabled people's organisations on building capacity and engagement, with independent living as a strategic overarching commitment. It is important to be clear what we mean by independent living. It is that disabled people of all ages should have the same freedom, choice, dignity and control as anyone else at home, at work and in the community. That means the right to practical assistance and support to participate in society and live an ordinary life. James Dornan was right when he said that all those issues are unfortunately made all the more difficult by the welfare reforms that are being pursued elsewhere.

A number of MSP colleagues attended the event in February and, therefore, will be well aware of the discussion about the underrepresentation of disabled people in politics in Scotland. The latest available figures show that adults with a long-term condition or disability make up 28 per cent of the population, and we need only look around the chamber to see that disabled people are clearly poorly represented in mainstream politics.

We need more role models in politics, political parties and the Scottish Parliament. We have some good ones already, and the debate has demonstrated many of them. However, listening to Dennis Robertson and Siobhan McMahon speak about their difficult and, often, long journeys to get to the Parliament should leave us under no illusion about the fact that there are significant barriers facing disabled people who get into elected politics.

Dennis Robertson: Does the minister accept that, often, people first see the disability, not the person? I remember going on a hustings with Nanette Milne at which I was introduced as “the blind chap”. I was there as a candidate. How do we get across the fact that we are there as candidates, MSPs, local government officials or whatever? How do we get society to see us for what we are—competent and, if not able bodied, certainly able?

Shona Robison: Part of the answer is the fact that Dennis Robertson and others stand here today and act as role models, which shows people that, although it is not always easy—in fact, it is not easy—it is possible. We should build on the role models that we have. Of course, those role models exist not only in the Parliament. Graeme Dey talked about Councillor Sheila Hands, who is a fantastic role model. Having recently appeared with Sheila Hands at a women and independence event, I can assure members that she is a tough lady and an able performer. Whether she has disabilities or not, she is a first-class politician.

We should not underestimate the importance of such role models. As Michael McMahon said, a

few years ago, they were not here. We have made significant changes, but we must keep that momentum going and build on their presence.

We have heard about some of the barriers that people face and some of the ways in which they can be overcome. The issue of attitudes is far more challenging. We must all challenge people's attitudes when, for example, we hear certain terminology used in meetings, and we must provide encouragement and support to ensure that people with disabilities do not rule themselves out.

The Equalities Act 2010 permits political parties to take certain steps in the selection of election candidates to reduce inequality in their representation, so there are opportunities for positive action in that regard, and there are opportunities for parties to find ways of working together to address the underrepresentation of people with disabilities.

We have discussed a number of recommendations that have been made, such as mentoring and buddy schemes that give people an insight into political life. James Dornan specifically asked about the access to politics fund, which was set up by the UK Government and runs until next March. I am happy to confirm to him that we will take that away and look at the feasibility of establishing something along those lines in Scotland.

I thank the people who are in the public gallery. It is not often that a members' business debate leads to some concrete action and change. They have demonstrated that, through the use of external pressure to get our attention firmly, some important and practical actions will flow from tonight's debate. I thank all those who have taken part in it.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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