



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 10 November 2021

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 10 November 2021

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Justice and Veterans

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is justice and veterans. I remind members that questions 4 and 8 are grouped together and that I will take any supplementaries to those questions after both have been answered. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate so by entering the letter R in the chat room during the relevant question.

#### Police Scotland (Control of Dogs)

1. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting Police Scotland to implement and enforce legislation on the control of dogs. (S6O-00337)

**The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Regan):** I am aware that Emma Harper's Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2021 came into force at the weekend. I pay tribute to her and to all who were involved in making that important legislation a reality. The Scottish Government worked with Police Scotland and others to help arrange the commencement of the legislation.

More generally, Police Scotland is a valued member of the Scottish Government-led dog control and dangerous dogs working group. Work carried out by the group includes a review of the control of dogs joint protocol agreement between Police Scotland and local authorities, as well as the establishment of a national dog control database, which will assist enforcement of dog control measures.

**Emma Harper:** As the minister said, my Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2021 came into force last Thursday. The act strengthens the penalties available for those who allow out-of-control dogs to worry or attack livestock, and it extends the power of the police

and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to investigate such offences. Has any guidance been produced for police officers and vets on the investigation and enforcement of those offences?

**Ash Regan:** I am pleased to confirm that officials have worked closely with stakeholders to assist with the development of guidance that has been prepared for private vets on what should happen if a live dog is seized by the police and presented to a private vet for examination. I should stress that we think that that is unlikely to be a frequent occurrence. The guidance has been discussed in detail with Police Scotland and with veterinary organisations, including the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the British Veterinary Association, and with the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The guidance is close to agreement and it will be published on the Scottish Government website by the end of November.

#### Domestic Violence (Support for Victims)

2. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of reported Crown Office findings that there has been a 9 per cent increase in reported charges with a "domestic abuse identifier" during the Covid-19 pandemic, what action it is taking to support victims of domestic violence. (S6O-00338)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** We all recognise that during the coronavirus pandemic, for some people, home has not been a place of safety. Sadly, that has been reflected in a 9 per cent increase in the number of domestic abuse charges reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in the past year. That is why, in its first 100 days, the Government directed £5 million of new funding to domestic abuse services and rape crisis centres, to help to cut waiting lists for specialist support services. That was in addition to the £5.75 million that was allocated last year to support front-line organisations' Covid response and recovery, so that they could respond to an increase in demand from victims of abuse.

**Colin Beattie:** What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that more people are aware of the support that the cabinet secretary outlined in his answer, and what support will be given to local organisations to help them to deliver their services?

**Keith Brown:** I am sure that the member and other members will be aware of the many advertisements on television and in other media about this issue. For our part, the Government remains committed to raising awareness of

domestic abuse, and we support Scotland's domestic abuse and forced marriage helpline, which is available 24/7 to support anyone with experience of domestic abuse. Later this month, we will launch a campaign to reach those who are most at risk and to ensure that survivors are aware of the support that continues to be available.

We continue to invest significant levels of funding in specialist front-line services. Our new delivering equally safe fund recently confirmed allocations to 121 projects from 112 organisations that are working to provide key services and prevent gender-based violence.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** Four in five victims of domestic abuse are women. We all agree that that is a truly shocking statistic, but it remains true that more than 10,000 incidents of domestic abuse involved male victims. Will any of the funds that the cabinet secretary mentioned be allocated to charities such as Abused Men in Scotland and other organisations that support male victims of abuse, so that they get a fair and proportionate share of Government support, too?

**Keith Brown:** The member raises an important point. We are absolutely clear that there is no excuse for domestic abuse, regardless of the gender of the victim or of the perpetrator. Although the victims in more than 80 per cent of cases are female, we recognise that men can be victims of domestic abuse, too, whether that abuse is perpetrated by women or in same-sex relationships.

We are funding a range of services to support male victims. That includes the provision of nearly £190,000 between 2017 and 2023 to run the Respect helpline, which signposts male survivors of domestic abuse to support services. Over the same period, we are providing £5.6 million to the advocacy, support, safety, information and services together, or ASSIST, project, which, as part of its work, provides advocacy support to male survivors of domestic abuse in the west of Scotland and the Lothians.

As I mentioned, we also fund the Scottish domestic abuse and forced marriage helpline, to support male and female victims and survivors.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Does the domestic abuse identifier include any evidence of increasing abuse of pets—usually dogs—which are used by perpetrators to coerce and control their partners?

**Keith Brown:** I cannot say that it does, and if it does, I have not seen such evidence. I am happy to look into the matter and, if we have more information that I can provide, to write to the member with that information.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 3 comes from Michelle Thomson, who joins us remotely.

### Legal Services Regulation

**3. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that the views of consumers are adequately heard in its consultation on legal services regulation reform. (S6O-00339)

**The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Regan):** A public consultation based on Esther Robertson's recommendations from her independent review of legal services regulation was published on 1 October and will run until 24 December 2021. We have also published a summary consultation, which is designed to allow participants without detailed knowledge of the current framework of regulation to share their views on and priorities for legal services regulation reform. In parallel, we are undertaking a series of consultation focus groups to increase the opportunity for the public to respond to the consultation in part or in whole.

Details of the consultation have been shared on the Scottish Government's Twitter page, and we continue to engage with stakeholder networks, such as Citizens Advice Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid and the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission, to amplify and promote the consultation to ensure that we reach as wide an audience as possible.

The consultation is available on the Scottish Government website, if anyone is interested and wants to respond to it.

**Michelle Thomson:** I declare that I am an interested party, as I have a current complaint.

Section A of the consultation, which is on potential regulatory models, requires strong responses from consumers, particularly those such as me who have recent direct experience of the current system. At present, I believe that the system is heavily biased against the consumer's interest.

Will the minister meet me to hear about my experience? Will the Government issue an urgent call to Consumer Voice to ensure that not just the lawyers and their representative bodies, but consumer voices, are heard?

**Ash Regan:** I agree. I think that a strong response from consumers and those with lived experience will be very important as ministers consider the reform of legal services regulation. I am clear that the future framework should place consumer interests at its heart.

I assure the member that the Scottish Government is actively encouraging consumers to

participate in the consultation. We engaged early with the SLCC consumer panel to seek its advice on how to do that. I call on all consumers with an interest to participate in the consultation that I mentioned in my previous answer.

I would be very happy to meet the member to discuss the matter in more detail.

### **Veterans (Wellbeing)**

**4. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure the dignity, security and wellbeing of Scotland's veterans. (S6O-00340)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** Last year, my predecessor presented to Parliament our response to the United Kingdom-wide veterans strategy, which set out the commitments that we have made to the veterans community to improve service delivery and mainstream support right through to 2028. Progress against that is reported through our annual update to Parliament, which I will deliver tomorrow.

In addition, Scotland was first in the UK to establish an independent veterans commissioner, whose recommendations have assisted and, occasionally, challenged our work over the past several years and ensured that our wider policies have been developed with views of the veterans sector firmly represented.

**Evelyn Tweed:** I welcome that we have doubled funding for the veterans fund this year. Will the Scottish Government elaborate on how interested parties can apply for support from the veterans fund?

**Keith Brown:** The application period for next year's Scottish veterans fund is currently open. It closes on Friday 12 November. Interested parties are able to apply for the fund via the Veterans Scotland website. This year, we particularly welcome bids that promote collaboration and partnership among and outwith the veterans charitable sector, as well as projects with a focus on early service leavers.

We continue to have financial support in that from the company previously known as Aberdeen Asset Management. I am not entirely sure how to pronounce its new name, but that is what it was then.

### **Veterans (Support)**

**8. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to assist veterans in readjusting to civilian life. (S6O-00344)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** Our response to the veterans strategy sets out our ambition to make Scotland the destination of choice for service leavers and their families. We have made several commitments on how we will support veterans to transition into civilian life, including inputting into the Ministry of Defence's holistic transition policy and working with the defence transition services. The Scottish Veterans Commissioner has also published two reports—on employability, skills and learning, and on housing—both of which focus on the transition from military to civilian life. We accepted all the recommendations in those reports and have outlined to the commissioner how we intend to take them forward.

**Jackie Dunbar:** I was have recently contacted by a national charity, Veterans First Point, which highlighted that some veterans struggle to engage with support services—specifically, housing services—when no veterans or serving officers are involved and engaged in their case. What engagement is the Scottish Government having with veterans charities to ensure that the support that we provide is accessible and fit for purpose for all our veterans?

**Keith Brown:** We fund Housing Options Scotland to provide housing advice and advocacy to older and disabled people. That funding includes support for the military matters project, which has the specific aim of helping veterans. We also commissioned the Veterans Scotland housing group to develop a pathway to prevent homelessness for veterans. The group has regular and wide-ranging dialogue with veterans, as does Veterans Scotland. That initiative looks at transition from the armed forces and at the reasons why veterans become homeless, sometimes many years after leaving service. The report, with its recommendations, is due to be published later this year. Furthermore, we continue to fund Veterans Scotland to support its capacity to deliver leadership, communication and co-ordination across the veterans charitable sector.

### **Antisocial Behaviour (Fireworks)**

**5. Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact its revised rules on the use of fireworks have had on antisocial behaviour complaints related to bonfire night. (S6O-00341)

**The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Regan):** I pay tribute to the police officers and firefighters who responded to incidents of antisocial behaviour around bonfire night this year, and I condemn the individuals who chose the occasion to launch attacks on them. The contribution of emergency services at this time—

including their planning and preparation—alongside the work of local authorities and community safety partners, has helped to promote safety and wellbeing in our communities.

Initial data from Police Scotland suggests that the number of complaints this year is down on previous years. Over 4 and 5 November, the number of calls about fireworks was down by 20 per cent on last year, while calls about fires were down by nearly one third. Data from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service reflects a broadly similar experience. That is encouraging and is likely to be due to the preventative activity to which I alluded, as well as to several other factors, including the new legislation that deals with the sale and use of fireworks.

Nonetheless, the level of antisocial behaviour and disruption to our communities remains unacceptable around the time of bonfire night, so I am committed to making further progress with the bill that we promised in our programme for government, which we hope to introduce to Parliament shortly.

**Neil Gray:** I reiterate the minister's tribute to emergency services personnel who responded to complaints over the weekend.

I am really pleased that the Scottish Government has taken action to restrict the sale and use of fireworks. Bonfire night is normally great fun for families, but it can be frightening for some people, including veterans and people with autism or sensory issues, and it can be frightening for animals.

Will the minister elaborate on what the Scottish Government will do to review the new restrictions and to consider whether more needs to be done alongside the United Kingdom Government, which also has responsibility in the area?

**Ash Regan:** I share Neil Gray's concerns about vulnerable groups, which were prominent in our publicity campaign around bonfire night this year. We are following up with our partner organisations to review the impact of the new restrictions. Initial indications are positive, but we understand that more is required. We have a commitment to introduce a bill to implement the fireworks review group's remaining recommendations. That introduction will happen shortly.

As far as the UK Government is concerned, I have to say to Neil Gray that I am not very hopeful. When the issue was raised by Patricia Gibson MP, the leader of the House of Commons responded to her by quoting a nursery rhyme and telling everyone to stop being killjoys. I do not think that that demonstrates quite what we are looking for.

We will use all the powers that are available to us in our bid to change Scotland's culture around fireworks.

### Community Sentencing

**6. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on community sentencing. (S6O-00342)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** Sentencing decisions are, of course, a matter for the independent courts. However, evidence shows that community sentences are more effective than short custodial sentences, and action continues to be taken to encourage a shift towards more widespread use of community sentences and other interventions, where they are appropriate.

Our most recent criminal proceedings statistics show that 22 per cent of all convictions in 2019-20 resulted in a main penalty of a community sentence. That is the highest proportion in the past ten years and is up from 14 per cent of convictions in 2010-11, and from 19 per cent in 2018-19.

Of course, there are challenges—not the least of which is the impact of the pandemic on capacity to deliver community sentences. We welcome recent reports and scrutiny from Audit Scotland, the Scottish Sentencing Council and the Public Audit Committee. In addition to on-going consultation and engagement with stakeholders, those will inform the development of a revised community justice strategy next year, and consideration of how best to build on progress over recent years to build more capacity and confidence in effective community-based interventions.

**Craig Hoy:** Research that was commissioned by the Scottish Sentencing Council found that 77 per cent of the public believe that a first-time offender who is caught with indecent images of a child should serve a prison sentence, but such offenders are, in reality, most likely to receive a community payback order—a sentence that is supported by only 2 per cent of the public, in a system that is being undermined by a Government that let criminals get off scot free by cancelling a quarter of a million hours of community sentences earlier this year. Will the minister now commit to reversing the Government's presumption against short sentences so that people who commit crimes such as possession of indecent images of children actually go to jail?

**Keith Brown:** I do not pass sentences and the Government does not: in this country, sentences are delivered by the independent courts. I have just mentioned the fact that community sentences are more effective than the short sentences that Craig Hoy mentioned. It is worth mentioning, as I

said to the Criminal Justice Committee this morning, that more people in the prison sector now are spending more time in prison than has been the case in recent years.

On the subtext of being accused of taking a soft justice approach in this country, we have 40 per cent more police officers per person than there are in England and Wales; we have given the police a pay rise that the police in England and Wales have not received; and we have the lowest recorded crime in living memory and the lowest recorded number of homicides—every one of which was solved. That is anything but soft justice.

### **Police Scotland (Complaints Handling)**

**7. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to incorporate the recent Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland findings in relation to Police Scotland into the on-going response to the independent review of complaints handling, investigations and misconduct issues conducted by Dame Elish Angiolini. (S6O-00343)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** Police Scotland's response to the HMICS report is a matter for the chief constable, with a clear role for the Scottish Police Authority in overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. I am aware, however, that Police Scotland intends to consider the recommendations alongside the work that is already under way in relation to Dame Elish's review.

The governance and reporting framework that the Scottish Government established plays a vital role in overseeing and providing assurance to ministers and, ultimately, to Parliament on progress towards implementation of Dame Elish's recommendations across all partners.

The Scottish Government published its first thematic progress report on 24 June 2021. The report showcased the progress that has been made. Work is under way to develop the next thematic progress report, which is due for publication by the end of this year.

**Willie Rennie:** I am concerned that, a year on from the Angiolini report, there are few signs of improvement. There have been more reports of sexism and a high proportion of ethnic minority officers—way more than other groups—leave the service. Our research has found that only 1 per cent of top policing jobs are held by people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Officers have little confidence in the leadership of Police Scotland when it comes to effecting change. Does the cabinet secretary have more confidence?

**Keith Brown:** I have confidence in senior police officers in Police Scotland to effect change. That is based on a number of conversations, meetings and reports that I have had on the matter. I am especially convinced of the earnest intent of officers at a very senior level—deputy chief constable level. However, Willie Rennie is right to say that that is neither here nor there if it does not permeate right through the service. Serious initiatives are under way to make that happen.

A number of the recommendations in Dame Elish's report have been implemented. Others will require legislation, which will take more time. I am thinking, for example, of barred and advisory lists that ensure that Police Scotland does not employ people from other forces who have conducted themselves inappropriately. We also have to legislate in relation to the practice whereby a police officer can behave badly then retire their way out of an investigation.

I assure Willie Rennie that I believe that Police Scotland is serious about the matter, and that Dame Elish's recommendations and the points in the report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland are being taken seriously.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** In the interests of transparency, will the minister reconsider the Conservative Party's suggestion of an online action tracker, so that the public can see exactly what is happening—or not happening, as the case may be—in respect of each one of Dame Elish Angiolini's 111 recommendations?

**Keith Brown:** In the interests of consensus, I undertake to look at that suggestion. I am certainly more than happy to give a full account of where we are in relation to all the recommendations—some of which have been taken forward by the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland, and some of which rest with the Government. Russell Findlay might want to publish that himself. I undertake, if what he suggested is possible, to look at the matter and to get back to him in due course.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** What steps are being taken to ensure that policing by consent and a rights-based approach continue to form the core of policing practice?

**Keith Brown:** That is a fundamental question. The traditions and approach to which Audrey Nicoll referred continue to lie at the heart of policing practice and the policing ethos in Scotland. When trust goes, consent can go too, so we are keen to ensure that we maintain trust and consent.

The Scottish Police Authority has a responsibility for holding the chief constable to

account for policing. Through its board and committee meetings, a series of checks and balances are in place to ensure that major decisions about policing are made transparently and appropriately. That helps to ensure that Scottish policing is based on public consent, in a way that commands respect and builds public trust and confidence.

In addition, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland has wide-ranging statutory powers to look into the state, effectiveness and efficiency of Police Scotland and the SPA.

## Finance and the Economy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move on to portfolio questions on finance and the economy.

If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate that in the chat function by entering the letter R during the relevant question.

### Budget (Public Sector Workers)

**1. Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to allocate additional funding in its forthcoming budget to provide pay increases for front-line public sector workers. (S6O-00345)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary who is responding to question 1 is Kate Forbes, who joins us remotely.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** The Government is currently in the process of developing its budget for next year and, as agreed with the Finance and Public Administration Committee, I will bring proposals to Parliament on 9 December.

We have offered a progressive pay policy over recent years, balancing reward and affordability, protecting the most vulnerable and supporting our front-line staff. I recognise the achievements of our public sector workforce, and accordingly we will look to retain our fair approach to pay.

**Foyso Choudhury:** The pandemic has demonstrated the true value of social care, despite the low pay that is endemic throughout the sector. Social care workers have been at the forefront of caring for and protecting our loved ones who have been most vulnerable to Covid-19. Will the Government show that it is serious about investing in social care by delivering an immediate uplift to £12 per hour for social care workers?

**Kate Forbes:** The member will know that providing our front-line workers in the social care sector with financial support was a key part of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care's

announcement just a few weeks ago. I agree that we need to continue to recognise their efforts, including through our pay policy. That is why this year's pay policy prioritised support for those who are earning the least and ensured that all workers in the social care sector are paid at least the living wage. We did all that despite no consequential funding coming from the United Kingdom Government, because there was a pay freeze south of the border.

### Public Sector (Consolidated Accounts)

**2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will produce consolidated accounts for the whole public sector in Scotland. (S6O-00346)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** We are committed to producing additional consolidated public sector accounts that cover the devolved public bodies in Scotland. I hope that the member will recognise that the pandemic has impacted timescales for the production and audit of accounts across all sectors. That affects the availability and timeliness of information for further consolidation. However, an outline plan is being developed with Audit Scotland for a staged approach to producing additional accounts for the 2020-21 financial year.

**Richard Leonard:** Will the cabinet secretary accept that the consolidated accounts were promised to Parliament and to the people back in 2016? They were then promised during 2018, then by March 2019. In November 2019, they were promised in due course. By February this year, we were told that it was no longer possible to set out a timetable at all. Will the cabinet secretary accept that this is about public transparency and trust? It is about good government, open government, good democracy and open democracy. Why can the cabinet secretary not set out a timetable? When will the cabinet secretary finally address this breach of a promise to Parliament and to the people by publishing these whole-Government accounts?

**Kate Forbes:** I want to clarify that we already comply with all financial reporting and auditing requirements. We are committed to developing the financial reporting to support the transparency that the member talks about. The Auditor General for Scotland and Audit Scotland recognise that that is a complex task and that work has been done to make progress to date.

The member asked for a timetable. The first stage will involve producing a draft account that covers the Scottish Administration and reflects the wider composition of the Scottish budget, as authorised by Parliament. The aim is for that to be audited and finalised by spring 2022. That will be followed by further work in summer 2022 to

develop a wider output, including that relating to local authorities.

We want to minimise the burden on public bodies. The member will be aware of the pressures that have been placed on all public bodies during the pandemic. I think that most people understand that this is a complex issue that requires time and capacity from all members of the Scottish public sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 3 is from Gillian Martin, who joins us remotely.

### **Just Transition (North-East Scotland)**

**3. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the economy of the north-east in terms of a just transition for workers away from oil and gas. (S6O-00347)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question will be answered by Richard Lochhead, who also joins us remotely.

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** The Scottish Government is committed to producing sectoral and regional just transition plans. This year's programme for government includes a commitment to develop our first just transition plan, for the energy sector, alongside a refreshed energy strategy. We will work with communities and with those who are most impacted across Scotland, including our highly skilled oil and gas workforce, to co-design that plan. We will support our planning process by taking forward a 10-year £500 million just transition fund for the north-east and Moray.

**Gillian Martin:** The minister will know that many routes to certification and accreditation for oil and gas workers over past decades have been through private companies. In the past, employers have largely picked up the tab for that training, but many workers who want to transition into low-emission energy sectors tell me that they have to pay for that training, and those sums are not affordable for many people. What routes are being investigated using publicly funded institutions, such as North East Scotland College, to deliver training using the expertise that they have, and how could the Government support them to quickly develop courses that are accessible to people who cannot be available during the working day and need a flexible offer?

**Richard Lochhead:** I thank Gillian Martin for highlighting that crucial issue about the just transition. We are working with organisations in the north-east, who in turn are working with local further and higher education institutions to make sure that the right skills are available for people

who are moving out of fossil fuel sectors and into decarbonised industries.

Gillian Martin will be aware that the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, Lorna Slater, is working out proposals for a skills guarantee. We are also working with the energy skills alliance, which is a newly created cross-industry collaboration group that has been established to develop an integrated skills strategy for a net zero energy sector. One of its workstreams focuses on the development of an all-energy training and standards programme, which will assess transferability of skills to ensure that the workforce skills that we require are available so that people can move easily across industries.

We are working with a number of publicly funded organisations and the further and higher education sector on that important issue.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** As part of the fair and managed transition to renewable energy, does the minister welcome the North Sea transition deal and the joint Government and oil and gas sector investment of up to £16 billion to reduce carbon emissions by 2030?

**Richard Lochhead:** The Scottish Government is taking action, as is the United Kingdom Government, which we welcome. The Scottish Government has also announced, as I mentioned in response to Gillian Martin, a £500 million transition fund for the north-east and Moray over the next 10 years, and we have asked the UK Government to match that investment. I hope that the member supports our appeal to the UK Government to do that, because it is important to make sure that there are good green jobs available for people in the fossil fuel industry as we go through the transition in the coming decades.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 was not lodged.

### **Employment Gap (Disabled People)**

**5. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle the employment gap for disabled people, in light of the reported findings from the annual population survey 2020-21 that the employment rate for disabled people was 47.4 per cent, which was lower than that for non-disabled people. (S6O-00349)

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** In "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: employment action plan", which was published in 2018, we committed to halving the employment gap between disabled people and the

rest of the working population by 2038, and we are making early progress towards that. Support for disabled workers is a key element of our employability programmes such as no one left behind, the young persons guarantee and fair start Scotland. We are working with disabled people's organisations and others to produce a refresh of the action plan, which is due to be published in spring 2022.

**Martin Whitfield:** The third annual report on fair start Scotland revealed that the scheme did not reach as many people with disabilities and health conditions as the Government set out that it would. That is not good enough. Why is the Scottish Government failing to support as many disabled people into employment through fair start Scotland as was intended?

**Richard Lochhead:** Fair start Scotland delivers for people with a variety of circumstances and backgrounds, and there was recently an evaluation report on that. In relation to support for disabled people, it is clear that, like many other people in our society, disabled people have been impacted by Covid over the past year or two, and we are still analysing the scale of that impact.

As I have said, the issue is important; disabled people have a lot to contribute to our economy and should be given the opportunity to work. As we refresh our action plan, we will take into account all our experience of the issue and lessons learned over the past couple of years, particularly given the impact of Covid.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** It is vital that we press ahead to reduce and remove the barriers that prevent disabled people from benefiting from our economic recovery. Will the minister provide an update on the Scottish Government's latest assessment of the disability pay gap and give information about the further action that the Scottish Government can take to reduce that gap?

**Richard Lochhead:** On average, rates of pay are lower for disabled people than for non-disabled people across the whole United Kingdom. In 2019, the median hourly pay for disabled people in Scotland was 16.5 per cent lower than that for non-disabled people.

As I said, we are producing a refresh of "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: employment action plan", which will be published in 2022. Later this year, we will consult on proposals to expand the existing duties on public authorities to publish information on the gender pay gap so that they include reporting on disability and ethnicity pay gaps, through a review of the public sector equality duty's operation in Scotland. We are taking a number of measures to tackle the barriers

that many people in our society, and particularly disabled people, face.

### Support for Co-operatives

**6. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress with the support available for co-operatives for the transition to a new economy. (S6O-00350)

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** Co-operative business models can play a critical role in economic recovery by supporting the Scottish Government's aim of creating a fairer, stronger and more democratic country and economy. We will continue to work through Co-operative Development Scotland and the enterprise agencies to support the growth of co-operative and other alternative business models.

We will set out how we will provide tailored support for businesses with alternative ownership models, including co-operatives and social enterprises, with a view to increasing their representation in the Scottish economy. That work includes considering how we can bring support for such models into mainstream activity to ensure more values-led outcomes.

**Maggie Chapman:** Across many sectors, from agriculture to energy, there is a recognition that inclusive and efficient co-operatives and producer organisations can play a key role in supporting small businesses and marginalised groups, including women and young people. Such organisations empower their members economically and socially and create sustainable employment through business models that are resilient to economic and environmental shocks.

Significant opportunities exist for such models—especially perhaps in rural and peri-urban areas—in sectors such as food supply chains, housing, energy production and tourism. Will the minister provide a bit more detail on the funding and financing options for co-operatives across different sectors, including tax reliefs, and on the timescale for those options?

**Richard Lochhead:** As Maggie Chapman outlined, the issue is aligned with the Scottish Government's fair work agenda. It is important to say that, since its inception, Scottish Enterprise has delivered Co-operative Development Scotland's services to support business growth across Scotland and assist in the creation of more co-ops and employee-owned businesses.

Such work includes the promotion of the co-operative model; the direct provision of business advice, particularly for start-up co-ops; and the provision of training in co-operative business skills.

We have limited opportunity for financial and tax incentives in Scotland but, if the member wishes to write to me, I will speak to finance colleagues and explore what is in place and what more might be possible.

### **Enterprise Agencies (Ayrshire)**

**7. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the enterprise agencies support economic growth in Ayrshire. (S6O-00351)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** Our economic recovery implementation plan committed Scottish Enterprise to working intensively with partners in Ayrshire to support economic recovery across the region. Last year, Scottish Enterprise spent just over £16 million in Ayrshire, when Covid support grants are taken into account.

Scottish Enterprise is contributing to projects under the Ayrshire growth deal and is working with local authorities and Business Gateway to produce regional business support plans and to support regional company growth pilots. The agency continues to offer expertise and investment in strategic sites, such as the HALO enterprise and innovation hub in Kilmarnock. I could go on, but I will draw my comments to a close in the interests of time.

**Willie Coffey:** As the cabinet secretary knows, Ayrshire trails behind the rest of Scotland on employment levels and is one of the three areas that the Scottish Government identified as requiring the most support for economic recovery. Will she outline what progress has been made towards identifying and supporting the important regional company growth pilots?

**Kate Forbes:** That is an important question. For context, it is worth noting that Scottish Enterprise has supported 37 inward investment projects in Ayrshire in the past decade alone, which have created 2,330 jobs.

A joint operational team that involves the three Ayrshire councils and Scottish Enterprise has been established to develop an integrated and consistent company support landscape. That team has a number of priorities. One is community wealth building to promote local procurement, fair work and climate action. Another is supporting local businesses to implement digital transformation projects, which I know is an interest that is close to Willie Coffey's heart. Targeted grant funding comes from the Ayrshire food and productivity fund to support Ayrshire companies in delivering productivity improvements that result in automation and reduced carbon emissions.

Understandably, the key players that are involved in the development of the growth pilot

and the regional business support plan have focused their efforts in the past year on delivering Covid support, but businesses and organisations are now increasingly focused on economic recovery.

### **Public Procurement (Ferries)**

**8. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent changes it has made to its public procurement policies, including as a result of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee report on its inquiry into construction and procurement of ferry vessels in Scotland. (S6O-00352)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** Any changes to procurement policy over the past year have focused largely on Covid and on driving socioeconomic outcomes and best practice. Changes to Scottish procurement policy notes and construction policy notes are published on our website. Those policy changes have no correlation with the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's report on its inquiry into the construction and procurement of ferry vessels. There have been no recent changes to procurement legislation.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I would usually thank the cabinet secretary for her answer, but I am slightly disappointed to hear that. She knows that the issues are not only about the waste of millions of pounds of public money; they are examples of communities losing out on vital lifeline services. The problems at Ferguson Marine are on-going, but we also know that Scotland has an ageing ferry fleet that requires not only maintenance but serious investment in replacement vessels in the coming years. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that lessons will be learned and that the failures that we have seen—most notably in relation to the ferries that still lie unfinished at Ferguson Marine—cannot and will not happen again?

**Kate Forbes:** I understand the sentiment behind Jamie Halcro Johnston's question. Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, which is the procuring authority for new vessels, operates under the Utilities Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2016, which serve the same purpose as the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015. It also complies with the statutory and legislative requirements that derive from the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.

To answer the question directly, CMAL continues to employ more robust processes, following lessons learned from previous projects and from the output of the REC Committee. Those processes include employing a ship broker early in the procurement process to provide a greater

understanding of the market, enhancing the level of evidence about finance, refunds and technical abilities that is required from bidders and undertaking site visits at the invitation to tender stage. I hope that that reassures the member that lessons have been and are being learned.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions. There will be a short pause before the next item of business.

## National Planning Framework

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a statement from Tom Arthur on the national planning framework.

14:44

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** We have all been enthralled as the world has descended on Glasgow for the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—to debate and commit to the future of our planet. The choices that we all make now and in the years to come will define that future.

Scotland must and will stand up and play its part, making the right choices in the public interest, for us now and for future generations. The twin global climate and nature crises have focused many of our minds on the quality of our places. We know that we have to change how we plan our future places if we are to respond to those challenges.

The coronavirus pandemic has meant that we all have a much better understanding of our individual needs and our priorities. Whether we realise it or not, planning is central to helping us to recover and to deliver the Scotland that we want to be. Planning can help us to deliver green energy, to restore nature and to create a circular economy. It can mean that we are protected from future threats of flooding and coastal vulnerability. It can improve our health and quality of life by delivering homes that meet our lifetime needs, shops and services that we can get to easily, and local parks and outdoor spaces that improve our wellbeing.

We must think today about the places that we will need tomorrow, and we need to plan for the change. We will have to be more decisive and firmer about the development that we do and do not want to see, so as to shape the kind of country that we want Scotland to be.

I am absolutely delighted that, today, the Scottish Government has laid the draft document “Scotland 2045: Our Fourth National Planning Framework” in the Parliament. It signals a turning point for planning. It is much more than a technical or routine update; it is the Parliament’s opportunity to be clear about what is needed in shaping Scotland’s future. It is our opportunity to lead the transition to stronger, greener, fairer, healthier communities across Scotland.

The new national planning framework is part of a much wider planning reform programme, which includes the Parliament’s passing of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. That act has given the NPF a

new, enhanced status as part of the statutory development plan on which all planning decisions must be based. The 2019 act requires that development plans must work in the long-term public interest, and that is what our draft NPF4 does.

Giving such a clear steer will enable Scotland's planning authorities to focus their local development plans on setting out a long-term vision for the future of their places. There will be no need to repeat planning policies over and over again, while some scope is retained to tailor local policies to respect local circumstances. That will mean that the planning system is more consistent and predictable and that the precious time and resources of planning authorities can be deployed effectively towards supporting the delivery of good-quality development.

I must stress that today is not the beginning for NPF4. Much has happened already to lead us in this ambitious new direction for planning. I want to pay tribute and say thank you to the many people and organisations from all over Scotland who have engaged enthusiastically with us before and during the pandemic. They have all helped to shape the draft that we have presented today.

Our engagement started at the beginning of 2020 with a call for ideas, which was backed up with an extensive programme of public consultation and involvement, including a Scotland-wide roadshow before the first lockdown. Over the past year, planning authorities have worked creatively with us to explore new duties to prepare regional spatial strategies. The outputs from that work have helped to shape the draft NPF4 national spatial strategy, and we can now open up to a much wider audience the debate about the contribution of different parts of Scotland.

There have been extensive and detailed conversations about specific parts of the strategy, including the challenging question of housing numbers and the need to better support nature recovery. We received an enthusiastic response to our position statement, which we published last November.

All of that work means that the draft "Scotland 2045" document is not just the Scottish Government's view of our future, but a collective effort to think about how we need to change.

I want that collective effort to continue throughout the process of parliamentary scrutiny that is now ahead of us. During the scrutiny of the 2019 act, we heard how many members care a great deal about planning, and the draft national planning framework aims to respond to many issues that many members have already told us are important. For example, we have listened to

views from members that our planning system needs to do more to improve health and wellbeing; we have looked at how we can best mitigate and adapt to climate change; we aim to enable the repopulation of rural Scotland; we have set out how planning can improve biodiversity and protect peatlands; and we have brought forward a new approach to planning for housing that will support the delivery of new, good-quality homes that meet all our needs.

All those issues—and more—featured during the parliamentary scrutiny of the Planning (Scotland) Bill and are now being addressed in the draft document. The draft NPF4 brings together a new vision for planning, it draws on all that we have heard so far and it sets out a new spatial plan for Scotland in 2045. The plan does not shy away from the sometimes uncomfortable choices that we will need to make about our future. It sets out shared spatial planning principles and proposes 18 national developments that will help to deliver the strategy. It also proposes new and revised national planning policies that, once approved, can be applied consistently to development proposals across Scotland.

In line with the work of Scotland's best-known town planner, Sir Patrick Geddes, our plan considers the importance of folk, work and place. We want liveable places for people that better support health and wellbeing and that are accessible to everyone; productive places that help us to grow a wellbeing economy and deliver fair work; and distinctive places that protect our most-cherished buildings and reinvigorate city and town centres. All of that must lead to more sustainable places, in line with our climate ambitions and commitment to nature recovery.

It will take time to get to grips with the draft framework and the transformational change that it can lead, so, to help with that today, I will highlight some of the key changes we are proposing. A new policy will ensure that planners give significant weight to the global climate emergency in plans and decisions. Policies will also require us to consider how we adapt to the future impacts of climate change—including flood risk, risks to infrastructure resilience, temperature change and coastal vulnerability. Development proposals will be required to contribute to nature recovery and community wealth building. We also propose to update our policies on green energy and heat networks, to enable the delivery of new facilities for a circular economy and to require more sustainable travel.

We are promoting the roll-out of 20-minute neighbourhoods, so that people have to travel less and benefit from an infrastructure first approach. The spatial strategy considers how such

neighbourhoods can work in practice, including how they will vary between rural and urban areas.

New and updated policies propose limiting greenfield development and out-of-town retail, to ensure that we protect the land that we will need if we are to reach net zero, make best use of vacant land and reuse empty buildings.

All of that—and much more in the draft NPF—adds up to a more positive, greener future in which our places support people to realise their potential rather than limit opportunities and reinforce inequality.

It is in the nature of planning that people will have different views on the spatial strategy and draft policies, but I hope that we keep in view those shared outcomes as we explore the detail over the coming months.

The draft NPF4 will be before Parliament for a period of scrutiny that will last up to 120 days. I am also pleased to announce that, today, we are kick-starting an extensive programme of engagement and public consultation that will run over a similar timeline. It is crucial that, in the consultation, we hear from as wide a range of people as possible, so that their needs are at the heart of our plans for the future, because our people and society deserve nothing less.

I look forward to a wide-ranging, exciting and lively debate about the future development of Scotland to 2045, through Scotland's journey to net zero. I hope that all members will embrace the opportunity and that we can work together to consider our draft framework with open minds and enthusiasm about what we need from Scotland's planning system in the challenging years that lie ahead.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions before we have to move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if colleagues who wish to ask a question could press their request-to-speak button now, or place an R in the chat function if they are joining us online.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of today's statement. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am still a councillor on Aberdeen City Council.

With NPF4, partnership working will be vital, and key partners in it all will be local authorities and local planning authorities. One of the main pieces of work that every local authority is currently focused on is the development of local development plans. The plans are central to the economic and social development of our towns,

villages and rural settings, and are heavily consulted on through local engagement and consultation events.

How have local authorities been consulted in the development of NPF4, what active engagement with local authorities is on-going, and how is the Government ensuring that the development plans—which are a year or more in the making—are workable within the new national planning framework? Will the Government financially compensate any local authorities that have to restart their local development plans as a result of what has been covered today?

**Tom Arthur:** The member is absolutely right to recognise the fundamental importance of local planning authorities. He will be aware that NPF4 is a product of more than two years of work and two rounds of consultation, and involved cross-portfolio work across Government. However, consultation and engagement with local authorities has played a key role in, for example, housing numbers and the emerging indicative regional spatial strategies. Local authorities have been engaged every step of the way.

As the member will be aware, measures will be set out regarding transitional arrangements for local development plans, but I bring to his attention that the 2019 act includes provision for new-style local development plans, on which I will be laying draft regulations shortly.

Another issue of which I am sure the member is aware is the importance of ensuring that our planning authorities are well resourced. Therefore, I am glad to confirm that I will be laying regulations on fees towards the end of the year. Ultimately, if we are to make NPF4 a reality, we need well-resourced planning authorities, and I am committed to ensuring that that is the case.

We will work constructively and collaboratively with local government, planning authorities and a range of stakeholders. I also draw the member's attention to the participation statement, which we published recently, and the programme of engagement, which we published today, which give a view of how broad our consultation will be.

I take the opportunity to encourage members to thoroughly engage in their constituencies and with their local authorities. I want as many voices as possible to participate in the consultation. We need collective buy-in, because it will set the planning journey for Scotland to net zero in 2045. Therefore, it is vital to ensure the broadest commitment and engagement possible.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the minister for advance notice of his statement. I agree that our priorities have to be Covid recovery and delivering on the climate and nature emergencies, but the key message from COP26 is

that it is not enough to have targets; we need effective planning and funding for implementation.

What new resources will come through NPF4 to enable local authorities to deliver on the infrastructure—for example, to make flood plains safe for residents—and to build in adaptation infrastructure for new investment, such as the rapid transit networks and the high-speed rail that are mentioned in the NPF4?

Given their negative environmental and climate impacts, will the document rule out fracking proposals?

**Tom Arthur:** I missed the last part of Sarah Boyack's question.

**Sarah Boyack:** Fracking.

**Tom Arthur:** I hear that loud and clear. The member will be aware of the Government's policy on unconventional oil and gas, which remains unchanged.

On the broader issue of resourcing, I already touched on resourcing for planning authorities in my response to Mr Lumsden.

On delivery of NPF4, it is important to remember that it is a draft document. Part 4 is on delivering our spatial strategy, and when the finalised document is agreed, we will publish a fully worked up delivery plan, which will be a live document in partnership with other Government strategies. I think that members would find it presumptuous of me if I published a fully worked up delivery plan at this juncture, but that will help to address a lot of Ms Boyack's points.

What is ultimately reflected in the final NPF4, which I hope will be agreed to by Parliament prior to the next summer recess, will be the product of a period of consultation and engagement that begins right now.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Joe FitzPatrick joins us remotely.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** With many new-build housing developments poorly served by bus services and safe, segregated cycle paths, what assurances can the minister provide that NPF4 will ensure that future housing developments in Dundee and elsewhere are well served by sustainable transport options, so that people can walk, wheel, cycle or use public transport to access schools, shops and other local services?

**Tom Arthur:** That is an important question. The document has policies on quality housing that take account of place, and on sustainable travel and transport. In addition, the national wheeling, cycling and walking network, which is one of the national developments, touches on all the aspects to which the member referred.

More important and fundamental is the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which is embedded throughout the draft NPF4. We are strongly promoting local liveability, directing future development to existing city, town and neighbourhood centres, and supporting sustainable rural communities.

The draft NPF4 clearly advocates limiting out-of-town and greenfield development, and making much better use of vacant and derelict land and empty buildings. That will greatly enhance our existing places and communities.

The focus on well-planned, good-quality homes will bring many benefits to our environment, our communities, our health and our lifestyles. It will also disincentivise unsustainable travel and, in doing so, incentivise sustainable travel.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister recognise the importance of working with commercial partners as part of the transition to greener, fairer and healthier communities, such as the partnership between BP and Aberdeen City Council on the low-carbon hydrogen energy hub, which the Scottish Government's Green coalition partners oppose?

**Tom Arthur:** I want to approach NPF4 in an open and constructive spirit. I think that we all recognise that reaching net zero will be a collective and collaborative effort. Government, the private sector and communities all have a role to play in that.

This is the start of a long period of consultation and I would encourage the member to engage with the process constructively. We are committed to working in partnership to deliver net zero. I will lead a constructive process of engagement and partnership in taking forward the consultation.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests: I, too, am a councillor on Aberdeen City Council.

I am pleased to see that Aberdeen harbour is one of the proposed national developments included in the draft NPF4. Will the minister outline the role that the Government envisages the harbour playing in the transition to net zero and in stimulating economic investment in the north-east?

**Tom Arthur:** Our spatial strategy is clear that Aberdeen harbour and the north-east will play a crucial role in our transition to net zero. NPF4 identifies the on-going redevelopment of Aberdeen harbour as a national development, which carries forward an existing national development from NPF3. However, the draft NPF4 does not cut across on-going consideration of a local development plan, which is addressing wider land-

use proposals arising from the energy transition zone.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** NPF3 had a commitment to the town centre first principle, but I am sure that the minister will accept that the decline of our high streets has continued. In fact, it has, I am sad to say, accelerated in recent years. Does he accept that, whatever commitments are made in NPF4 on town centres, which he referred to in his statement, those must be backed up by adequate resources? For example, building housing on a brownfield site to get people back living in our town centres is more expensive than putting a square box on a greenfield site. Will those extra costs be reflected in Government grants, and will that be set out clearly in the delivery plan that he publishes?

**Tom Arthur:** The member raises an important point. I refer him to policies 25, 26 and 27 on distinctive places in city, town, commercial and local centres, which set out the planning aspect. The member will be aware that we have a £350 million funding commitment to our place-based investment programme over this parliamentary session. *[Tom Arthur has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]*

We will take forward a review of development obligations as well, and then look towards how we can implement the infrastructure levy provisions in the 2019 act. Further down the line, we will also look at reforming policy on compulsory purchase orders to bring it up to date. A number of different components have to come together to ensure that we have all the levers at our disposal to see the regeneration and revitalisation of our town and city centres that the member referred to.

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** As part of the Scottish Children's Parliament project, the moment, I recently met online with pupils from Forgandenny primary school in my constituency of Perthshire South and Kinross-shire. One thing that we talked about was using sheep's wool as building insulation. Wool is abundant, continuously renewable and locally produced. It lasts for decades, and at the end of its life it can simply be composted. Can the minister tell us how NPF4 will ensure that new building standards promote the use of such sustainable materials?

**Tom Arthur:** I thank the member for bringing that matter to the attention of the Parliament and for ensuring that young voices are being heard in the Parliament.

I note that we want our places and our buildings to be resource efficient. That is reflected in the draft framework, as it promotes sustainable building that prioritises the reduction and reuse of

materials, which are intrinsically important to achieving a circular economy.

With reference to building standards regulations, mandatory requirements, such as the need to limit heat loss from buildings, are set on the basis of performance. Regulations and supporting guidance define an expected level of performance but do not prescribe the use of any particular material or solution when demonstrating compliance with standards.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Right now homes with gas boilers are being built in my constituency. Persimmon Homes has refused to connect new homes in Guardbridge to the already-operational district heating system 100m away. Will the new, significant weight being given to the climate emergency in the framework prevent such decisions from being made in future?

**Tom Arthur:** The member will appreciate that I cannot comment on any individual and specific case. When he has a chance to look through the document, he will see strong commitments to supporting heat networks and, in general terms, the matters that he raises. I encourage him to look through the document, where I hope that he will find the answer that he is looking for.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** I ask whether the minister can provide reassurance to me and my constituents in Inverness and Nairn that his statement does not and will not, in any way, manner or means, delay, detract, diminish or dilute the absolute commitment of the Scottish Government to dual the remaining sections of the A9 between Perth and Inverness and the section of the A96 from Inverness to Auldearn, and to do so as swiftly as possible?

**Tom Arthur:** I thank the member for his question and for his—as always—formidable and robust defence of his constituents' interests.

As Mr Ewing will appreciate, NPF4 is a draft document; we hope to have it adopted by the Parliament prior to summer recess. It is forward looking and will consider future planning decisions.

More generally, the sustainable transport hierarchy from the national transport strategy—NTS2—applies in rural as well as urban areas. Draft NPF4 proposes that both rural and urban areas demonstrate how they provide for and prioritise transport in line with the NTS2 hierarchies.

Government policy aims to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030. That is needed to meet ambitious carbon-reduction targets in the face of a climate emergency. *[Interruption.]* Draft NPF4 aims to provide—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, minister. There is a bit too much chuntering from a sedentary position. Continue, minister.

**Tom Arthur:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. To conclude, draft NPF4 aims to plan future development in a way that helps us to achieve zero-carbon living. It looks to minimise the need to travel by unsustainable modes, for example, by the creation of 20-minute neighbourhoods where they are achievable.

However, there will be those who continue to rely on a car, and NPF4 aims to support the roll-out of electric vehicle infrastructure, which I am sure that Fergus Ewing will warmly welcome.

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The new national planning framework demonstrates an important shift towards a plan-led system that helps communities and nature thrive, while aligning with Scotland's climate targets.

That shows the value of having Greens in Government. It paves the way for a massive expansion in renewable energy and active travel, as well as channelling the £55 million nature restoration funding that was announced on Saturday. I particularly welcome the shift in focus towards communities, 20-minute neighbourhoods and town centres that will work for people, not traffic jams.

What assurance can the minister provide that the huge ambition and scale in tripling the budget for walking and cycling to at least £320 million, or 10 per cent of the total transport budget, will not be focused just on the central belt but will benefit communities across Scotland?

**Tom Arthur:** The member will appreciate that, as I am not the transport minister, it is not for me to comment on those specific matters. However, the document is a national planning framework, so it applies to all of Scotland, and I can assure the member that it will apply to Scotland in the fullest way.

A key aspect of that is recognising that certain commitments and policies will apply differently, depending on the locality. An obvious example of that is 20-minute neighbourhoods. In urban centres where we have high population density, a 20-minute neighbourhood will be quite different from such a neighbourhood in one of our more rural or island communities. That is another area on which we are keen to get responses and feedback in the consultation process. I encourage the member to respond to the consultation, and to encourage all the stakeholders with whom she engages to respond to it.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** When a minister does not want to answer a question, he simply reverts to reading his civil service briefing. We have had an object lesson in that from the minister today. The statement has lots of buzzwords and fuzzy ideas—frankly, it is pretty much what we have come to expect from the Scottish National Party Government. The minister is fair and frank enough to admit that we are years away from action. Will he therefore say—without buzzwords—what the Government will do now in respect of town centres, many of which are in need of urgent action after the past 18 months, which have resulted in shop vacancies being at a six-year high? What will the statement do now to convert derelict and abandoned brownfield sites into usable spaces?

**Tom Arthur:** How much time do I have, Presiding Officer? I will keep this terse. I will not be drawn into a political bunfight, because this is a positive day for planning. I hope that the member will reflect on his comments, because the document is not just the result of the work of Government. There has been a huge process of engagement with the planning profession and stakeholders right across Scotland. I encourage the member to take the time to digest the document and to fully consider it before coming to any hasty conclusions. The document reflects the provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. I realise that the member was not in the Parliament when that legislation was passed, but his party supported it and indeed worked and engaged constructively on it. I encourage the member to fully digest the document.

Specifically on town centres, I have already referred to the £350 million for the place-based investment programme. *[Tom Arthur has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* We have the Scotland loves local campaign, the Scotland loves local fund and the Scotland loves local gift cards. Retail is a key element of our town centres, and I will very soon be publishing the retail strategy. The Government is undertaking a range of work now. However, in case it escaped the member's attention, the statement is about Scotland's national planning framework, which is a long-term strategic document until 2045. If the member approaches it with that broader perspective, he will find a lot in it with which he can agree.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** In light of the focus on sustainability and tackling climate change in the draft document, will the minister advise whether due consideration is being given to supporting suitable renewable energy developments that will ensure the case for an interconnector for Orkney?

**Tom Arthur:** As the member will appreciate, I cannot comment on live planning applications.

However, the spatial strategy recognises the exceptional opportunities for our islands and coasts in transitioning to net zero. An important part of that is supporting development that contributes to the blue economy and energy innovation and investment. The draft NPF4 proposes an updated national development, which would establish the need for strategic renewable energy generation and grid connections throughout Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Jamie Halcro Johnston can have a very brief supplementary question.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I very much enjoyed the minister's response to Fergus Ewing, and also Fergus Ewing's deadpan face as he did not receive an answer. Therefore, I ask the minister again: will the A9 and the A96 be dualled in full as planned?

**Tom Arthur:** There is no change to the Government's policy on that.

## Fisheries Negotiations 2021

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place, and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The next item of business is a debate without a motion on Scotland's approach to the 2021 coastal state negotiations. I invite members who wish to contribute to the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible, or if they are joining us online to put an R in the chat function.

15:16

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** This debate on fishing negotiations comes at a time when the world has gathered in Glasgow to take stock of efforts to preserve our planet for future generations. The theme of sustainability and preservation of biodiversity must run through all our policies, discussions and laws. The Scottish Government recognises the critical role that our oceans and seas play in our daily lives, as well as in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Last week's ocean action day during the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—showed us why and how we need to challenge ourselves and the global community to act faster. We need to do more to ensure healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans for today and tomorrow.

The debate also comes at a time when the Scottish fishing industry continues to face significant challenges. Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have hit Scotland's seafood industry hard. From Shetland to Eyemouth, and from the Western Isles to the Clyde, I have been listening to fishers and processors, and have been hearing at first hand how their businesses and livelihoods have been harmed.

We want a resilient, robust and sustainable fishing industry that delivers for Scotland. Realising that goal means striking a balance between environmental, social and economic considerations that protect our fishermen and our stunning and diverse marine environment. Getting that balance right is in everyone's interests. As one Scottish skipper noted recently,

"You have to make sure you are guaranteeing a future in the job"

and

"It's in my interest to fish within sustainable levels."

A healthy marine environment is crucial to supporting a sustainable fishing and seafood industry. The year-end negotiations with our coastal state partners are a crucial part of getting the balance right. Under its sustainability objective, the Fisheries Act 2020 makes it clear that fisheries managers should find the middle ground between economic and ecological considerations. Our negotiating position is based on taking pragmatic and informed management decisions on appropriate levels of total allowable catches. We must follow the direction of the scientific advice towards maximum sustainable yield.

However, we also have a responsibility to manage the increases and decreases that are recommended by science, thereby avoiding large fluctuations in total allowable catch that could negatively impact on the industry and the markets. That sometimes requires that we take a more incremental approach to achieving maximum sustainable yield, in the interests of the broader sustainability of a given fishery. Our position in negotiations is therefore informed by the principle of TAC constraints. We believe that it is appropriate to limit TAC variances year on year by 20 per cent for individual stocks.

The TAC constraint, which is in line with international good practice, allows us to move in the direction of the scientific advice while avoiding peaks and troughs in TACs that would be economically damaging. That kind of active and pragmatic management is particularly important in the context of this year's negotiations. Almost one year on from the signing of the trade and co-operation agreement, the shortcomings of the reckless Brexit deal are already plain for all to see. Scotland's fishermen are particularly scunnered by what many of them now realise was a sell-out of their and our industry. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has labelled the deal as "desperately poor" and the "worst of both worlds" for the industry.

A report that was published in September this year, which was prepared by a former Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs negotiator, has confirmed our analysis at the time that, far from increasing prosperity, the trade and co-operation agreement will lead to a loss for the industry. The fact that much of the vaunted increase from the TCA is paper fish is something that we highlighted at the time, when the agreement was made. For various reasons, the fish will therefore not be caught and will add no value to Scotland's economy or its coastal communities. It is no wonder that Scotland's fishermen feel a sense of "Brexit betrayal".

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** How many of the fishermen the cabinet secretary has spoken to have told her that

they want to follow the Scottish National Party's policy of returning to the European Union, and therefore going back into the common fisheries policy, now that we have regained control of our waters?

**Mairi Gougeon:** The biggest issues that I hear about when I speak to fishers and people in the seafood industry the length and breadth of Scotland are those that I am outlining at the moment. Among those issues, labour is a big issue.

The situation has been exacerbated by Covid-19, which has forced boats to remain tied up at quaysides and has driven volatility in the market. The results in a Marine Scotland survey that was carried out last year showed that 73 per cent of sea fisheries businesses relied solely or partly on Government support to continue operating. Those findings underline the importance of the Scottish Government's actions in getting help to Scotland's fishers, processors and small fish and seafood farmers as fast as we could last year. We were the first Government in the United Kingdom to act, and we helped to save many from much harsher financial harm.

Now, we are faced with some difficult scientific advice for 2022. Proposed cuts to key stocks are a real concern for communities up and down Scotland that rely on fishing for their livelihoods. The advice also highlights the precarious nature of some stocks, which must be protected and preserved for future generations. The context is, indeed, challenging.

However, I reassure Parliament that the Scottish Government is focused on getting the best possible deal for Scotland. Even as I speak, marine officials are working hard to promote our interests in the international negotiations with other coastal states. I am pleased to say that we have reached agreement with our coastal states neighbours, in line with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea's advice, on total catch limits for 2022 for mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring.

The first round of our trilateral negotiations with the EU and Norway was productive, and we look forward to hosting the second round here in Edinburgh next week. In addition, the first round of the UK-EU bilateral negotiation starts tomorrow. Although the timescales for negotiation are uncertain and depend on the willingness of our international partners to negotiate, we hope to conclude discussions by the middle of December, which will allow fishers to enter a new fishing year with more clarity, certainty and, I hope, optimism than they have had in recent years.

We are conscious of our obligation to balance the needs of the present with the interests of the

future. That is clearly set out in “Scotland’s Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030”, which we published last December, and in the co-operation agreement that we have made with the Scottish Greens. The fisheries management strategy will drive an inclusive approach to fisheries management.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Can the cabinet secretary confirm that, under the Green-SNP coalition, there is no threat of cuts in quota, bearing in mind that the conservation aspect of fisheries is devolved?

**Mairi Gougeon:** We will continue to have discussions. We will set out and consult on our future catching policy early next year, when all such matters will be discussed.

We want to bring people together to ensure that a range of voices are heard as we collaborate on finding solutions. The Government will continue to engage with stakeholders at every level to achieve that.

That approach is epitomised in the recent work of the nephrops working group, which published a report on 15 September this year. Today, we responded to the recommendations that are set out in that report. Fundamentally, we are all agreed that we need to strengthen the resilience of the seafood industry in Scotland. A key aspect of that is strengthening of links to local and global markets. Of course, that objective would be easier to deliver if there was a level playing field in trading and if the industry had access to the skilled labour that it requires.

The UK Government did not need to force us out of the EU’s free trade and freedom of movement arrangements, but it did and our seafood industry is paying the price. I want to reassure our coastal communities that we will continue to do all that we can, with the resources that are available to us, to continue to supply high-quality seafood to consumers here at home and abroad. We will, of course, continue to press the UK Government for measures to address labour shortages, and for it to help rather than to hinder efforts to export our high-quality products to our most lucrative market, which is the EU.

Although recent experience suggests that it will continue to be our industry that is put in harm’s way at every opportunity, as the Tories seek to manufacture a problem in order to disguise the sheer awfulness of the deal that they agreed to on leaving the EU, we must use our own powers to make our industry more resilient, onshore as well as offshore.

The Government has long been committed to applying an economic link licence condition to fishing opportunity. I can announce today that, following consultation in the previous

parliamentary session, we will move to increase the amount of catch that is landed at Scottish ports by introducing new economic link arrangements for Scottish vessels in 2023.

A wide range of other commitments are in the 12-point action plan in our fisheries management strategy. Those include introducing a new catching policy, enhancing our knowledge and evidence base through the introduction of remote electronic monitoring to key parts of the fishing fleet, and working to mitigate the impact of climate change on our seas.

The co-operation agreement with the Scottish Greens incorporates those commitments, but it goes further. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party believe that the marine environment should be clean, healthy, safe, productive and diverse, and that it should be managed to meet the long-term needs of nature and people.

As part of that vision, we are determined to make a step change in marine protection and to deliver on our shared commitment to achieving and maintaining good environmental status for all Scotland’s seas—offshore and inshore. The measures that we have agreed for enhanced marine protection will make Scotland an international leader in that field.

We specifically commit to restoring marine habitats in Scotland’s inshore waters, with the aim of achieving good environmental status, recognising that those waters contain valuable blue carbon hotspots, nursery grounds for fish stocks and an array of rich marine wildlife and biodiversity.

Specific actions will include enhancement of marine protection through designation of marine protected areas and new highly protected marine areas, through taking specific measures to protect the inshore seabed, and through extending the requirement for vessel tracking and monitoring systems across the whole commercial fleet by the end of the current parliamentary session. Making progress on delivering those commitments will be our priority in the coming year.

The Government is wholly committed to addressing the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Increasingly, the world is realising that adapting to climate change while also seeking to slow global warming is a marine as well as a land challenge. Scotland is already playing its part; indeed, we are part of groundbreaking and world-leading activity on blue carbon. Tomorrow, I will open an international blue carbon conference here in Scotland—the first ever to be held at the same time as a UN climate conference. This is the first time that the oceans have had such prominence in the UN climate

change programme, with hundreds of ocean and marine events taking place over the course of COP26. That is a welcome development and an important step to build understanding of the importance of protecting our oceans and of the role that they can play in climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and to drive action.

There is no doubt that facing up to and addressing the intertwined challenges is difficult. The past few years have been a time of constant upheaval for Scotland's fishing and seafood sectors. In the words of one of my favourite authors, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, at times it has felt that

"Nothing ... is true but change."

The shock of the Covid-19 pandemic, added to a Brexit deal that has utterly failed and undermined our industry, has wrought unwelcome uncertainty among our fishing communities and partners for an endeavour that is always challenging and often dangerous. All that is taking place in the wider context of the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, which pose real and imminent dangers to our country and our planet.

However, this Government is not sitting on the sidelines. We have a vision and a strategy to make our fishing industry sustainable, both economically and ecologically. We are acting to resolve the issues and to give the fishing industry a renewed sense of certainty by fiercely defending Scotland's interests in international quota negotiations, and by bringing the best available science to bear on the current and future management of our fisheries. We have a team of some of the most experienced and competent negotiators in Europe to support our industry objectives. We are working with others to protect our shared marine heritage and we are leading in international collaboration in areas such as blue carbon habitats and storage.

Although we might be facing challenges, I am resolved, as we continue to face uncertainty and change, to do what this Government does best—to stand up for, promote and protect Scotland's interests at all times.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call the next speaker, I advise the chamber that we have a little time in hand, so anybody who takes interventions will get that time back.

15:28

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I thank and pay tribute to the fishing industry for its resilience, as well as all who work in the seafood supply chain. In my

constituency, we were recently reminded of the perils of the sea when the town of Eyemouth marked the 140th anniversary of the Eyemouth disaster, when 189 fishermen were drowned on a stormy night in October 1881. Our fishermen risk their lives in all weathers so that we have food on our plates, and we must never forget that.

As a result of our exit from the EU, the United Kingdom and Scotland are now an independent coastal state, which has given us control over our own waters. We on the Conservative benches feel that it is a fantastic chapter of opportunity for our fishing communities. Because fisheries are a devolved matter, many of the powers that were exercised at the EU level before Brexit are now held by the Scottish ministers, and the devolution of fisheries is further consolidated by the Fisheries Act 2020, which conferred on the Scottish ministers a broad power to make regulations, within the scope of devolved competence, for "a conservation purpose" or "a fish industry purpose".

In opening for the Scottish Conservatives, I would like to stand up for fishing communities by making a number of points on vital funding and sustainability. First, as a result of the UK's exit from the EU, the UK is now an independent coastal state, with control over our waters for the first time in decades. Not only have we managed to secure additional quota, worth around £146 million over the next five years, but it will be shared across the UK.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Does Rachael Hamilton agree that the UK negotiated on the principle of leaving the EU and not actually working for the fishing industry?

**Rachael Hamilton:** The trade and co-operation agreement with the EU, which was agreed in December 2020, gives British fishermen the right to catch more fish in UK waters. I know that Emma Harper is interested in separating our country and taking us right back into the common fisheries policy. That was hated by many fishermen across the country, which is why we should work together to make the most of the opportunities that we have in front of us.

I was talking about the additional quota that is shared across Britain. It will benefit parts of the UK where active fisheries have demonstrated that they need and can catch those stocks. I will talk about that later in my speech.

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly stood up for fishing communities since the EU departure. When it comes to funding, Scotland's other Government has stepped up to the mark by providing the industry with additional support.

**Mairi Gougeon:** Would the member care to elaborate on why, in the replacement for the European maritime and fisheries fund, Scotland

received only £14 million, as opposed to the £62 million that it should have received?

**Rachael Hamilton:** The Scottish Government has received a number of tranches of funding, in particular the recent funding that will give access to developing technology and increase the number of skills opportunities. Further into my contribution, I will speak about the Scottish Government's lack of help for young entrants to the industry.

Going back to the UK Government's support, we opened a £23 million fund to support fishing communities through disruption related to the UK's exit from the EU. It is important that the UK Government recognised that businesses needed support at that crucial time, which mitigated losses to businesses caused by delays related to the export of fresh or live fish and shellfish to the EU. That was an important bit of funding.

The UK Government also bolstered support with the £100 million UK seafood fund, which has been a vital lifeline to level up coastal communities across Scotland. The first part of that vital funding was announced in September 2021. As I said to the cabinet secretary, there is an important opportunity to invest in and develop technology, trial new ideas and support world-class research to improve the industry's productivity and long-term sustainability, which has been really important in the conversations that we have had during COP26. The fund will enable the industry to process more fish that is landed in the UK, create the job opportunities that we need across that supply chain, and upskill the workforce and train new entrants in cutting-edge technology and new safe and sustainable methods.

I am concerned that a number of Scottish National Party members are dragging us back to constitutional arguments, which highlights the SNP Government's attitudes towards our fantastic coastal communities. Let me take the example of my constituent—I am sorry, Presiding Officer, I am just looking for my notes on that. The issue is about banging the drum for getting young people into the industry. Recently, I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy about a loan for a fishing licence for a young constituent of mine who has a fishing vessel and is looking for help with getting a licence. It concerns me greatly that he was told that, on the basis that the cost of licensing a vessel is an operational statutory cost to a business, it is considered to be

"a relatively poor return in terms of public investment for the limited funding which has been historically available to the industry".

To put it simply, that confirms that the SNP is not standing up for young people who want to enter this thriving industry. That is a sad state of affairs for the next generation.

To add insult to injury, the minister also told my constituent that better value in terms of investment return is achieved from assisting industry with aid directed at non-statutory investments such as quality improvement, safety, infrastructure and market-related initiatives where added value is achieved. That shows a lack of understanding of how we want to address being an independent coastal state by getting communities across Scotland into the fishing industry and making the industry thrive again.

I want to touch on cod stocks. The Shetland Fishermen's Association and the Scottish White Fish Producers Association have asked the Scottish Government and the UK Government to create an independent panel to assess and put into proper perspective the numbers from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. Fishermen have warned Scottish ministers to think twice about cutting cod quotas for next year, after figures showed that there are 285 million fish in the North Sea. ICES is recommending a 10.3 per cent reduction in the total allowable catch for North Sea cod, even though it admits that doubling quota for the species would mean a 24 per cent increase in stock by 2023.

We know that North Sea cod is abundant and that the population in 2018 was 180 million. However, Green non-governmental organisations constantly describe the species as threatened, endangered or at risk of extinction. Perhaps the picture is very different. That is why, in an intervention, I asked the cabinet secretary whether there is a threat of the SNP-Green coalition cutting the quota, given that conservation is devolved.

The CFP is unavoidable if we have EU membership, which can come only if the SNP-Green nationalist coalition breaks up the United Kingdom. Our fishermen do not want to be dictated to by Brussels. It is time that both Scotland's Governments worked together for the benefit of Scotland's fishing communities.

15:37

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Scotland's fishers, who have the most dangerous peacetime occupation and go to sea every day to put food on our tables. The sector provides thousands of jobs, often in Scotland's most fragile rural communities, and generates more than £300 million a year in gross value added—and the processing sector contributes more than that.

Faced with the twin shocks of the collapse of markets during Covid lockdowns and a deal to leave the EU that—as no one was surprised to find—failed to deliver what Scotland's fishing sector needed or had been promised, the industry has shown remarkable resilience. The impact of

the Brexit deal was entirely predictable. There have been entirely predictable and devastating delays in getting products to market. There have been entirely predictable labour shortages, which were particularly crippling for fish processors. There have been entirely predictable trade disputes.

It is in the context of that deal and those challenges that the next round of coastal state negotiations will take place. The negotiations also take place in the context of a renewed focus on the importance of our precious green environment, the need to tackle the climate crisis and the need to prioritise sustainability, not just because that is the right thing to do for the environment but because it is the right thing to do if we are to secure the long-term economic viability of the industry.

The Scottish Government has opted to rely largely on the UK Fisheries Act 2020 in determining the framework for the negotiations, even in devolved areas, rather than deliver a Scottish fisheries act. However, decisions on fisheries management in Scotland rest with the Scottish ministers. Fishers themselves have a role to play in responsible management of the seas, but it is the Scottish ministers who decide how our seas are used.

Ahead of this year's discussions and negotiations, I will set out Labour's five tests for the Scottish Government on the establishment and distribution of sustainable fishing quotas for 2022. First, we believe that fishing catch quotas should not exceed the maximum sustainable yield in 2022, according to scientific advice. I appreciate that delivering against fixed MSY targets in mixed fisheries, where individual stocks are subject to fluctuating scientific advice, is challenging. It requires close co-operation across the UK and beyond.

However, overfishing depletes our public fish asset and reduces the amount that is available in subsequent years. Labour will assess the outcome of the forthcoming negotiations by the Scottish ministers on how total quota allowances compare with scientific advice, on whether overfishing is tackled and on whether the Scottish Government makes a genuine commitment not to exceed the maximum sustainable yield.

Secondly, we will assess the actions of ministers on whether negotiations deliver a fairer and more diverse distribution of quota allocation in Scotland. The cabinet secretary was silent on that in her opening comments. Fish quotas have become a tradable asset, being sold and leased for profit. Quotas have become highly consolidated. For example, four companies control 55 per cent of the North Sea mackerel quota. Benefits are no longer being shared among a fleet

of smaller vessels; instead, they are concentrated among the few owners who operate large boats. The Scottish Government should instigate an immediate review of how quotas are allocated, in order to assess what more can be done, in relation to section 25 of the 2020 act, to deliver the best social, economic and environmental outcomes for Scotland.

Thirdly, Labour believes in the principle that Scottish seafood should be landed in Scotland. At present, far too much is landed abroad, which means that Scotland's economy, food system and jobs are bypassed. For example, 55 per cent of mackerel that was caught by Scottish fishing vessels last year was landed directly in a foreign port. Beyond consultation, the Scottish Government has done little to date to prevent that from happening, so we will assess carefully the announcement that the cabinet secretary has just made. We need proper investment in building capacity and infrastructure in fishing quays and in the processing sector in order to secure more landings in Scottish ports, which will help to regenerate our all-too-often neglected coastal communities.

Fourthly, we believe that quotas should be used to incentivise a change towards forms of fishing that have lower impact and less bycatch. We know that some fishing methods cause serious environmental harm. Scotland's marine assessment in 2020 found that fishing was the most significant and widespread pressure on Scotland's seas. In particular, it noted that bottom trawling and other mobile bottom-contacting fishing methods have led to widespread changes to the marine ecosystem. The pressure that is associated with damaging methods can be reduced and the impacts can be mitigated through restrictions on such methods, backed by a just transition, to ensure that fishers are supported. That can also be done through proper incentives.

In addition, discarding is resulting in vast volumes of fish being killed and thrown back at sea. That is environmentally damaging and, to be frank, a shocking waste, given that throwing back lots of juvenile fish because they are too small to market ends up reducing the next year's catch. That practice was supposedly made illegal in 2019, but we know that it continues.

Fifthly, Labour believes that a fairer share of catching opportunities should be secured for Scottish fishers. Scottish fishers have not been served well by the trade and co-operation agreement between the UK Government and the EU. The seas around Scotland contain some of the most productive, valuable and diverse fisheries that are to be found anywhere, but Scottish vessels currently account for a minority of the total tonnage in value taken from those fisheries. As

well as reforming how quotas are allocated in Scotland to ensure that they are distributed more fairly on social, economic and environmental grounds, the Scottish ministers should focus, in the negotiations, on securing a greater share of the fishing in Scottish waters for Scotland's fishers.

In the current round of coastal state negotiations and beyond, Labour will assess and hold to account ministers on our five tests. We will make an assessment of whether the negotiations deliver a better redistribution of fishing quotas to smaller boats, which are the backbone of the fishing fleet; whether they lead to more catch being landed in our Scottish ports, which will create the jobs that our coastal communities need; and whether they genuinely deliver a sustainable fishing industry for the benefit of our environment and of all our coastal communities.

15:44

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I, too, pay tribute to all our fishermen and the dangerous job that they do, and all the work that the fishing industry does to put food on our tables.

I will not be the first to raise with the cabinet secretary the disparity between the scientific assessment of fish stocks, particularly cod, and the reality on the fishing grounds. I am told that the disparity has widened to the point where the credibility of the fisheries management system is under threat. Shetland fishermen are seeing abundant cod on the fishing grounds, but some vessels face bankruptcy if the quota is cut again. As it has been put to me,

“it is one thing to have fishing vessels going bankrupt if fish stocks disappear but quite another to engineer a situation where they go bankrupt amid the largest fish stock seen in the North Sea for the last two decades.”

I understand that an increasing number of fisheries scientists have grown uneasy over the ICES stock assessments. Although ICES says that it is willing to engage with the fishing industry to improve data collection and the way in which the data is interpreted, the trouble is that that will take years. That could mean vessels going bankrupt and, in turn, coastal and island communities facing crisis, all of which is avoidable.

Shetland may be small and perfectly formed, but we are a large ocean community in the heart of the North Sea and north Atlantic. We rely on the sea and those who work on and around it. To that end, I am frequently in touch with the Shetland Fishermen's Association which, along with colleagues on the mainland, has called for the introduction of an expert panel to advise ministers on ICES advice every year. There is concern about the quality of scientific advice in relation to

both the at-sea data gathering exercise that feeds into annual ICES assessments and the reference points that ICES uses to recommend total allowable catches—TACs.

The headline recommendation from ICES in relation to North Sea cod is a 10.3 per cent reduction in the 2022 TAC. That is where negotiators feel bound to start from. They need reasons to depart from that advice if there is going to be an agreement to an increase rather than a decrease of cod TACs.

I will make several points about the ICES advice and the increase of North Sea cod quotas next year. According to ICES, the North Sea cod quota could be increased substantially in 2022 without sacrificing increases in stock size. Modelling indicates that the spawning stock biomass—SSB—of that species would increase by 24 per cent between now and 2023 if the TAC was doubled. More modest increases in the TAC would lift the SSB by almost as much as the ICES-recommended 10.3 per cent cut.

Secondly, the ICES reference point for North Sea cod is the largest size that the stock has reached in the period from 1998 to 2021—almost 98 tonnes—which is the highest figure for the past 40 years. That means that the system is trying to raise the North Sea cod SSB to levels that, according to the advice, cannot be reached by 2023 even with no fishing at all.

Thirdly, North Sea demersal fisheries are mixed fisheries, with cod being caught at the same time as several other species during typical fishing operations. An acute shortage of cod quota in a situation of cod abundance restricts the fleet's capacity to catch species for which it has quota.

The immediate priorities for Shetland's fleets in this year's talks are to agree an increase in the North Sea cod quota, avoid a cut in the ling quota, as the only evidence available to ICES shows the stock to be three times larger than it was 20 years ago, and keep up pressure on our neighbours to reverse the unilateral increases in mackerel quotas that were announced this year.

I have two final points. The cabinet secretary may be aware from her visit to Shetland of the view of local fishermen that they are unfairly targeted by fisheries protection vessels compared with fishermen from non-UK countries. I urge transparency and the publication of figures relating to that issue. Perhaps next year, consideration may be given to holding at least one round of the coastal states talks in Shetland, which is at the heart of Scotland's richest fishing grounds.

15:49

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** The Scottish Government's position has always been to deliver the best outcomes for Scotland's fishing interests. A world-class fishing nation should deliver responsible and sustainable fisheries management and communities. To put it simply—fish, folk, future.

I was brought up in the east neuk of Fife. Fish was a constant through my childhood; my father's accounting business supported fishers, my higher geography project was on the development and sustainability of the industry and a fish supper at Anster harbour was a top treat.

I studied in Aberdeen and came to face to face with the bigger industrial fishing industry there. As an accountant, I audited fishing businesses, reconciling catches with quotas. I now live in Argyll and Bute, where I represent a different, but extremely important, element of Scotland's fishing industry—the west coast inshore fishers. I thank those who work so hard in that industry.

The matter of fisheries is—correctly—devolved. Significant differences exist in the industry in Scotland and across the UK, and differences should be recognised. The management of fish stocks needs to be tailored to individual circumstances.

I am pleased that, when it constructed its core team for the coastal state negotiations, the Scottish Government brought in voices and experiences from all elements of our fishing industry, including Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance, which is a community-based organisation whose main aim is to address the economic and physical needs of the Scottish inshore fisheries and their associated communities and businesses. The alliance provides local wisdom which, when it is combined with the science, can ensure the most sustainable results.

Coastal communities should not be cut off from opportunities—just because they have not done something for a while should not negate their chance to return to it. They can also comment from a practical perspective, for example on how quota swaps from west to east could impact negatively on the west coast nephrops fleet if discards are lost. By bringing everyone around the table, the Scottish Government is creating the space to ensure the protection of Scotland's interests.

Leaving the EU has disproportionately impacted on Scotland—one of my fishers has lost 60 per cent of his market and is worried about the labour impact too, and our fishing fleets have access to fewer valuable fish stocks. Until Scotland regains its independence and EU membership, the Scottish Government will continue to be actively

involved in the coastal state negotiations, in which it will play a key and active role in ensuring the protection of Scotland's interests.

As the cabinet secretary has said, the Scottish Government will also be an active partner at international negotiations, especially in relation to fish stocks in Scottish waters and access to Scottish waters by foreign vessels. Fish do not recognise international boundaries, so it is vital that they be jointly managed to ensure long-term sustainability—fish, folk, future.

As I have said, I grew up in the east neuk of Fife—home to the award-winning Scottish fisheries museum, whose collection traces the development of commercial fishing through the ages, including Loch Fyne skiffs and Campbeltown ring nets from Argyll and Bute. The collection tells the story of a way of life that is so important to Scotland and which has adapted and changed through constant innovation. Fishing survives because of the dedication of folk who often work in harsh conditions. Sustainable fishing is crucial to its future.

15:52

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Scotland's fishing industry finds itself at an important point in its history. At the start of this year, the United Kingdom re-established itself as an independent coastal state outside of the European common fisheries policy. That event is the basis for the negotiations that have taken place this year and for the UK's direct participation in international discussions around the industry.

However, we do not exist in isolation. We are aware of the need to work with our neighbours to provide positive results for those around the table. This week more than usual, we have been reminded that we have a responsibility to our natural environment. Although we are driven to maximise opportunity for our fishing fleet, we must do so sustainably, in a way that leaves a positive legacy for future generations, promotes biodiversity and secures habitats for marine life below our waters. I applaud the sector and fishermen across the country for the work that they have done to that end.

Around the chamber, we know that the process of transition has involved problems for the sector. In the past year, we saw a number of competing issues that have had costs for our fishing fleet. Border arrangements in particular have been challenging, as importers and exporters as well as border agencies adjusted to changed rules at our frontier.

It was important for Government to be able to respond. I welcomed in particular the positive step of the creation of the Scottish seafood exports task

force, which brought together Government, sector representatives and other stakeholders to drive improvements. However, it was clear that direct support was also essential, and the £23 million package of support for exporters in the sector, which was built on the £100 million UK seafood fund, demonstrated a will and action to back British fish and to work through the issues that have arisen. That is a reminder that we should also be looking to the future by investing in the sector, building on existing trading links with our closest neighbours and seizing opportunities to make new links with partners around the world.

This year, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation praised the tireless work by team UK—in which we include Marine Scotland—on negotiations. The benefits of working effectively together cannot be overstated.

Quite properly, discussions of allowable catches and rules for 2022 began soon after arrangements with the EU for 2021 were concluded. It is in everyone's interest that processes are prompt and that certainty is provided at an early stage. The same principle applies to our relations with Norway.

It is worth reminding ourselves that this year's negotiations took place against the backdrop of not only a new relationship after leaving the EU but, as for virtually every employer in the country, a pandemic that had unpredictable effects on demand, logistics and supply. The recent dispute with the French Government about fishing licences has also raised questions. There is no denying that recent times have been testing for the sector, but I am confident that it can and will thrive.

My own region, the Highlands and Islands, has a long association with the fishing industry. There has been considerable change in recent decades, but the seafaring spirit of many of our communities is at the heart of their identities. We face additional challenges. Shetland is one of Scotland's main ports for fish landings, as Beatrice Wishart said, but it depends on travel links with and from the islands to get its produce to market, even domestically. That is the extreme end of a scale that affects all remote and rural fishing communities.

We remember when, as part of the common fisheries policy, there was a wide agreement in the chamber that Scotland's fishing fleet deserved better. Scotland has a long and close association with the sea. As with other products of our food and drink sector, Scotland's fish exports are recognised as a quality product with a positive reputation.

We believe in growing opportunity for the sector and in investing to ensure a positive, sustainable

future. I will welcome any work that the Scottish and UK Governments can do to build that future.

15:57

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** The majority of fish stocks that are of interest to Scottish fishermen are found across international boundaries. There are significant differences between the four UK nations and it is important to tailor fishing to our Scottish circumstances.

Brexit has seriously damaged the Scottish fishing sector. People in Scotland did not vote for the UK's hard Brexit and chaotic fisheries policy. I welcome, in contrast, Scotland's commitment to upholding its international reputation as a good global citizen. The Scottish Government has repeatedly demonstrated Scotland's commitment to the European family of nations, which reflects the will of Scottish voters.

The UK Government's isolationism in acting as a sovereign coastal state undermines those efforts, and Scotland continues to pay the price for Tory Brexit. The UK Government has sold out Scotland's fishing sector. Industry experts predict that the UK fishing industry will make an eye-watering loss of £300 million by 2026 as a result of the UK Government's disastrous Brexit deal. That is despite Boris Johnson's promise of a sea of opportunity for Scotland's fishermen.

The Prime Minister's sea of opportunity was supposed to benefit us to the tune of £148 million by 2026 if we voted to leave the EU, but the former DEFRA official and fisheries negotiator Gary Taylor has estimated that fishing firms face losses of £64 million per year. Those grave predictions have prompted the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to ask the UK Government to urgently publish an analysis of the cost of its disastrous Brexit. The NFFO's chief executive officer, Barrie Deas, has said that

"there are ... few winners and ... many losers"

in the fishing industry as a result of Brexit.

It is welcome that the Scottish Government is not taking such an approach for Scotland's fishing sector; instead, the Scottish Government's negotiation strategy and priorities are influenced by high-quality science and take into account wider policy objectives, including socioeconomic implications. The cabinet secretary highlighted the 12-point action plan in the future fisheries management strategy. The negotiating approach is underpinned by a set of guiding principles that will remain consistent each year and is in line with the need to progress towards good environmental status.

The Scottish Government will conduct negotiations on a principled, rather than positional,

basis and will comply fully with a range of international conventions and obligations, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. That will allow for sustainably managed stocks and the use of total allowable catches when appropriate, including consideration of the introduction of TACs for current non-quota species.

I want such an approach in Scotland, as opposed to the shambolic ideological stance that the UK Government has taken. The UK Government negotiated in principle just by leaving the EU and not by working for the industry. Brexit has already had a huge impact across my South Scotland region, and it has hit Dumfries and Galloway fishermen particularly hard. In December 2020, many boats—including ones that operate out of Kirkcudbright and Garlieston harbours in D and G—were tied to shore, as businesses became unviable and almost went out of business completely. That was all because, on 31 December 2020, new information technology systems, as well as regulatory, welfare and customs checks, came into force for Scottish seafood exporters going to Europe, despite calls for a six-month transition period to trial new systems and checks. The UK Government refused that, to the Scottish fishing sector's utter disbelief.

In preparation for today's debate, I obtained a direct quote from a local fish-processing business, which said:

"Although things have stabilised slightly, uncertainty still remains a huge concern because we don't know where we'll be in 12 months."

I welcome the approach that the Scottish Government is taking to the negotiations and, in response to Ms Rachael Hamilton's comments, I look forward to Scotland being a normal independent coastal state that can choose our own path and make our own decisions.

16:01

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

The negotiations are different this year, but they must be underpinned by sustainability and science to maximise the economic benefit to our communities while protecting stocks and the environment.

The debate takes place during COP26, and the goals that we expect world leaders to realise must be at the forefront of our deliberations. Brexit also looms large, which means that the negotiations are very different from those that have come before. In many ways, they will set the scene for the future. Regardless of how we feel about or voted on Brexit, our negotiators must have the best interests of our country, environment and

industry as their primary focus. We must try to realise the vision of a sea of opportunity.

In the negotiations, it is the Scottish Government's responsibility to ensure the effective management of fisheries and to deliver the best possible outcome for the industry, our communities and our environment. Getting that balance right is key to a sustainable future and a sustainable industry.

We should strive to follow scientific advice on quotas, but we should also take steps to protect fisheries from the effort shift. We saw in the past that that almost caused the collapse of sustainable fisheries on the west coast, as Jenni Minto said. Having Marine Stewardship Council certification of our fisheries will be more important in the future, as we see people awakening to sustainability and protecting our planet.

We have issues regarding the distribution of quota. We have the opportunity to move to a different pattern of distribution and management. As Colin Smyth said, our smaller vessels currently lose out to those who own and operate larger boats, because quota distribution penalises smaller fleets. The Scottish Government must address that issue. It must look to our fleets and communities for good practice—for example, Shetland Islands Council owns quota that is leased to local boats on the understanding that they will land their catch locally. That needs investment in food processing, which has staffing shortages. The Scottish Government needs to consider how to make careers in the processing sector more attractive.

The problem of bycatch is still to be solved sustainably. I have long advanced a system where quota for bycatch can be bought at the point of landing. The price of such a quota would make it possible to land bycatch without detriment, but without profit. Stiffer penalties are also needed for those who dispose of bycatch at sea.

We have the opportunity to introduce conservation methods, by using science and fishing gear, in order to be more selective in our fishing, and to insist that those who access our waters do likewise. There is an opportunity this year to set in train solutions to the stubborn problems that have damaged the industry in the past.

We need to look at a transition that will keep a greater share of the fish in our waters for our industry, because doing so would create a buffer when there is a need to reduce our total allowable catch. We can farm our seas for the benefit of future generations, and we must maximise the opportunity that we now have, while recognising that it is also a transition for our neighbours.

Fisheries management is the responsibility of Scottish ministers. Fishers have a role to play in the responsible management of the seas, but Scottish ministers decide how our seas are used, because those who are concerned about their income today might not have the luxury of looking out for our future generations. The Scottish Government must listen to the industry's advice on good practice so that it can manage our seas in a way that enables our fishing communities to thrive, while protecting our precious environment and ensuring the long-term sustainability and future of the industry.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Karen Adam joins us remotely.

16:06

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** My constituency is a coastal fishing community of integrity and values that are embedded in trust and honesty. We often see that in highly skilled and dangerous professions, because a person's word and integrity can mean the difference between life and death or prosperity and hunger.

The fishing industry has gone through many changes over the past few hundred years. It has diversified from whaling ports through to today, when it catches, lands and processes first-class seafood that is exported all over the world. We are extremely lucky to have on our doorstep a major contributor to local jobs and our food supply chain, and a global standard that highlights to the world what Scotland has to offer.

The topic for debate is Scotland's approach to the 2021 coastal state negotiations. In my speech, I wish to get it across that, in all the discussions and debate, we must remember those who are at the heart of it all. We must listen to those with lived experience in the communities, who have for too long felt that they are being played by politicians in order to leverage deals.

International relations is a reserved matter so, before the UK Government undertakes negotiations, it is essential for it to listen to Scottish ministers, officials and industry representatives and—not least—the very people who live and work in fishing communities. The Government also needs to act on the advice that is given, particularly when the rhetoric of having more fish to catch is thrown around, without the sense to acknowledge that it is the type of fish that matters. If members will excuse the pun, that rhetoric is a red herring.

At the beginning of this year, Fergus Ewing spoke in the chamber and painted a picture that illustrated how proud and historic fishing communities would be left reeling as they faced

the great Tory betrayal of Scottish fishing interests—and how right he was, as was the fishing industry. An underlying truth is increasingly evident—that those at Westminster who claim to care about our fishing and coastal communities in Scotland do not, because their deeds do not match their words. They might enjoy the finest seafood in fancy restaurants, but I doubt that they care too much about the people in the industry—the processors, producers and those who risk their lives out on the sea—or the coastal communities in which such people have lived for hundreds of years.

As has been mentioned, the Tories promised Scotland's fishermen a sea of opportunity and the benefits of an independent coastal state but, instead, they have been exposed. As Elspeth Macdonald, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, put it, the UK is

“now a coastal state with one hand tied behind our back.”

The broken promises leave our fishermen woefully short of their expectations, and their sense of betrayal is evident in their responses.

Our vision for Scotland is to be a world-class fishing nation that delivers responsible and sustainable fisheries management. My meetings with stakeholders throughout the summer made it clear that, to mitigate the shortfall in available quota and deliver the best possible management structures in our waters, we must include in discussions the very people whom our plans directly affect. For example, marine health, our path to net zero, our good food nation and our economy depend on including coastal communities and fishing workforces in plan making, as we are asking them to enact the plans. If we are to succeed in any of our aspirations, we need to build the trust of those people, who have suffered immense hardship and chaos because of political choices.

We know that we have challenges ahead and that our fishing industry is under immense pressure. I therefore ask that, above all else, we take the example of the people whom I represent by cultivating the fishing community spirit and being people of our word. Although difficult decisions lie ahead, we can have a prosperous and sustainable future and ensure that our fishing communities thrive for generations to come.

16:10

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank everyone involved in our fishing industry for their hard work in catching fish in all sorts of weather to bring high-quality food to our plates while also playing a vital part in the north-east economy.

The UK Government has secured a deal that means that we are now an independent coastal state with control over our own waters for the first time in decades, which is something that our fishermen asked for. Our fishing community now has a Government that stands up for their livelihoods rather than faceless bureaucrats in Brussels deciding their fate.

As a result of the UK's exit from the EU, we are now in a position to develop our own policies in relation to fishery matters. In doing so, as is indicated in its 2018 white paper "Sustainable fisheries for future generations", the UK Government intends to be a champion of sustainable fisheries in every part of the UK. We can now directly improve the sustainability—

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Douglas Lumsden:** Yes, I will.

**Dr Allan:** If Brexit is, as the picture that the member paints suggests, an unqualified success, can he explain why many fish-processing businesses in my constituency cannot find a workforce?

**Douglas Lumsden:** The member makes an interesting argument that we should be dependent on immigration as we go forward. Immigration involves taking people and resource away from other countries, and we have to think about whether that is a moral thing to do or whether we should look at modernising the fishing industry that we have and growing it in that way.

The focus of the UK Government on levelling up also extends to our fishing fleet in Scotland, with a new £100 million UK seafood fund. It will ensure that fish that are landed in the UK are processed in the UK, thereby creating job opportunities across the supply chain. It will upskill the workforce and train new entrants, as well as investing in technology to put the UK at the cutting edge of new safe and sustainable fishing methods.

What is certain is that the UK Government must secure the best deal for our fishing fleet as the negotiations move forward. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has commended DEFRA and Marine Scotland for working tirelessly on those arrangements.

The SNP Government is currently undermining our fishing industry with undue concern and insecurity about its future. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation is rightly concerned about the coalition of chaos between the SNP and the Greens. The fishing industry has been fishing in a sustainable way for many years, and few industries can be more aware of the impact of environmental change or doing more to preserve our oceans and fish stocks. We have to support

the industry's efforts, not put more barriers in its way. I hope that ministers will join me in meeting leaders of the industry in order to understand their concerns and help them to flourish.

I have a plea for this SNP-Green Government: instead of always being negative, why not try to be positive and help to support the fishing industry? If this devolved Government plays its part in supporting the industry, I will even give it a few suggestions about how it can help. The Scottish Government should work with the UK Government to promote our fishing industry and support the £100 million UK seafood fund, and then it should look at the powers that it has, such as those over transport.

The transport links to Peterhead are a disgrace. There is no rail, so producers have to rely on a single-track road that goes past the notorious Toll of Birness. If the Scottish Government cared about the fishing industry, it would sort that out. Fish processors are reluctant to invest in improved buildings in Aberdeen because they would face a crippling business rates bill. If the Government cared about the fishing industry, it would sort that out. Let us also look at the lack of investment in new automation equipment. If the Government cared about the fishing industry, it would sort that out. The ministers have the power; they just need to use it.

The fishing industry has a bright future within the UK. I hope that the devolved SNP-Green Government will step up to the plate and support it as the UK Government is doing. However, it appears that this devolved Government wants to preside over failure. It seeks failure to sow division and promote its nationalist cause. We will not let that happen. We will defend the fishing industry from this coalition of chaos and we will ensure that it has a bright future.

16:15

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I thank the fishers who risk their lives every day and everyone involved in the sector who provides food for us in Scotland and abroad.

As we have heard, this is an annual debate about negotiations on fishing quotas. Yes, we must talk about quotas, but, if we want to ensure that we can talk about quotas 10 or 100 years from now, we should look at the whole way in which we manage our seas.

With COP26 happening in Glasgow, all week we have been talking about taking action to ensure a future for young people. If we want to pass on to them a vibrant fisheries sector, we must design Scotland's fisheries in a way that preserves fish stocks for future generations.

Right now, we have layers of sticking-plaster policies that do not tackle the problems of overfishing, the crisis in our inshore environments and the sheer unfairness of how quotas are currently distributed. *[Interruption.]* The system needs to be completely redesigned as a coherent whole, to promote social, environmental and economic benefits for all, and to deliver fisheries for the future. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I do not think that the member is taking an intervention.

**Ariane Burgess:** The Scottish Greens look forward to working with and encouraging the Scottish Government to fulfil the commitments in the shared policy programme, including the commitment to consult on a cap to fishing activity in inshore waters, and to deliver a suite of highly protected marine areas that will enable habitats to recover, which will lead to far more productive seas.

However, we must go further. From speaking to stakeholders, I have learned that, together, we must end overfishing.

**Rachael Hamilton:** It is important to highlight in the chamber today that the stated position of the SNP-Green coalition is to rejoin the CFP in an independent Scotland. Is that the member's position?

**Ariane Burgess:** The Scottish people need to truly have a voice, and Scotland needs a seat at any negotiation table, wherever that is.

We must ensure better enforcement of, and higher fines for infringements into, marine protected areas. Only days ago, the alarm was raised when a trawler was dredging in a protected area near Gairloch. The trawler moved off in the morning only to return later that day because of a lack of enforcement.

We say that 37 per cent of our sea area is protected, but I have heard stories of fishers who feel unable to speak out about illegal incursions into MPAs due to intimidation from other fishers. We need action on that.

We must redistribute quotas to benefit more fishers and local food systems, which would provide local jobs and food. Quotas are currently given in a highly centralised way to a few individuals. Allocating quotas based on previous track records, as we currently do, just means that those with the highest quotas now will end up with even more. A redistribution of quotas would unlock coastal communities and enable more people to make a living from the public good that is our seas.

We must establish a process that incentivises more selective and environmentally sensitive forms of fishing. Dredging and trawling release as

much carbon into the water column as the entire aviation sector releases into the atmosphere. We must protect the blue carbon stored in our sea bed and increase its ability to act as a vital carbon sink. One way to do that could be to add environmental conditionality to quotas, like we do on agricultural support payments.

Finally, we must bring about a just transition—one that supports those in the sector to move to regenerative ways of working, prioritises economic opportunities in restoring the inshore environment, and puts long-term investment into skills development in regenerative fishing methods.

For a nation with so much coastline, we should be doing so much better for coastal communities. If we can do what I have outlined, we will be able to pass on to future generations healthy, thriving seas from which everyone can benefit.

16:20

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** The fisheries negotiations are, if not exactly a festive occasion, at least a predictable feature of the advent season. This year the UK has ensured for itself less influence over the negotiations than ever before.

The last few years could be described as having been challenging, at best, for Scotland's fishing industry and for our coastal communities as a whole. The combination of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in huge losses of income and even the closure of some entire fishing enterprises. Therefore, it is important that Scotland's voice is heard—in whatever indirect way that Scotland can ensure that that happens—in the on-going coastal state negotiations.

As the talks surrounding 2021's catch agreements were concluded only in the summer, it is a cautiously hopeful sign that the negotiations for 2022 seem to be proceeding in a more timeous manner, with agreements for pelagic stocks having been signed at the end of October. However, despite the swifter progression of the next coastal state negotiations, Scotland's fishermen still face myriad difficulties.

Although fishermen were promised that Brexit would bring welcome benefits to their businesses, the last-minute deal instead sacrificed the needs of the Scottish fishing industry all too quickly. Who can forget the gridlock at the Anglo-French border or the Northern Irish ports in January this year, with tonnes of good-quality Scottish produce going to waste due to the mountains of additional paperwork and costs that were brought about by Brexit? Labour shortages—which, I noticed, one Conservative member seemed to completely and casually dismiss as irrelevant and which were already a concern for both the catching and

processing sectors, not least in my constituency—have been further exacerbated this year against the backdrop of a lack of seasonal workers across multiple industries.

As we have heard from the Government today, protecting our marine environment is one of the most important ways that Scotland can be a world leader in carbon capture and storage. Scotland's seas are estimated to hold more carbon than the total that is stored in our land resources, such as our peatlands, forests and soils. However, I want to say that fishing deserves a future as part of all this—a future in which designations are managed at a genuinely local level and in which the concerns of some of our most fragile communities are listened to.

It is essential that those who work in the fishing industry can access the right Government information, support and initiatives. It seems that support schemes are in high demand, given that the marine fund Scotland was suddenly closed at the beginning of October due to the high level of applications for the funding. I am pleased that Marine Scotland, in its own words, has

“taken stock of the MFS commitments”

and has decided to reopen the fund as of Monday this week.

Scotland's fishing industry is a vital component of the economic, social and cultural life of the communities around Scotland's coastline. In my constituency, it represents overwhelmingly small businesses and small concerns. I hope that the coastal state negotiations provide a platform for reminding ourselves, as much as any other country, of that fact and of the importance of that fact in the months and years that lie ahead.

16:24

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I am delighted to be speaking in this important debate. The fishing industry is of national importance to Scotland, but it is integral to constituents in my region, particularly those in and around Peterhead and Fraserburgh and across the many smaller fishing ports along the north-east coast.

The industry is often at the forefront of the rhetoric around the constitutional limbo into which two Governments have led us, but it is also often in the background of real considerations. It is often used as a symbol of national pride, culture and history while its contemporary needs are forgotten. Its importance is often heralded, but investment rarely follows those pronouncements.

The negotiations that we are discussing are incredibly important. The voices of the industry and the communities that form it must be the ones

that drive our position. Of course, all this is in the context of Brexit. Those on the Conservative benches drove the industry to the front and centre of their analysis of the future of the UK, only to bring chaos to the industry following a deal with the EU that failed to deliver on the promises that they had made.

The scale of the industry remains significant. Too often, Scottish fishing is discussed as an industry of the past and a remnant of a Scotland that is gone, but that is simply not borne out by any real analysis. The latest figures show that nearly 400,000 tonnes of fish were landed by Scottish vessels in a year, with a value of around £600 million. That is invaluable economic activity.

As Colin Smyth said, much more can and should be done to capture economic activity on these shores in the communities where our fishing fleet is based and can be expanded. We should cherish the product and consume more of it. A national diet containing more fish would be a healthier diet, so we must consider how our food system can make the product more attractive and affordable.

I believe that great days remain ahead for Scottish fishing, which is why the negotiations are integral to the Scottish Government doing more to protect and enhance the industry. Colin Smyth clearly set out Scottish Labour's approach to the talks. That includes a commitment to regeneration and investment in the communities that support and house the fishing industry. It is clear that investment is key to the industry's future. Rhoda Grant set out a compelling case for the application of new technologies to ensure sustainability in our fishing industry for the long term. Our Government can do much more to support innovation in those areas.

For the industry to thrive, we need not only the physical infrastructure of quays, processing facilities and logistics; we need places and people as well. There can be no bright future for an industry that is based in locations where there has been a chronic lack of investment for generations, where young people often do not stay and where the skills pipeline is based on opportunity rather than a structure that has been put in place to plan for industry and expansion. It is the Government's role to put that structure in place, and we need to hear more about that.

In the discussions, we must absolutely remember our environmental obligations and sustainable fishing commitments, which, frankly, are more important to the industry than to anyone else. We must work with the industry to ensure that those obligations are met.

I wish the Government well in the negotiations and hope that our constructive feedback can form part of its position in the talks.

16:28

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and I thank other members for their contributions.

As a child, I spent every Saturday morning being dragged to Aberdeen fish market, where my father, who was then an accountant in the fishing industry—there seems to be a theme here—stood staring at landing prices on a big chalk board. Then, as now, we took this wonderful food source for granted.

The 2021 coastal state negotiations are a crucial event for Scotland's fish producers and processors and the wider supply chain, as well as being an important forum in which to discuss how coastal states can work together to ensure that the fishing industry is sustainable in the long term. The UK Government's decision to impose a hard Brexit during a pandemic has, predictably, made the negotiations harder than they would otherwise have been.

Across Scotland, more than 12,000 people are employed in the fishing and processing industries and, in 2018, those industries were worth more than £2.2 billion. According to Peter Cook from Opportunity North East, the turnover of the local seafood processing sector is around £700 million per annum—it accounts for 32 per cent of total north-east food and drink sales. I am proud that my constituency of Aberdeen South and North Kincardine is home to several local processing businesses.

Recently, I spent small business week meeting local businesses in the constituency, including two long-standing family-run processing businesses that produce speciality products using fish that is sourced from across Scotland. Both those businesses are key parts of the local economy. They employ skilled local workers, supply the local food and drink sector and export their products as far afield as China.

However, things have been rough for those businesses. Both found themselves navigating the Covid-19 pandemic when along came the disaster of Brexit and the resultant uncertainty over workforce availability, export cost increases and diminishing export markets. Despite that, the businesses have shown extraordinary resilience. In September, John Ross, master curer and smoker, celebrated its gold star award from the Guild of Fine Food for its whisky smoked salmon. J Charles, a third-generation family-run business, made the brave decision to expand its online

business during the pandemic, remaining open and building up online deliveries. That is now a thriving part of its business.

At the most recent meeting of the north-east Scotland fisheries development partnership, Mike Park of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association updated us on the challenges that quota constraints, loss of access to fishing grounds in Norway and fear were having on the industry. The importance of the coastal negotiations, therefore, cannot be underestimated if we are to continue to have a thriving processing sector. According to Andrew Charles, it is absolutely vital that robust, sustainable science supports the total allowable catch agreed and that the total accountability of the stock catch is properly managed and policed.

As an independent coastal state, it is therefore vital that we have a robust and independent fisheries management force. The failure of the UK Government to build good working relationships with our nearest and most important quota trading partners will, regrettably, require robust policing. In that regard, I ask the UK Government to provide clarity around what increases in fishery protection might have to be budgeted for now that we cannot rely on European co-operation.

Never has there been a time when these negotiations have been more important, and never has there been a time when the case for independence has been so evident. I look forward to working with the cabinet secretary to ensure that the negotiations are a success for all who are involved in the sector, and especially for businesses in Aberdeen South and North Kincardine.

16:32

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** For the most part, we have had a very good debate. There have been some very constructive comments, and there is clear agreement on the need to support our coastal communities and fishing industries, but to do so within the context of the climate and the nature emergency and the need to deliver sustainable fishing.

As my colleagues have said, Scottish Labour believes that we need to address five key areas in the coastal state negotiations. Colin Smyth outlined those areas at the start of the debate, and I will summarise them. The first is the need to prevent overfishing and enhance local food supply chains. Secondly, we need an immediate review of how new and existing fishing quotas are allocated. Thirdly, we need to end fish being landed abroad—I will come back to that. Fourthly, we need to invest in building capacity and infrastructure in fishing quays and the processing

sector to regenerate our all-too-often neglected coastal communities and to get a fairer and greater share of the fishing in Scotland's waters for Scotland's fishers. Finally, we need to make sure that quotas are used to incentivise a change that moves us towards forms of fishing with a lower impact and less bycatch. Those are crucial issues.

From the COP26 events that I have attended, it is absolutely clear that there is widespread agreement that we have to act now. We need to halt global warming at 1.5°C. That also means addressing our nature emergency, be that the pollution of our waters by plastic or other waste, or as a result of overfishing. That is why we need to support our fishing industries in the future.

We need more political leadership from the Scottish Government. In a briefing that we got in June this year, the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust highlighted that Scotland's marine areas play a central but often overlooked role in the nation's carbon budget. The sea and many marine species and habitats, including kelp forests, sequester carbon dioxide. Of particular importance is the role that marine sediments play in storing carbon. Scotland's sea loesses have some of the richest carbon stores on earth, containing many times more carbon per unit than our terrestrial peatlands. However, while we protect our peatlands and are considering restoring them, marine sediments continue to be disturbed and damaged by heavy mobile fishing gear, so we need to act.

We need to encourage and support sustainable local fisheries, such as the Clyde creel fisheries and other local organisations.

Scotland's marine assessment 2020 found that fishing was the most significant and widespread pressure on Scotland's seas. In particular, it noted that bottom trawling and other mobile bottom-contacting fishing methods had led to widespread changes in our ecosystem. We need to reduce the use of those methods and incentivise change. That is critical for the future of our industry.

In addition, discard practices are resulting in vast volumes of fish being killed and thrown back into the sea. As well as being environmentally damaging, that contributes to food waste. Given that many of the fish that are thrown back are juvenile fish, because they are too small to market, that reduces the following year's fish catch. The practice was supposedly made illegal in 2019, but it is apparently an open secret within fisheries management that it continues today. Most egregiously, an additional uplift quota was created in an effort to help with the transition to no-discard fisheries, but rather than incentivising change, it has been used by some in the fishing sector to continue to discard fish, which is compounding

overfishing and resulting in yet more environmental harm.

Now is the time to use the powers that are set out in the Fisheries Act 2020 and create marine protected areas. The Arran marine protected area is a perfect example of the benefits of such protection, which not only vastly improves the sea bed and biodiversity in the area, but provides a safe haven for fry and increases fishing yields in the surrounding areas. We also have good evidence of how the Gaelic language is helping to protect our fisheries through the passing down of local knowledge through the generations. That shows that the issue is a cultural as well as an industry one, and it shows how deeply intertwined our communities are with the seas that they work with and the need for us to support them at a local level.

We have had an interesting set of exchanges across the chamber. There have been disagreements but, at the end of the day, fisheries management is the responsibility of the Scottish ministers. Although fishing communities have a key role to play in responsible management of the seas, the Scottish ministers have a critical role to play in deciding how our seas are used. We may have fewer incomprehensible regulations, but that can result in a race to the bottom. The Scottish Parliament is a powerful one, and I hope that we use the agreement that we have across the chamber to support more decisive action.

Fishing makes a vital contribution to local economies. Some of the most powerful and emotional contributions that we have heard today have reflected the fact that colleagues know that. Fishing is an industry that lies at the heart of many communities, and one that has a history and a culture of its own. We need to protect that.

I found it really ironic that some of the speeches of Conservative members about Brexit did not accept the reality of its impact. We need only look at the impact on demersal fishers in Douglas Ross's area. Fish are being landed abroad, which means that Scotland's economy and food system are being bypassed, along with Scottish jobs. Many large fishing businesses have elected to land the fish that they catch abroad and to supply them directly to processing factories there. We need change, because jobs are flying out of the north-east fishing towns. Skippers have been on the brink of financial ruin, as others have said, yet the Conservatives are patting themselves on the back. Fifty-five per cent of the mackerel that was caught by Scottish fishing vessels last year was landed at a foreign port. That cannot be acceptable. We need action.

We urgently need the Scottish and UK Governments to work together. We know that they will not agree, but the Scottish Government must

be respected. It must be at the top table with the UK Government. We need engagement and the sharing of expertise and knowledge. Crucially, as Michael Marra and other members across the chamber said, we need to make sure that funding reaches our coastal communities to support the sustainable fishing and the jobs that we have all said that we support. Let us have constructive collaboration. People do not need to agree on everything, but if we are to support our fishing communities, our environment and, crucially, jobs in our local communities, we need the Scottish and UK Governments to work together.

16:39

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I apologise for arriving slightly late for the start of the debate; I missed the first minute of the cabinet secretary's speech. I would like to make up for that by offering, as is traditional in these annual debates, best wishes to her in the upcoming negotiations, not least because it will be the first time that she has participated in those negotiations as cabinet secretary. Conservative members hope that she secures as beneficial a deal as possible for Scotland's fisheries sector, working in tandem with the UK Government.

I also offer the thanks of these benches to all those who work in that sector, whether they be the some 4,700 fishers employed on Scottish-registered vessels, those who work in our processing firms or those who work to promote our fantastic fish and shellfish products.

Covid-19 has brought immense logistical challenges to all sectors of the economy, not least our fishing industry. We on these benches praise all the work that those in that industry have done to adapt to the rapidly changing environment produced by the pandemic. It has been a volatile time, indeed.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I am highly aware of the importance of the sector to the areas that I represent. We must treat this debate and the upcoming negotiations with the utmost seriousness.

It is important to recognise the variety within the fishing sector. That point was made by both Rhoda Grant and Colin Smyth, who said that we must remember the smaller boats as well as the larger vessels, boats and businesses in the industry. Likewise, we must recognise that fishing on the western seaboard of Scotland involves more nephrops than pelagic fishing. It is important to acknowledge the diverse nature of the sector that we are debating.

It is disappointing that some in other parties used the debate to resurrect old arguments about the constitution and to fight old battles over Brexit.

That does nothing for our fishing industry and those who work in it. Those who work in our fishing industry want to see politicians come up with solutions to problems—not merely regurgitate the same old grievances that have plagued our politics for so long.

The fact is that we are now an independent coastal state. With that comes an ability, in the long term, to use that status to our competitive advantage to benefit our fishing communities and wider economy.

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Donald Cameron said a moment ago that the Scottish Government should work in conjunction with the UK Government. However, given that since the 1970s successive Tory Prime Ministers have consistently let the Scottish industry down, does he not think that the time is right for the Scottish Government to be the lead negotiator in future?

**Donald Cameron:** No. I do not think that and I do not accept the premise of that intervention. The fact is that we have delivered the independent coastal state that the United Kingdom now is, and that we have the ability to use that to benefit our fishing communities.

I accept that we face short-term challenges. We recognise that and we want to face them head on. I welcome initiatives from the UK Government to mitigate the short-term impacts of Britain's exit from the EU. Others spoke about the establishment of the £23 million seafood disruption support scheme, which is open to those who export fish and shellfish to the EU. I also acknowledge that the UK Government has released an initial £24 million of funding from its £100 million UK seafood fund, which will help businesses to develop technology and trial new gear, and support world-class research to improve productivity and the long-term sustainability of the industry.

However, the response to those short-term challenges goes far beyond financial investment, as important as that is. The UK Government has met regularly with the industry and worked closely with Marine Scotland on the new 2021 arrangements. That work has been met with praise by the sector. The chief executive of the SFF, Elspeth Macdonald, said that

"we know the UK team has worked hard for several months to achieve the best outcome that was possible. We are very grateful to them for their efforts."

It is clear that much progress has been made, but it is also evident that more must be done to secure a strong deal that benefits all parts of the fishing industry in the upcoming negotiations.

It was positive to learn that the total tonnage of pelagic landings increased by 13 per cent in 2020

compared to 2019, and that the total value of that increased by 6 per cent. That was acknowledged by the executive officer of the Shetland Fishermen's Association, who noted that

"This bring a long-awaited end to past practice in which the EU used to hand substantial amounts of Scottish quota to Norway."

I recognise the disappointing reports that there were falls in both demersal and shellfish tonnage and value. The Scottish Government's recently published "Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2020" document suggests that that drop in tonnage was, in large part, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions that were placed on industry, as well as the decline in demand from the hospitality sector during the period when restrictions were at their most severe. We cannot treat that as a one-off, and it is clear that we must ensure that both those specific parts of the sector recover and thrive in the coming years.

Unlike the SNP, which continues to put its faith in the common fisheries policy, members on these benches believe that the UK's ability to deliver free trade deals with other states and trading blocs will provide opportunities for our sector to grow. A few years ago, I met the owner of a local shellfish processor in Alasdair Allan's constituency and I asked him his opinion of Britain's exit from the EU and how it might impact on his business. He was optimistic and told me that the future growth of his business was dependent not on our membership of the EU, but rather on the ability to access and benefit from the growing demand for Scottish shellfish in Asia. That is not to say that many businesses in the shellfish sector have not felt an impact from the new arrangements with the EU—it would be wrong to suggest that. Clearly, more must be done to help the sector in the immediate aftermath of exiting from the EU, but that example is an indication that many businesses seek greater opportunities beyond the confines of the EU. It is obvious that the UK and Scottish Governments should be working together to achieve those outcomes.

There have been many excellent contributions across the chamber. I agree with Michael Marra, who said that, behind what we are debating, there is a wider context of skills, housing and livelihoods in general. Rachael Hamilton concentrated on the importance of getting young people into the industry and Douglas Lumsden spoke about the benefits of being autonomous as an independent coastal state. Many Labour members and Ariane Burgess rightly drew attention to the importance of sustainability. In the week of COP26, it is correct to remind us that sustainability cannot be just a catchphrase; it has to mean something in practice.

We recognise that the negotiations are of immense importance. We want to see constructive

talks that deliver growth across the sector. Now is the time to deliver for Scotland's fishing communities, and for that reason alone we should all unite in seeking a positive outcome.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call cabinet secretary Mairi Gougeon to wind up the debate.

16:47

**Mairi Gougeon:** I thank everyone who has taken part in the debate for their speeches and interventions. There have been some constructive moments and a wide range of views and issues have been aired. These matters affect not just those of us who live in and represent rural, coastal and island communities, but all of us. The debate has covered a lot of areas and has shown the breadth and complexity of our marine economy.

We are approaching the annual negotiations in the spirit of co-operation and partnership with our coastal state neighbours and allies, building on the relationships that we have established over many years. We are fortunate that we have some of the most respected and experienced fisheries managers in Europe, and I am confident that they will come back with a good deal for Scotland and the Scottish industry. Our positions and principles are based on the best science and the most up-to-date evidence available, and we look forward to negotiating with our international friends and partners on that basis. I look forward to reporting back to Parliament on the conclusion of the negotiations.

A number of valuable points were raised in the debate and I want to try to address as many of them as I can in my closing remarks. If I miss any, I urge members to contact me and I will be more than happy to follow them up.

First, I will address some of the points that have been made on funding, which Rachael Hamilton and a number of other members talked about in their speeches. It is unfair to paint a picture by comparing and contrasting the approaches, when in Scotland we do not even have the funds that were promised to us after Brexit. As I said in response to Rachael Hamilton, we received only £14 million in the replacement to the European maritime and fisheries fund, when we should have received £62 million. That was and should have been our allocation. The UK Government has actively short changed our coastal communities, bypassing our devolved Government at every turn.

**Rachael Hamilton:** It would be useful for the cabinet secretary to set out how the £180 million transition fund for moving away from the EU has worked for the fisheries industry, as well as the extra help that was given on veterinary capacity and the centralised hub. We have not had any detail on that.

**Mairi Gougeon:** First, it is only right and fair that the UK Government covers the cost of its approach to Brexit. Brexit is why we are in this mess, and it is only right that the UK Government compensates us for it. I will come on to address other points that were made about funding.

A point was made about new entrants. We are using the marine fund Scotland, which is our replacement for the EMFF, to support young fishers to purchase their first vessels.

Another important matter that a number of members, in particular Beatrice Wishart, raised today was the ICES advice, particularly on cod. We recognise how challenging that advice is, as it stands. It is a priority area for us as we go into the negotiations, and officials are doing all they can to get as good an outcome as possible when it comes to cod stocks. We are submitting a technical service request to ICES, to get a further evaluation of the assumptions that have been made, using the most up-to-date information that is available. I add that the UK is a contracting party to the ICES convention and, on 1 January, signed a memorandum of understanding to enable the UK to receive advice directly. We will not hesitate to use our membership to challenge advice or findings that we do not think are robust.

Beatrice Wishart called for transparency on the boarding of UK vessels. We proactively publish that information and I would be happy to contact the member with further details in that regard.

We all want a positive future for our fisheries and seafood industry in Scotland. That is probably the one solid point of consensus across the chamber that has emerged in the debate.

Karen Adam touched on another important point when she mentioned the good food nation policy. Our fishers provide us with a sustainable and nutritious source of protein, which we want to ensure that everyone in Scotland and others further afield can enjoy.

We all want a successful industry in Scotland. However, we cannot be blind, as the Tories are, to the significant barriers in the way of that, which need urgent and critical intervention from the UK Government. Emma Harper, Alasdair Allan and others mentioned the critical shortage of labour in the processing industry because of the end to freedom of movement and the UK Government's point-blank refusal to address the matter in a meaningful way. Although visas for poultry workers, butchers and heavy goods vehicle drivers have been introduced—although, given take-up so far, how successful those will be is anyone's guess—nothing has been offered to help the processing sector. When we add in the continual cost increases that the sector faces and the non-tariff barriers that Alasdair Allan mentioned, we

can see that the challenges are not going away. Some businesses are on a knife edge. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I cannot take an intervention; I need to make progress.

We need immediate intervention. We also need to consider what we can do in the longer term to address those challenges. We can address the skills gaps and shortages, but only in the longer term.

The Tories talked about all the powers that have come back to the Scottish ministers. I reiterate that we should also get the funding to reflect that. Tory members said that £100 million of funding has been announced, but that completely bypasses devolved Governments, in areas of policy that are fully devolved.

Douglas Lumsden mentioned funding for transformation. It is important to highlight that we provide funding for that, through our food processing, marketing and co-operation grant scheme.

I want to mention a few other initiatives before I bring the debate to a close. This Government is wholly committed to the sustainable development of our fishing industry. We recognise that Scotland's inshore fisheries are a most valuable asset and make a significant contribution to the economic and cultural fabric of our coastal and island communities. In early 2022, we will consult on inshore fisheries management elements of the agreement with the Scottish Green Party, as Ariane Burgess said, including on a cap on inshore fishing activity, which represents an important step in our inshore fisheries policy development.

I will address a point relating to marine protected areas and highly protected marine areas, which were mentioned by Ariane Burgess and by Sarah Boyack in her closing comments. Making space for nature is vital in addressing the twin biodiversity and climate crises. The shared marine space has become increasingly valuable and contested, especially as net zero industries emerge and as we strive to restore the rich biodiversity of Scotland's seas. Marine protected areas are a vital part of that restoration process. Our Scottish marine protected area network already covers 37 per cent of our waters, and we have committed to delivering fisheries management measures in existing marine protected areas by 2024.

We will now go even further by designating 10 per cent of our waters as highly protected marine areas by 2026. That will provide a higher level of protection and allow for additional recovery and enhancement of the marine environment. Such conservation measures will help to halt biodiversity loss and will provide a critical buffer in our fight to

mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. They will protect the resources and industries on which we all rely and will ensure that we can continue to benefit from our rich seas for many years and generations to come.

The economic link is another way in which we will benefit. That is an important point to highlight, as I did in my opening remarks. The Scottish Government is committed to amending the economic link arrangements for Scottish fishing vessels in order to increase the amount of fish that is landed in Scotland and to broaden the return to our nation from fishing, thereby extending the benefits to our coastal communities.

In drawing the debate to a close, I offer a couple of final reflections. The fishing industry faces many challenges. Like many industries in this country, it has struggled in the past two years because of the pandemic, but it has also suffered because of the botched Brexit deal that the Tories have inflicted on it.

In contrast, the Scottish Government has a vision for the Scottish fishing industry and has a clear plan in place under our future fisheries management strategy. We believe in an industry that is based on science and evidence and that has sustainability as its core principle. The outcomes that we seek at the annual fisheries negotiations are aligned to that vision. We are not looking for a deal that will benefit vested interests or that will betray a whole industry, as the Brexit deal has done. We are committed to delivering the right deal for Scotland—a deal that allows our fishers to work today, while preserving our shared marine heritage for tomorrow.

## Point of Order

16:57

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

This is the third time that I have had to raise the use of Government initiated questions by the Scottish Government to announce significant and substantive policy. Today, the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport published a draft hydrogen action plan that is backed by £100 million of public spending commitments. The announcement for the publication was made via another underhand GIQ—S6W-04328.

The Presiding Officer has previously stated that the Scottish Government should

“reflect on the use of GIQs when Parliament is sitting.”—*[Official Report, 22 June 2021; c 12.]*

It has not. From the chair, the Presiding Officer has also stated on multiple occasions that all significant and substantive announcements should be made to the Parliament, whenever that is possible. That has been ignored.

I will tell members about the arguments that the Scottish National Party Minister for Parliamentary Business has made in meetings of the Parliamentary Bureau. The minister has said that he has encouraged ministers to attend the chamber to deliver statements and submit themselves to the scrutiny of members’ questions, and he appears to be uncomfortable when they do not do that. I take the minister at his word. Well, Presiding Officer, we have no platform to scrutinise the action plan this week.

A clear pattern of disrespect has now been shown by the Scottish Government, and I see no indication that it will change its ways. What course of action is open to us, as parliamentarians, if everything that we do, including our scrutiny of the Executive, is continuously controlled and constrained by the Scottish Government? Will you ensure that formal guidance is issued to the Scottish Government on the use of GIQs?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** I thank Stephen Kerr for his point of order. GIQs are a recognised mechanism through which the Government can make announcements. As the Presiding Officer has previously set out, significant announcements should be made in the chamber to Parliament whenever that is possible, but there will, of course, be instances in which that is not possible. I have not had the opportunity to study in detail the GIQ that the member referred to, but I remind him that there is guidance in place and that GIQs can be followed up with debates.

The member might wish to raise that with the Parliamentary Bureau.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):**  
On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Last week, the Scottish Government agreed to provide a statement on incineration and the much-delayed deposit return scheme, but the topic for next week's statement in the business motion is "Towards a Circular Economy". I seek your guidance on how we can have full scrutiny of those incredibly important topics, and I would welcome an additional statement on the circular economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank the member for his point of order. The Parliamentary Bureau discussed the matter and Parliament agreed to the subject matter of the statement that is proposed for Wednesday 17 November. I understand that that is the current position. The member's party's business manager has the opportunity to seek further clarification on the matter at the bureau on Tuesday 16 November, but my understanding is that the substance of the statement that is proposed is as was agreed by the Parliament last week.

As I said before the points of order, and should say for the record, the debate on Scotland's approach to the 2021 coastal state negotiations has been concluded.

## Business Motion

17:02

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-02056, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 16 November 2021

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: COP26 Outcomes

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Celebrate the First Anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 17 November 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
COVID Recovery and Parliamentary Business;  
Net Zero, Energy and Transport

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Towards a Circular Economy

*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.40 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 18 November 2021

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Parliament Corporate Body

Questions

2.45 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Rural Affairs and Islands

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the UK Government's Levelling Up Agenda in Scotland

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 23 November 2021

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 24 November 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Health and Social Care;  
Social Justice, Housing and Local  
Government

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Transvaginal Mesh Removal (Cost Reimbursement) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Financial Resolution: Transvaginal Mesh Removal (Cost Reimbursement) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 25 November 2021

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 15 November 2021, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-02057 and S6M-02058, on designation of lead committees.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Subsidy Control Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[*George Adam*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:03

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. I propose to ask a single question on the two Parliamentary Bureau motions, unless any member objects.

As there are no objections, the question is, that motions S6M-02057 and S6M-02058, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on designation of lead committees, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Subsidy Control Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## One Hundred Years of the Poppy in the UK

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place and that face masks should be worn when moving around the chamber and around the Holyrood campus.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-01536, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on 100 years of the poppy in the United Kingdom. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament acknowledges that the first annual Poppy appeal was launched in the UK in November 1921; understands that in excess of nine million poppies were manufactured for this event and that they sold out almost immediately; believes that this raised more than £106,000, the equivalent of over £5.3 million today; notes that the money was put to assisting veterans in finding jobs and homes; believes this was the birth of an enduring symbol of the nation's gratitude for its veterans and helps provide them with a lifeline; acknowledges that, in Scotland, Lady Haig's Poppy Factory opened in 1926 at a former wood-cutting factory in the grounds of Whitefoord House on Edinburgh's Royal Mile; notes that it moved to the Warriston area of the capital in 1965; recognises that its team of 34 disabled veterans hand-produce more than five million poppies and 15,000 wreaths annually; notes that the team relocated to Redford Barracks in 2019 to allow substantial refurbishment work to be carried out at the Factory, returning this summer; believes that, with the help of sales by organisations such as Poppyscotland, the Royal British Legion, the Ancre Somme Association Scotland and myriad Armed Forces' charities, this adoption as a symbol of charity right across the UK, including in the Mid-Scotland & Fife region, has seen the poppy transcend its purely metaphorical and commemorative status, additionally becoming a physical and palpable object with the single purpose of providing financial stability for men and women affected by war and conflict, and notes that people can also offer support by visiting the Poppyscotland website and purchasing from its pages at [poppyscotlandstore.com](http://poppyscotlandstore.com).

17:05

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am delighted to have the opportunity to open this highly poignant members' business debate. During the previous session of Parliament, I was extremely privileged to have been able to mark two significant military centenaries in the chamber. The opportunity of marking such an anniversary for the most all-encompassing symbol of remembrance for all those who served, and are still serving, in Her Majesty's armed forces throughout the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, as well as for their families, is a special moment for me. I thank my fellow MSPs who supported my members' business motion for allowing me this privilege.

The history of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance may not be as clear cut as has been previously assumed. The first reference to the poppy has been traced back to the Napoleonic wars. Several documents have been unearthed, noting that, following Napoleonic battles, poppies became abundant on the battlefields where soldiers had fallen. The same sources drew the first comparison between bloodstained individuals and the red colour of the poppy. As many of us know, the growth of the scarlet corn poppy is aided by massive disruption to the soil. Thus, the devastation of the natural environment caused by such conflicts saw fields littered with bodies alongside red poppies.

To fast-forward to modern times, while poppies remain more popular in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries, other nations have become involved. Actually, it may be an American, Moina Michael, who can be credited with the first charitable poppy sale. She worked for the overseas war secretaries office of the Young Men's Christian Association in New York. She was so stirred by what is perhaps the most famous war poem of all time, "In Flanders Fields", by Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, that she vowed to pin a poppy to her lapel and swore always to wear one to honour the war dead. Using money that she had earned from the YMCA, she purchased 25 silk poppies and distributed them among her colleagues.

Moina Michael continued her endeavours to ensure that the poppy was adopted as a symbol of national remembrance, and the American Legion eventually adopted the poppy as an official symbol of remembrance two years later. The popularity of the new custom grew exponentially, and the tradition crossed the Atlantic.

A lady named Mme E Guérin had travelled from France to attend a conference of the American Legion, and she saw the sale of poppies as a great way to raise money for children who had suffered during the great war in France. She was quick to organise a team of French widows, who immediately began making paper poppies on an industrial scale. They made 1 million of them by 1921. Following the tremendous success of her poppy sales, Mme Guérin sent a delegation of poppy sellers to London in a bid to get the United Kingdom involved. Field Marshal Douglas Haig was highly enthusiastic about the idea that was put forward by Guérin's delegates. To that end, the Royal British Legion adopted the poppy almost immediately, and the first-ever annual poppy day in the United Kingdom occurred on 11 November 1921, marking the third anniversary of armistice day. The poppy rapidly outgrew its American roots and was adopted by Canada and Australia in 1921 and by New Zealand a year later.

At that time, poppies intended for distribution in the UK were still made in France by war widows, but a factory opened in Bermondsey in 1922. The factory employed five disabled ex-military personnel to produce poppies all year round for distribution in the weeks prior to remembrance Sunday. The first official UK poppy appeal in 1921 raised £106,000, equivalent to almost £5.5 million today. The Royal British Legion now aims to make £25 million annually from the sale of poppies.

Here in Scotland, Lady Haig's Poppy Factory opened in 1926 at a former woodcutting factory in the grounds of Whitefoord house, opposite this Parliament's Queensberry house. It moved to the Warriston area of the city in 1965. Its team of 34 veterans proudly produce more than five million poppies and 15,000 wreaths annually. They relocated to Redford barracks in 2019 to allow substantial refurbishment work to be carried out at the factory, to which they began returning this summer.

The poppy's enormous financial success and its adoption as a symbol of charity means that it has transcended its purely metaphorical and commemorative status. The red wildflower has become a physical, palpable object providing financial stability for those affected by war. That is a result of the tireless endeavours of volunteers from across the United Kingdom.

Poppy sales support the Royal British Legion, Poppyscotland and the Ancre Somme Association, for which I am proud to be the honorary ambassador for Scotland. I also hold the post of honorary president for the Ribbon of Poppies project.

I conclude by echoing the words of Canadian journalist Matt Gurney to those who accuse the red poppy of glorifying war:

"The red poppy is inherently a symbol of peace. Not just of peace as a concept—pleasant a concept as it is—but as the hard-won peace that hundreds of thousands ... earned at such great cost."

The poppy is not a symbol of anyone's victory. The flags of nations and countries or military ensigns all serve far more ably in that role. Neither is the poppy a symbol of military conquest or national glory. It is a natural reminder of the ravages of war and conflict. None of us needs to be reminded why the red poppy was chosen as the symbol of remembrance. Flanders field is a poignant place and it is because of that that we must, and will, always remember.

17:13

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I congratulate Alexander Stewart on securing time for debate on this important anniversary.

In 1915, while the second battle of Ypres was raging, a Canadian medic, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, who was the grandson of Scottish immigrants from Kirkcudbrightshire, noticed how bright red poppies grew in the war-torn Flemish landscape. Despite the suffering around him, McCrae was inspired by the growing poppies to write the poem "In Flanders Field", as Alexander Stewart pointed out. That poem, closely associated with the appalling losses of the first world war, is renowned throughout the world. It first appeared in *Punch* magazine and was quickly republished, becoming synonymous with the sacrifice of fallen soldiers everywhere.

Although the association between the poppy and conflict can be traced back to the Napoleonic wars, McCrae's poem inspired the adoption of the poppy as the flower of remembrance in Britain, France, Canada, the Commonwealth and the United States. In the aftermath of world war one, poppies came to symbolise the sacrifice of those who gave their lives in conflict, including an estimated 147,000 Scots, representing 14 per cent of the British empire's total war dead at a time when barely 1 per cent of the empire's population was Scottish.

Four of those who made the ultimate sacrifice were the Mochrie brothers, James, Matthew, Robert and Andrew, from Kilbirnie in my constituency, the town where I live and where their family lives on. Tragically, James, Matthew and Robert all died while serving in different regiments on the opening day of the battle of Loos on 25 September 1915. In that battle, Scots made up almost half of the 72 battalions that were deployed, and in barely three weeks, British casualties numbered 60,000. The fourth brother, Andrew, died later, on 9 June 1917, on the battlefield of Arras.

Although no graves of the men exist, all four brothers appear in bronze along with 155 others on Kilbirnie's war memorial. A fifth Mochrie brother who served on a minesweeper survived, as did their sister, a Red Cross nurse, who sadly lost her son on the HMS Hood in the second world war.

So many soldiers lost their lives in the conflict, but tens of thousands died subsequently from wounds. My maternal grandmother lost her uncle, who was captured in 1918 and sent to the Silesian mines. A guard hit him with a shovel, and he died two years after returning home in 1921, aged 23. His name appears on no memorial.

My maternal grandfather was mustard gassed aged 18, a month before the end of the war. He died of emphysema at 41 years old, when my mother was only a toddler, his life inevitably shortened by his time in the trenches.

Demobbed soldiers often returned home struggling with psychological trauma as a result of the horrific scenes that they witnessed on the battlefields. Many also faced unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

Red silk poppies were first worn 100 years ago, not only to keep alive the memory of the servicemen and women who died, but because their production offered employment to men who had been disabled during world war one, while proceeds were used to help other veterans with employment and housing.

Of course, the great war to end all wars, as it was known a century ago, was not the last, and Scotland's Lady Haig Poppy Factory, which is still there today, provides dignity through work to 34 mainly disabled veterans, who, between them, have seen service from Korea to the Persian Gulf.

Money raised provides invaluable assistance to Scotland's armed forces community, ranging from local signposting, housing, mental health, mobility employment and financial support, while Poppyscotland's important advocacy work highlights the experience of serving personnel, veterans and their families.

Together with the Royal British Legion, Poppyscotland has long campaigned for the UK Government to scrap fees for military personnel from the Commonwealth, and their families, who wish to stay in the UK once they leave service. I wish them success in that campaign.

The 100th anniversary of the first poppy appeal makes us reflect and remember those from Scotland and beyond who gave their lives in world war one and the many conflicts since. Behind each statistic lies a human story of a life taken, often at a young age, such as those of Kilbirnie's own Mochrie brothers. We are all indebted to their sacrifice, and it is our duty to ensure that veterans and their families have access to the services and support that they need.

Once again, I congratulate Alexander Stewart on bringing this important commemoration of Poppyscotland's 100th anniversary to the chamber.

17:17

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I congratulate my friend Alexander Stewart on securing this important debate at such an important time.

In the run-up to remembrance Sunday, we all reflect on what has gone before us, and the sacrifice made by many servicemen and women in two world wars and other conflicts around the globe. We wear our poppies with pride. I say that as someone who represents the Highlands and

Islands region, which has many strong military links. My area of Moray is home to RAF Lossiemouth and Kinloss barracks. In communities across Scotland, such as Moray, we can see the support for our current military personnel, and the active role that they play, and the many veterans who are among us in the communities that we represent.

Earlier today, I was at the Lothian veterans centre in Dalkeith to see the outstanding work that Ian Stewart and his team do there. They have a drop-in centre just off the High Street, which is extremely busy. I went along to one of the centre's events today, and it was encouraging to see the support that is available to our veterans, although there is more that we can do.

As Alexander Stewart and Kenny Gibson did, I pay tribute to the work of the Lady Haig Poppy Factory. We are all seeing that work with the poppies that we are wearing and the wreaths that we will lay later this week. I congratulate everyone who is involved on the work that they do with the charity and Poppyscotland.

I also want to use my time today to speak about one individual in particular. Sir Alistair Irwin, who is a Moray constituent of mine, has been the president of Poppyscotland for 15 years, and he was at the launch of the Poppyscotland appeal here in the Scottish Parliament a couple of weeks ago. This will be his final appeal as president of Poppyscotland. As he has given so much service over such a long period of time to Poppyscotland and the Royal British Legion, I think that it is right that we in the Parliament say thank you to Sir Alistair for his efforts, not only over a few weeks, months or years but for well over a decade and a half. *[Applause.]*

That commitment to the armed forces started with Sir Alistair's own career. He joined the Black Watch in 1970 and retired from the army in 2005. However, people like Sir Alistair never really retire. His contribution to the armed forces and the work that he does for veterans across Scotland and the United Kingdom has continued ever since. He has been the president of Royal British Legion Scotland and Poppyscotland since 2006, and he is the president of Scotland's Officers Association. Between 2006 and 2011, he also served as the president of Veterans Scotland, and he was vice-chairman of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Whenever anyone meets and speaks to Sir Alistair, they can see the passion that he takes to the Poppyscotland role. Many people take on the role only for a year or two, but he has done it for 15 years, which shows just how important it is to him.

It is also important for us to say what Sir Alistair has achieved over that time. He has brought a lot of professionalism to the organisations with which he has worked. He has changed those organisations significantly and we have all benefited from his work over such a long time.

Sir Alistair regularly volunteers to sell poppies in Moray. He is not only at the top of the organisation; he wants to get out with other volunteers to help collect the funds. As Alexander Stewart mentioned, communities have raised many millions of pounds by selling poppies.

The Royal British Legion motto is “Service not self”. Sir Alistair Irwin embodies that motto, as does every single volunteer who, at this time of the year, sells the poppies that we all wear with pride. We thank Sir Alistair and every single one of them for the work that they continue to do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I add my personal recognition of the contribution that Sir Alistair Irwin has made.

17:21

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate my colleague and friend Alexander Stewart on securing this members’ business debate. It is fitting that this topic is the subject of a members’ business debate, which I will come back to.

I echo Douglas Ross’s words and extend my thanks and congratulations—and the well-deserved rest that is possibly coming—to Sir Alistair Irwin. I also thank Lady Haig’s Poppy Factory, the 34 veterans it currently helps and the many veterans it has helped over time.

I would like to take this short time to put on record the various poppy designs of the countries that have been referred to, and why the poppy is so important to them.

In Scotland, we have four petals with a black centre. We used to have a leaf, but it was removed to make the poppy easier to post. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the poppy has two petals with a black centre. Some of the poppies have a leaf, which is often said to reflect the addition of the events of world war two.

In the USA, people wear a poppy on memorial day, which is on the last Monday in May. It has a crêpe-paper style but with a green centre. In Australia, they remember on Anzac day, on 25 April, and they have a single red corrugated petal. In New Zealand, they have a similar design to Australia, but they choose to lose the corrugation and have it flat.

I raise that because, at its heart, the poppy reflects the thoughts of individuals. It reflects

differences, but it also reminds people of a similarity: tragic loss; a memory of generations; and a memory of individuals who have paid the ultimate sacrifice or who, as Kenneth Gibson rightly said, have returned bearing scars, some of which are invisible. One of the powerful images of the poppy is that, although it may look different to different people around the world, what is felt inside is the same. That is thanks for a gift that others, whom they might not even know, have given. I welcome the opportunity for us in the chamber to extend our thanks to those people and to the volunteers who stand in the rain selling the poppies.

At the weekend, my son visited the cinema. He told me that he and his friends rushed around trying to find a sea cadet who could sell them a poppy. Although the sea cadets were having lunch, one of them stood up, put his burger to one side and offered them a poppy to wear. Those individual acts of young people speak of such great hope, arising as they do from such tragedy, which is moving further and further into the past.

I would like to say to young people that Poppyscotland gives opportunities for everyone to take part by using a variety of fund-raising methods. People can challenge themselves. The Poppyscotland sportive, which takes place in September, has people ride their bike one of three distances around the beauty of East Lothian, ending up in my home town of Prestonpans. If they are feeling very brave, they can take on the 102-mile route down into the Borders and back. I am astounded at the ability of cyclists to do that, and I am enormously proud that they do so to raise money for our veterans and their families. Through Poppyscotland, we see that work day in, day out. For that, I say thank you.

17:25

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is a pleasure and a privilege to follow Martin Whitfield, who gave an excellent speech. I also congratulate my friend and colleague Alexander Stewart on securing the debate.

For 100 years, the poppy has been our nation’s symbol of gratitude for and remembrance of our veterans and those who could rightly say:

“For your tomorrow, we gave our today”.

As we all know, the poppy is also a symbol of hope, life and freedom from the horrors and destruction of the first world war, although the war to end all wars it was not to be.

The first world war cost the lives of more than 800,000 British and Commonwealth servicemen—men and boys from these islands and from far-flung parts of the then empire. Like many of you, I

have stood at the Menin gate at Ypres and at the Thiepval memorial and read the names of the thousands of men and boys—sons, brothers, boyfriends, fiancés and husbands—missing with no known burial place. It is humbling, it is moving and it is upsetting.

My family, like many of yours, has graves in Flanders and in France; my great-uncles lie there. There is something powerful and poignant about the rows of headstones in those immaculate war cemeteries. In 1922, King George V visited Tyne Cot cemetery and looked out over the rows of thousands of wooden crosses that had been planted in memory of the fallen. He said:

“I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon the Earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war.”

After the fighting ended, the poppy grew in the churned-up foreign battlegrounds. With its blood-red colour, it quickly came to represent the immeasurable sacrifice of a generation, and it was formally adopted, as has been said, by the Royal British Legion in 1921 as a symbol of remembrance of all those who died in the first world war and later conflicts.

I believe that there is another layer to the symbolism of the poppy. After such horror and death on such a grand scale, life re-emerges. The sacrifice of the fallen and the loss and pain of their families should not be in vain. Therefore, on the record of our Parliament, I humbly express my personal gratitude and the feelings of, I am sure, so many more people in Central Scotland for the work of Poppyscotland; for those who make the annual Scottish poppy appeal possible; for the service of the veterans at Lady Haig’s Poppy Factory, who make millions of poppies and thousands of wreaths; for the many hundreds of volunteers who, over the generations from 1921 to the present day, have sold poppies and made collections; and for the many businesses, organisations and individuals who see that the poppy continues to be prominently displayed each year.

I say to our veterans and their families, and to those who continue to serve our country in the uniform of Her Majesty’s armed forces at risk of life and limb: thank you for your vigilance and your service; because of what you do for us—day in, day out, every single day—we are free.

We need to remember. We need to remember 100 years of the poppy and 100 years of caring. It must never end, because remembrance and the poppy are a mark of who we are and the people we have become.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Keith Brown to respond to the debate. Cabinet

secretary, you have around seven minutes, please.

17:28

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** I thank Alexander Stewart for securing this members’ business debate to mark the centenary of Poppyscotland’s iconic poppy appeal. It is clear, from the contributions that we have heard, that, across the chamber, we are unanimous in recognising the formidable work of Poppyscotland over the past 100 years and its dedication to and support for our armed forces community.

Alexander Stewart rightly mentioned the symbolism of the poppy, but he also mentioned the practical benefits that accrue from people buying poppies and from the work of Poppyscotland, which is the real point of Poppyscotland.

The remembrance period, which we are currently in, serves a vital purpose in allowing everybody in Scotland a moment to pause, reflect and be thankful to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. It is very important that we to continue to remember those who served and lost their lives in all conflicts—as Alexander Stewart said, not to glorify war but to recognise the sacrifice that was made to protect the freedoms and the way of life that we hold so dear.

The poppies that we wear, which were inspired, as we heard from Kenneth Gibson, by Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae’s poem “In Flanders Fields”, which was written during the first world war, are a tangible symbol of remembrance and of the enduring courage, loyalty and commitment of our regulars and reservists. That shows that, after 100 years, no matter how much time may pass, we will never forget their sacrifices or those made by their families and loved ones.

I was delighted to attend the launch of the 2021 poppy appeal in Parliament at the end of last month—which was also mentioned by Douglas Ross—to hear at first hand how it has evolved over the past 100 years, no more so than in the past 18 months, with increasingly innovative approaches to raising funds and the absolute necessity of that in the face of the pandemic. Increasingly, and exclusively now for many people, payments are being made digitally. Sir Alistair Irwin had some problems with the move to digitising the poppy appeal, but I am sure that that digitalisation will only strengthen it.

The Scottish poppy appeal is Poppyscotland’s largest fundraising event, and all the money that is raised goes to the armed forces community here, in Scotland, to provide support in six key areas: finance, advice, employment, mobility, housing

and mental health. The appeal's success relies on the dedication and hard work of the 10,000 volunteers across Scotland. Without them, it would be impossible to raise the vital funds that are used to deliver support to former service personnel and their families.

For that reason and for many others, I give my personal thanks to the dedicated Poppyscotland staff and volunteers for all that they do—as Sir Alistair did when he spoke at the event that has been mentioned. Stephen Kerr was there, too. The work that has been done by some individuals—I am thinking of one or two of the people who received awards that night—has been absolutely phenomenal. That includes, of course, the devoted team of 34 disabled veterans based at New Haig house, who hand produce more than 2 million poppies and 10,000 wreaths every year.

The poppy appeal and the commemorative events serve a vital purpose for the people of Scotland in allowing time for reflection on the sacrifices that have been made to protect our freedoms. As we all know, Scotland has a large and vibrant armed forces community, and the role of the charity sector is essential in delivering valuable support to veterans right across Scotland. I am sure that I speak for everyone in the chamber today when I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who supports the various charities in whatever way they can.

Since I first took responsibility for the veterans portfolio, in previous ministerial roles, and, more recently, since being appointed the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans, I have been fortunate and humbled to hear directly about the experiences of veterans in our community, including the vital assistance that veterans receive from third sector organisations.

For our part, the Scottish Government remains committed to supporting our veterans community. We recognise that veterans and their families are true assets to their communities, their employers and wider society. That includes war widows, who have given so much. I am honoured to be representing the Scottish Government at the War Widows' Association annual service of remembrance at the cenotaph in London this weekend, although I will not be able to stay for the festival of remembrance, which I think is also celebrating a 100-year anniversary, because I will be returning to Glasgow to attend the remembrance event there on Sunday. We remain committed to those remembrance events.

In the chamber tomorrow, I will provide Parliament with an update on the Scottish Government's continued support for our veterans and armed forces community, which will include a focus on remembrance commemorations.

I will say a few words about some of the points that have been made in the debate. We heard some very interesting accounts from Alexander Stewart, Kenneth Gibson and Martin Whitfield on the origins of the poppy as a symbol. Kenneth Gibson mentioned the incredible story of the four brothers called Mochrie, who were from Ayrshire. To think that four brothers from the same family were all killed in the war—the sacrifice was truly astonishing.

I was interested to hear Douglas Ross talk about the Lothians veterans centre, mainly because it is a centre that I have visited before. He mentioned Ian Stewart. Ian is a friend of mine, and he has been involved in the veterans centre just along the road from the Parliament. We served together in 45 Commando during the Falklands war. I should mention that he is also a former editor of *The Scotsman*. He has done some fantastic work with veterans.

I associate myself with the comments that have been made about the contribution that Sir Alistair Irwin has made over many years. I have stood at many remembrance events with him. The work that he has done has been tremendous, and we should remember it. Like Douglas Ross, I am fairly certain that Sir Alistair will still be seen at remembrance events, in Moray and elsewhere, when he has the chance to attend them. Something of a hole will be left in his life, and he admitted as much to me when I spoke with him recently at the remembrance event in Princes Street gardens.

Martin Whitfield made an important point about differences in poppies. Some time ago, I wrote an article about that issue, which could have been construed as being contentious. The point of it was that it really does not matter what colour or design of poppy people wear; they have the same intent. However, I would make the more contentious point that that is also true if somebody does not wear a poppy. I always wear a red poppy because I know that the money is going to a cause that I am very keen to see supported, but others do not want to, and we have to remember that the people we are commemorating fought those wars so that people would have a choice about what they do—which includes not wearing a poppy if they do not want to. I would encourage everyone to wear a poppy, but I respect the rights of those who do not want to wear one, whatever their reason. Martin Whitfield drew out some of the differences that we have, but he said that we all feel the same in our hearts about what we are trying to commemorate.

Stephen Kerr, Alexander Stewart and I have together attended a number of events at Bridge of Allan and elsewhere, and I have visited many of the places that Stephen Kerr talked about,

including the Menin Gate at Ypres, Contalmaison, Arras and so on. He also talked about the poignancy of some of the graveyards, which are incredible to witness. It is good to see so many schools taking battlefield tours over the years, because they drive the subject home to young people, who are often particularly interested when they see the graves of people who were 17 or 18 years old when they died.

When I go to those cemeteries, my inclination is to go to their furthest points and find the graves that say "A soldier known only unto God". It is really poignant that the families of those people do not have a physical place to go to remember them, as Kenneth Gibson said about the Mochrie brothers. The point is that we should continue to remember—we should never forget, not least because we should not allow that kind of event to happen again.

I close today's debate by offering my congratulations to Poppyscotland as it marks the centenary of the poppy appeal. It deserves every plaudit that it has received tonight in the chamber, and, like other members, I have every reason to be proud of its achievements.

*Meeting closed at 17:37.*

## Correction

Tom Arthur has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

### **The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):**

At col 27, paragraph 2

*Original text—*

The member will be aware that we have a £350 million funding commitment to our place-based investment programme over this parliamentary session.

*Corrected text—*

The member will be aware that we have a £325 million funding commitment to our place-based investment programme over this parliamentary session.

At col 30, paragraph 3

*Original text—*

Specifically on town centres, I have already referred to the £350 million for the place-based investment programme.

*Corrected text—*

Specifically on town centres, I have already referred to the £325 million for the place-based investment programme.



This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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