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Wednesday 7 February 2018

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Economy, Jobs and Fair Work

Financial Services Industries (Support)

1. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support the financial services industries. (S5O-01754)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): Scotland's financial services sector directly employs 86,000 people across Scotland and delivers 6.5 per cent of Scotland's gross value added. The Scottish Government works in partnership with the financial services sector through the Financial Services Advisory Board to support the sector's continued growth. Our development and skills agencies actively engage with the sector and key professional bodies to support development of the sector across Scotland, thereby building on our established global reputation in the industry.

In the programme for government, we committed funding of up to £250,000 to establish FinTech Scotland, which is an independent industry-led organisation that is backed by public, private and academic partners. It will champion, nurture and grow Scotland's fintech—financial technology—community.

Joan McAlpine: During a recent Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee visit to Dublin, representatives of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce explained that financial services firms from the United Kingdom are already putting in place plans to move jobs to Dublin because of uncertainty about the sector post-Brexit. The UK Government has failed to produce a position paper on the sector for its Brexit negotiations, so does the Scottish Government believe that there is a danger to Scotland that we will lose those jobs, and that there is also a missed opportunity, in that if we were still in the single market, we would be well placed to attract such jobs?

Keith Brown: I fully agree with Joan McAlpine. It is interesting that we are now seeing comments about passporting no longer being an option in the financial sector. The sector deemed passporting to be absolutely critical to its continued ability to thrive in a Brexit environment.

Of course, the UK Government should have produced a detailed proposal on the UK's future relationship with the European Union and the implications for the financial sector. We see other countries in the EU quite happily being predators in respect of businesses in the UK. Financial firms are, of course, already planning for the future, but in the absence of any certainty or analysis by the UK Government, they have to base their arrangements on the worst-case scenario, which is a hard Brexit.

Continued uncertainty about the UK Government's negotiating position risks jobs and future investment in the financial services sector in Scotland and across the UK. It is not just the Scottish Government that is saying that; every business organisation and every economic think tank says it. I think that British Chambers of Commerce, too, has said that today. The only people who do not say it are, of course, the Scottish Conservatives.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): According to the latest available figures, Scotland's finance and insurance trade with the rest of the UK represents 83 per cent of all the sector's business and is worth 20 times the value of Scotland's finance and insurance trade with the EU single market. What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to help the sector in Scotland to protect and expand its market with the rest of the UK single market?

Keith Brown: In my response to Joan McAlpine's first question, I laid out some of the things that we are doing. I mentioned FiSAB, which the First Minister jointly chairs with the industry, and which Paul Wheelhouse and I attend. As Dean Lockhart suggested, many of the organisations have a UK presence, as well. A great deal is being done that is common to both areas, but there is also the question of the different perspective and demographic of the financial sector in Scotland, which people in FiSAB talk about.

Dean Lockhart mentioned funds that are looked after in Scotland. The strength of the global custody of funds and asset management in the Scottish economy in particular involves a perspective that is different from that of elements of the financial sector in London. However, the sector is hugely important. By some measures, it is the second biggest in the EU and is even greater than Frankfurt's.

Of course there is substantial business with the rest of the UK, and nothing that the First Minister, Paul Wheelhouse or I have said suggests that we should do anything other than try to grow that business. We realise how important it is. It is not we who are looking to be isolationist and to cut ourselves off from markets. We will continue to do

the work that we can do to grow our work and business with the rest of the UK and the rest of the EU. That is why it is vital that we stay within the European single market.

Trade Hubs (Berlin and Brussels)

2. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the Berlin and Brussels trade hubs are expected to open. (S5O-01755)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government has committed to establishing innovation and investment hubs in Dublin, London, Brussels, Berlin and Paris as an integral part of wider work across the Scottish Government with our partners and businesses, in order to support trade, investment, innovation and intergovernmental relations.

The newly established Berlin hub, which is located close to the Reichstag, is already operational and recently recruited its first member of staff from Scottish Development International. The early focus for the Berlin hub will be to identify early priorities, build networks and establish key relationships.

Our operation in Brussels is in the process of transitioning into a hub from our existing presence: Scotland Europa has been operating for more than 25 years and the Scottish Government European Union office has been there since 1999. That transition should be completed by the summer and will include a representative of SDI.

Rachael Hamilton: The 2016 Scottish National Party programme for government said that opening of the Berlin and Brussels trade hubs is critical to Scotland's economy. They were announced way back in October 2016. The 2017 programme for government even stated that the Berlin hub would be open in 2017. The cabinet secretary has outlined some processing that is on the way to getting the hubs open, but we have not seen action. We want action, because it is important that the hubs are open. We want to see performance targets: currently they do not exist for the hubs in Berlin and Paris, which are not yet functionally operational. Can the cabinet secretary give us some more detail on the hubs, please?

Keith Brown: Perhaps Rachael Hamilton should have listened to the detail that I already provided. She just said that the hubs are "not ... functionally operational". My first answer said that the Berlin hub "is already operational". I do not know how much more explicit than that I can be. It is operational and has recruited its first member of staff. That builds on the work that is already being done through our presence in Düsseldorf and the work that was done when I visited Berlin last year.

In Brussels, there is a transitional arrangement because we have an existing presence in Brussels. We are building on that, which is the rational thing to do.

I think that this is the first time that a question has been asked—certainly by the Conservatives—about performance measures for the hubs. I am perfectly willing to get into that discussion.

However, we have done that—and we have done so in the teeth of substantial opposition from some people. That is important in the context of Brexit. The question that is never asked by the Conservatives is what the impact of Brexit will be on Scotland. The reason why we are doing this, and building our presence not just in the EU but in Canada and other parts of the world, is in part the challenge that is posed by Brexit—a challenge that at least one Conservative in Parliament should acknowledge.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): This week, in an attempt to pacify the hard-line Brexiters in her own party, the Prime Minister ruled out membership of the customs union. I have already raised in Parliament the importance of the customs union for musicians from Scotland and elsewhere across the United Kingdom. Can the cabinet secretary state what impact he thinks leaving the customs union will have on Scottish businesses and on trade with European Union countries?

Keith Brown: We think that being outside the customs union will create barriers to trade for businesses in Scotland and, indeed, across the UK. We have consistently made the case that maintaining our membership of both the single market and the customs union is essential to the prosperity of Scottish firms and the Scottish economy. In the document, "Scotland's Place in Europe: People, Jobs and Investment", which we published last month, we demonstrated that Brexit will significantly weaken our economy. We have carried out and published analysis: apparently, the UK Government has done some analysis, but it does not want to publish it or tell anyone about it—yet we get a lecture from Conservative members about transparency. We have done the work and published it. It is about time the UK Government did the same.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Cupar North Relief Road (Funding)

4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether the Cupar north relief road will be funded through the Tay cities deal. (S5O-01757)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The Scottish

Government is committed to securing a city region deal for the Tay cities as soon as possible, and we are currently considering all proposals and fully exploring all financing and funding options. A proposal to accelerate the Cupar northern bypass project is one of those put forward by the Tay cities, but it is not possible, at this stage, for me to confirm details of which projects may or may not be included as part of the final deal.

Willie Rennie: The Tay cities deal aims to create a smarter and fairer region with innovation to create sustainable growth. I was surprised that the Cupar north relief road was put forward as part of the Tay cities deal, especially when the planning permission specified that the consortium of house builders should build that road. Why is the state even considering bailing out house builders to build a bypass? If that proposal comes before the cabinet secretary, will he rule it out?

Keith Brown: Willie Rennie asked why we are considering that proposal. I said in my first response that we are considering it because it is a project and proposal that has come from the relevant local partner—the local authority—and that is the basis of city deals. Neither we nor the United Kingdom Government decide which projects come forward; we decide which to support, which is perfectly legitimate. The whole virtue of city deals is that the projects come from local partners. I do not know whether Willie Rennie is saying that we should rule projects out at the very early stage of a city deal or before we come to a conclusion. I think that I am right in concluding that Willie Rennie does not like that project.

I do not know whether Willie Rennie's concerns are related to the planning application, but, if that is a concern, I make the point that nothing that we agree in a city deal takes away the need for local partners, especially local authorities, to follow whatever statutory processes are involved.

It is also worth saying for Willie Rennie's benefit that sometimes there are other ways to fund things, if that is what is desired, including the application that he referred to. For example, when I was the housing minister, back in 2011, we established a housing infrastructure loan fund to help with infrastructure that was related to developments. I have asked officials to ensure that they look at all options for any proposals that come forward from local authorities that might unlock further development. The city deal will be concluded when the local partners, the Scottish Government and the UK Government are ready to conclude it.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Tay cities deal is a fantastic opportunity to bring vital investment into the area and to drive economic growth. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on how talks are

progressing? Does he agree that it is an excellent example of the benefits that are brought by co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments?

Keith Brown: When I receive letters such as the one that I received from Alexander Stewart and his Conservative colleagues this week, I sometimes wonder about that co-operation. We are trying to work closely with the UK Government on the matter. When I and Lord Duncan appeared before the Local Government and Communities Committee, it was the first time that ministers from both Governments had appeared together before a Scottish Parliament committee. If members look at the *Official Report* of that meeting, they will see that a substantial degree of joint working is going on, which we are trying to continue. Unravelling the deals in advance by making announcements, which is what Alexander Stewart asked me to do in the letter that he sent, would be disruptive to that joint working.

It is true that we very much value the fact that local authorities and partners come forward with proposals and that the Scottish and UK Governments jointly consider and announce which of the proposals we can take forward. It is a valuable process, but we should observe the interests of the different parties that are involved in it.

Automation and Artificial Intelligence (Employment Opportunities)

5. Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that an increasing use of automation and artificial intelligence over the next decade will increase employment opportunities in Scotland. (S5O-01758)

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of emerging technologies and how they will influence the future labour market. That is why I published our labour market strategy in August 2016 and why we established the strategic labour market group to provide advice on a range of matters, including automation and artificial intelligence.

In Scotland, we have record levels of employment and a highly skilled workforce, and we continue to encourage people to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers through careers advice and guidance in schools and the developing the young workforce programme. Through the enterprise and skills strategic board, we are working to ensure that the planning and commissioning of our annual £2 billion investment in skills is better co-ordinated and more responsive.

We continue to support businesses to take advantage of new technologies and to advance their ability to integrate with data and digital. We are investing £48 million in the national manufacturing institute for Scotland, and we are providing support for innovation centres such as CENSIS—the centre of excellence for sensor and imaging systems—and the Data Lab.

Bill Bowman: According to a recent report, almost a quarter of jobs in Dundee could be lost to automation by 2030. At 64.1 per cent, Dundee's employment rate is already well below the average, and Dundee has the lowest employment rate of any city in the United Kingdom. An extra 10,000 jobs are needed just to put Dundee on a par with the rest of Britain. How will the minister create those 10,000 jobs? How many jobs has the Scottish Government created in Dundee since coming to power?

Jamie Hepburn: I know the report that Bill Bowman refers to, and I recognise what it says about the potential impact of the increased utilisation of automation. Of course, there are other reports that provide different assessments.

That said, I recognise that a lot of good things are happening in Dundee right now. When I am there, I am pleased to see the investment that is being made and the regeneration, particularly of the waterfront, that is driving an increase in jobs growth. Indeed, the report that Mr Bowman referred to highlights that Dundee has one of the strongest growth rates for private sector jobs. Just a few moments ago, we heard from the cabinet secretary about our commitment to progress the Tay cities regional deal as soon as possible. We are making every effort to ensure that Dundee continues to benefit from this Government's efforts to give people in Scotland the chance to get into the labour market.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Self-drive automated vehicles are a specific technology that will have a significant impact on employment profiles, opportunities for industrial innovation and many other areas of public policy including planning, housing and environmental, energy and regulatory policy. As the parliamentary liaison officer for the economy, I take a particular interest in that area. What work is the Scottish Government planning to prepare Scotland for that rapidly approaching technological revolution?

Jamie Hepburn: I assure Ivan McKee that I take an interest in the matter as well. It is critical that our workforce is adaptable, ready and responsive to changes in our economy and our labour market, as is likely to be the case through automation, and that we stand ready to benefit from opportunities by making sure that we are not just a consumer of new products and innovations but an inventor and producer of them. That is why

we are taking forward developments such as the national manufacturing institute for Scotland, which I have referred to, and why we have supported innovation in Scotland by increasing support for research and development. Grant funding will increase by a total of £45 million over the next three years, which is an increase of almost 70 per cent.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am sure that the minister will join me in welcoming the opportunity that is presented by automation, but there are understandable concerns about potential job losses—about 230,000 Scottish jobs were identified as being at risk by the "Cities Outlook 2018" report. I ask the cabinet secretary: what specific forward planning has the Scottish Government done, beyond the list that he has read out? We will be reassured if he is working with businesses on that specific issue to mitigate job losses and create high-skilled, highly paid jobs for the people who may be displaced.

Jamie Hepburn: Jackie Baillie may have asked the cabinet secretary, but I will answer the question, if she does not mind.

I recognise the points that she has made and I hope that the answers that I have given thus far give a sense of the importance that we attach to that area. I have referred to the fact that our labour market strategy explicitly recognises the challenges that automation may bring. That is why we have established the strategic labour market group, which includes many representatives from industry who are willing to engage and discuss with anyone their perspectives on those matters.

We need a workforce that is adaptable, flexible and ready to respond to the challenging opportunities that are ahead. We are taking that work forward through initiatives such as our developing the young workforce strategy and the strategy for science, technology, engineering and mathematics that we have laid out. We will continue in that work.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The physicist Stephen Hawking has said that the emergence of artificial intelligence could be

"the worst event in the history of our civilisation".

Professor Kevin Warwick of Coventry University has tested network AI systems that cannot be switched off if they go rogue, which would be a particular problem for military applications for which AI is currently being developed. The Tesla car maker and space pioneer Elon Musk has asserted that AI is

"as big a threat to humanity as climate change or nuclear war".

Those views may well be alarmist, but what safeguards are being developed with regard to artificial intelligence here in Scotland?

Jamie Hepburn: Far be it from me to disagree with Stephen Hawking, but Kenneth Gibson is correct in saying that those views may be somewhat alarmist. However, I recognise that concern and it is incumbent on us not only to consider the potential impact on the labour market but to hear those concerns. We will work in conjunction with industry and academia to gain a full understanding of future technologies and to make informed judgments about the move to greater automation in the labour market and the introduction of artificial intelligence.

Hard Brexit (Impact on Economy)

6. Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact a hard Brexit will have on the Scottish economy. (S5O-01759)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): On 15 January 2018, the Scottish Government published "Scotland's Place in Europe: People, Jobs and Investment", which assesses the implications for Scotland's economy if the United Kingdom exits the European Union. The analysis in that document indicates that a hard Brexit could lead to a loss of up to 8.5 per cent of gross domestic product in Scotland, or £12.7 billion in 2016 terms, by 2030. That is equivalent to £2,300 per individual.

Outside the EU, continued membership of the European single market and customs union is the least worst option for Scotland and the rest of the UK. As we move into the crucial second phase of the negotiations, it is time for the UK Government to start putting jobs and living standards first.

Ash Denham: What is the Scottish Government's reaction to Downing Street's statement that the UK is categorically leaving the customs union?

Keith Brown: On the one hand, it shows utter disrespect to the devolved Administrations, which, by all conventions, should have been involved in discussions before such a statement was made. Being outside the customs union will create barriers to trade for businesses across the UK. That is why the Scottish Government has consistently made the case that maintaining our membership of the European single market and the customs union is essential to the prosperity of Scottish firms and the Scottish economy.

I thank Ash Denham for asking the question in the first place. It is a question that we will never hear from the Conservatives, or indeed from

Richard Leonard, although we might hear it from Jackie Baillie on occasion.

Finance and the Constitution

The Presiding Officer: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

European Union Continuity Bill

2. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what would be involved in an EU continuity bill, in the event that the Parliament does not give legislative consent to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. (S5O-01765)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): All parties in Parliament have agreed with the Finance and Constitution Committee that the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is incompatible with the devolution settlement in Scotland and with the committee's conclusion that Parliament should not give legislative consent to that bill as currently drafted. In those circumstances, the Government has a responsibility to prepare so that, under any scenario, there is a legislative framework in place for protecting Scotland's system of laws from the disruption of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Michael Russell and Joe FitzPatrick set out those plans in their letter to the Presiding Officer of 10 January.

Patrick Harvie: I note the Scottish Government's openness to the possibility that agreement can be reached on changes to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, however unlikely that prospect seems to be. However, Michael Russell, the minister responsible, has told the Finance and Constitution Committee that a continuity bill has already been drafted and given to the Presiding Officer. It is clearly not possible for that bill to be published until the Presiding Officer has made a ruling. If we are to take seriously Mr Russell's commitment to maximum scrutiny, surely the Scottish Government could publish at least a discussion paper on the possible contents of such a bill, given that we are not going to be able to have any kind of meaningful public consultation on such a huge and far-reaching piece of legislation as the withdrawal bill.

John Swinney: I am sure that Mr Harvie will understand that the Government has to follow the arrangements put in place by Parliament for the Presiding Officer's proper consideration of bills, and that is exactly what we have done in these circumstances.

To help Mr Harvie in relation to the contents of the continuity bill, Mr Russell has set out clearly to the committee the provisions that would be necessary in such a bill. As I said in my original

answer, they would seek to put a framework in place to protect our system of laws from disruption as a consequence of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

We will consider Mr Harvie's point about any dialogue. Mr Russell has made it clear to the committee that the Government wants there to be maximum possible scrutiny of the bill in the circumstances that prevail. We will have to consider that point in the context of the wider discussions that we have with the UK Government around the amendment to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I thank Patrick Harvie for bringing this matter to the attention of the chamber. It is an exceptionally important one.

Given that the United Kingdom Government has repeatedly committed to amend the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill to meet the concerns of the Scottish and Welsh Governments—concerns that the Scottish Conservatives have shared—and given that negotiations between the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations on this matter are proceeding and are making progress, does the cabinet secretary not agree that introducing a continuity bill in this Parliament at the moment would be unnecessary, premature and unwise?

John Swinney: I encourage Mr Tomkins to reflect on the circumstances and scenario that I put to Parliament in my original answer to Mr Harvie. I said that, as things stand—and Mr Tomkins is a signatory to this—the Finance and Constitution Committee has indicated that it cannot give legislative consent to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

I am party to the negotiations with the United Kingdom Government, and I have to say that I have a less optimistic assessment of where we are than the one that Mr Tomkins has given to Parliament today. Mr Tomkins will know that I am very familiar with negotiations with the United Kingdom Government and with coming to agreements on such points, and I am far from optimistic about where we are placed.

In such circumstances, the Government in Scotland has a duty to make the arrangements that we have made. We are not doing anything prematurely. We are doing things to ensure that we can have a protective framework of stability around legislation in Scotland if we are unable to give legislative consent to the bill. As things stand, the Scottish Government remains unable to give legislative consent to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am also grateful to Patrick Harvie for asking his question

today. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the ball is in the court of the United Kingdom Government to respond in the way that the Welsh and Scottish Governments and Parliaments, and indeed the Conservative Party and the Labour Party in this Parliament, want it to respond?

Does the cabinet secretary also agree that this is quite a clear issue to be resolved—either people believe in the devolution settlement or they do not—and that it is time that the UK Government expressed in a proper way that it believes in that settlement?

John Swinney: The very sharp issue that we are confronting is whether the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill will be compatible with the devolved settlement. That is the hard test that must be resolved by the negotiations in which we are currently involved.

That view has been expressed very powerfully in the House of Lords by Lord Hope, who has given a very clear assessment of the legislative difficulties that this Parliament would face in signing up to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill as it is currently constituted. He has given to the United Kingdom Government a very clear direction as to what amendment has to be made to make the bill compatible with the devolved settlement.

I agree with Mr Crawford that that is the sharp issue that the UK Government has to resolve, because however much we might wish to get to a point of agreement, we cannot get to an agreement that jeopardises the integrity of the devolved settlement, which was legislated for in 1998, was subsequently amended and has served this country well.

Scottish Growth Scheme

3. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much financial assistance has been given to businesses through the Scottish growth scheme, and whether this was in the form of loans, guarantees, equity or another form of assistance. (S5O-01766)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Under the Scottish growth scheme, Scottish Enterprise continues to assist companies that are looking to secure investment from the Scottish European growth co-investment programme.

In the meantime, a total of £25.7 million in equity funding has been agreed and invested in 28 companies under the new and additional resources that have been provided to the existing small and medium-sized enterprises holding fund. We expect to utilise further European structural funds to expand and enhance the SME holding fund under the Scottish growth scheme in 2018.

That funding will support microfinance, debt and equity investment.

Liam Kerr: When the Scottish National Party Government unveiled the Scottish growth scheme 18 months ago, it was hailed as a £500 million vote of confidence in the Scottish economy, which was to be made up of loans and guarantees. The scheme is now in the form of equity sold by business, and only a fraction of the £500 million assistance has been made available to businesses in Scotland. Will the cabinet secretary confirm when the balance of the £500 million will be made available?

Derek Mackay: In fairness, that commitment was made to provide support that would be spent over a number of years. Some deals will take time to conclude, because investor collaboration will be required as well. It is not simply a case of people applying for half a billion pounds' worth of support, although the commitment is absolutely still there.

We have been able to be quite adept in adapting some of the support around what is required in relation to commercial financing. I have worked with the banks and the British Business Bank on that, to ensure that we can provide additionality rather than substitute finance. In that regard, we have worked with other partners and the enterprise agency to ensure that there is a range of support so that we can absolutely deliver on that financial commitment. It will involve a variety of measures, from equity to loans and guarantees. We had envisaged more use of guarantees, but there seems to be more interest around other areas.

That said, we are, of course, progressing the plans around the Scottish national investment bank and other new measures that will enable us to support businesses. My colleague Keith Brown and his ministerial colleagues will enjoy the 64 per cent uplift in the economy portfolio in terms of spending and use of financial transactions.

I say again that some of these deals will take some time to crystallise, as other investors are involved. However, the support is there, and we will work very hard to promote the range of schemes under that umbrella so that we can support our commercial and business community.

Budget (Contribution to Tackling Child Poverty)

4. Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance secretary has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities regarding how the 2018-19 budget can contribute to tackling child poverty. (S5O-01767)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): I meet all

members of the Cabinet regularly to discuss how best to use the budget to deliver the Scottish Government's priorities of tackling inequalities and creating a prosperous and fairer Scotland.

The draft budget sets out a number of measures to tackle child poverty, which include establishing a £50 million tackling child poverty fund; £8 million to fund the baby box; investment of £243 million towards providing expanded childcare; and supporting local authorities through, for example, the attainment Scotland fund, as part of our £750 million commitment to attainment over this session of Parliament. There is further housing investment, as well. The first delivery plan due under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, which is to be published by April, will set out a range of action that will be taken in this session to make progress towards our ambitious targets to reduce child poverty.

Elaine Smith: Is the cabinet secretary aware of the findings of the Child Poverty Action Group that tell us that raising child benefit by £5 a week, which Scottish Labour supports, would lift 30,000 children out of poverty? Since the Scottish Government has not included plans to do that in its 2018-19 budget, how specifically is the Scottish Government going to lift 30,000 children out of poverty?

Derek Mackay: I thought that I had set out in my first answer some of the actions that we are taking in that regard. Further to that, there will be another £100 million of welfare mitigation. I hear the point that is made about top-ups to child benefit. We have asked the poverty and inequality commission to provide advice on the suitability and sustainability of using the power to do that. As it stands, the policy is estimated to cost around £250 million every year and, as we understand it, only £3 out of every £10 would go to households that are in poverty. That is exactly why we have asked for more information on that policy and for it to be explored.

I do not think that a member of the Labour Party can talk with any credibility about an alternative budget when we realise that its revenue-raising proposals would not raise the revenue suggested.

Income Tax Increase (North Ayrshire)

5. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how many people in North Ayrshire will see their income tax increase in 2018-19. (S5O-01768)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Scottish income tax data and forecasts are not produced for local authority areas. Overall, however, 70 per cent of Scottish taxpayers will pay less income tax in 2018-19 than they did this year, for a given

income. Nobody earning less than £33,000 will pay more income tax next year.

Jamie Greene: In the absence of any answer, perhaps I can help the cabinet secretary out. Analysis of his tax plans shows that up to 24,000 hard-working people in North Ayrshire will see their income tax rise this year. Contrary to what the First Minister said last week, they are far from Scotland's richest and wealthiest. In fact, many will be deeply disappointed by this. Given that local Scottish National Party constituency MSPs were elected in 2016 on a specific manifesto promise not to increase income tax, do the cabinet secretary and his colleagues owe people an apology for breaking that promise?

Derek Mackay: We will invest more in public services, and we will turn a Tory real-terms cut to resource budgets into growth—including growth for the health service. Jamie Greene is one of those politicians who consistently demand that more money be spent in their regions but who want to raise less at the same time. Incidentally, the median salary in North Ayrshire is £23,352, which shows that—just as in the rest of the country—the majority of taxpayers there will pay less, not more, under the tax plans that I have proposed. Some of the money from the tax changes will be invested in local government. Overall, local government nationwide will benefit from the deal with the Greens to the tune of £150 million. North Ayrshire, which the member mentioned, will get £4.2 million extra, and that was opposed by Jamie Greene.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I was going to ask the cabinet secretary how many people in my constituency of Glasgow Provan will see their income tax reduced as a consequence of the budget, but clearly we do not have the data available at constituency level. However, I expect that there will be far more winners than losers. Does the cabinet secretary agree that injecting cash into lower-income households will have a far greater economic multiplier effect as a consequence of such households having a higher propensity to consume, thus helping to grow the Scottish economy?

Derek Mackay: I agree. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has provided evidence on that, and we also produced modelling for the discussion paper last year, so I think that that is correct. Incidentally, the issue with data is not the Scottish Government's doing. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs collects income tax in Scotland, so if members want to see data enhancements, it will be for HMRC to provide analysis by either constituency or local authority.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): Figures from the recent end child poverty coalition report reveal that, in North Ayrshire, nearly 30 per cent of

children live in poverty, with the figure being as high as 36 per cent in the Irvine West ward. Does the cabinet secretary agree that such figures are unacceptable? Rather than rhyming off a list of excuses as to why he cannot take action on child benefit, should he not seriously look at how to use the powers of the Parliament to alleviate those concerning figures?

Derek Mackay: No, I do not think that those levels of poverty are acceptable, which is why we are taking a range of actions to tackle them. We could do even more if we had welfare powers that we do not have. The Labour Party was not particularly supportive of getting those powers over the decades in which it had the opportunity to do so.

I say again that the alternative budget that was put forward by the Labour Party is totally incredible. It does not stack up, it does not raise revenue and it calls on us to use powers and mechanisms that are not currently in place. Let us unite around tackling poverty, but let us do so in a credible way, which is exactly what the Government proposes to do.

Brexit Final Terms (Referendum)

6. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent *Guardian*/ICM survey, which suggests that 69 per cent of people in Scotland support a referendum on the final terms of Brexit. (S5O-01769)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The *Guardian*/ICM survey provides further evidence that most voters in Scotland want to remain in the European Union. The Scottish Government recognises the arguments in favour of a second EU referendum, although it is not currently Government policy. The Scottish Government believes that it is vital that devolved Administrations are involved in the negotiations between the United Kingdom and the EU to ensure that the interests of Scotland are protected.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: For 18 months, I have heard the Scottish Government demand that the democratic will of nearly 70 per cent of the people of this country be recognised in the conduct of Brexit negotiations, yet it is completely silent in representing the views of the nearly 70 per cent of Scots who now support a referendum on the final terms of a Brexit deal. Does the cabinet secretary accept that, for every day that goes by when his Government refuses to join calls for a referendum on the final deal, a day is lost in efforts to offer the British people the opportunity to reverse one of the most calamitous decisions in the history of these islands?

John Swinney: I agree with Mr Cole-Hamilton about the calamitous nature of the EU exit decision. The Scottish Government is working very hard to try to influence the decisions that are taken by the UK Government on its negotiating position in that respect. There are two important dimensions to that. The first has been the evidence and arguments that the Scottish Government has marshalled to support continued membership of the single market and the customs union, for which, in my opinion, it has made an unanswerable case that has been cast aside by the illogical decisions of the UK Government.

Secondly, we have been trying to ensure that the UK Government fulfils the commitment that it made in the establishment of the joint ministerial committee on European Union negotiations that the devolved Administrations would be actively involved in the negotiation of the UK position. That has not happened and, indeed, UK ministers will be meeting today to try to arrive at a final UK position. Not just the Scottish Government but the devolved Administrations as a whole have not been involved in the process. If the UK Government wants to be taken seriously about the conduct of the negotiations, it should respect the agreements that it has signed up to and ensure that the devolved Administrations are fully involved.

Undercover Policing

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, on a strategic review of undercover policing by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement.

14:40

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Before I turn to undercover policing, I would like to update members on recent policing developments. As members will be aware, Phil Gormley has today tendered his resignation from the post of chief constable and will leave Police Scotland with immediate effect. I respect the decision of the chief constable and hope that it enables policing in Scotland to move forward with a clear focus on delivering the long-term policing 2026 strategy, which Phil Gormley helped to develop. Although the management of the police service has been the subject of close scrutiny in recent months, I would like to pay tribute to all those officers who have continued to serve the people of Scotland every day, helping to keep crime at historically low levels and making our communities safer.

I have spoken to Susan Deacon, the chair of the Scottish Police Authority, which will undertake the process for appointing a new chief constable. Professor Deacon informed me yesterday that the SPA was in discussions with the chief constable's representatives regarding his future, and she provided assurance that the appropriate processes were being followed. Going forward, I am encouraged by the commitment that she has made to improving the robustness of decision making in the SPA.

Today, I laid before Parliament the HMICS report on undercover policing, "Strategic Review of Undercover Policing in Scotland". I thank HMICS for that strategic review, which I directed in September 2016 to be undertaken. The report makes 19 recommendations, and Police Scotland has undertaken to implement them all. I received HMICS's report on 2 November and have taken my time to consider carefully all that it has to say. Members may be aware of the on-going judicial review into the matters concerned, which has also had a bearing on the time that I have taken to consider the report.

The report says:

"The use of undercover officers is a legitimate policing tactic and has been used effectively in Scotland. Operational activity has primarily focused on drug related offences, child sexual abuse and exploitation, human trafficking and exploitation and serious organised crime."

The report makes it clear that, since 2000, the use of the undercover policing tactic has not been widespread in Scotland and states that

“the number of undercover deployments by Scottish policing lead us to the conclusion that the use of undercover policing in Scotland cannot be considered to be widespread. Indeed, we believe that undercover advanced officers and undercover online officers has been underutilised.”

The report also notes that

“there was no evidence that undercover advanced officers ... from Police Scotland had infiltrated social justice campaigns or that officers had operated outwith the parameters of the authorisation.”

Members will be aware of the undercover policing inquiry—the UCPI—that is taking place in England and Wales. Its stated purpose is

“to investigate and report on undercover police operations conducted by English and Welsh police forces in England and Wales since 1968”,

including the full scope of undercover policing, the work of the special demonstration squad—the SDS—and the national public order intelligence unit, the NPOIU.

A number of issues led to the instigation in 2014 of the inquiry by the then Home Secretary. Mark Kennedy, a former Metropolitan Police officer who was attached to the NPOIU, had infiltrated protest groups between 2003 and 2010. In 2011, a *Guardian* article claimed that undercover officers routinely adopted a tactic of promiscuity. We have heard in previous debates in the chamber about undercover officers having long-term relationships with members of the groups they had infiltrated. In 2012, Theresa May appointed Mark Ellison QC to carry out a review of the police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence for the purpose of examining allegations, which were reported in the media, that the investigation had been tainted by corruption. In 2014, Theresa May told the House of Commons that the findings of Mark Ellison and of operation Herne, which was a review of the SDS, had persuaded her of the need for a judge-led public inquiry into undercover policing.

The accumulation of revelations of highly questionable and unethical behaviours eventually led to the establishment of the undercover policing inquiry. They all relate to English police forces that fall within the ultimate responsibility of the Home Secretary.

Despite the evidence that the SDS and the NPOIU had been active in Scotland, the terms of reference for the undercover policing inquiry did not and do not extend to Scotland. I wrote on a number of occasions to Theresa May and Amber Rudd stating that I was disappointed that the terms of reference for the inquiry would not be

extended to allow it to consider the evidence of those English and Welsh units’ activity in Scotland. In her letter of January 2016, Theresa May wrote of the inquiry:

“They are interested in the whole story and are bound to encourage those coming forward to provide a complete picture when submitting their evidence.”

Despite that response, neither Mrs May nor her successor saw fit to amend the terms of reference in order to allow that “whole story” to be considered.

The HMICS report confirms that undercover officers from the SDS and the NPOIU were active in Scotland. However, this activity was, as we understand it, not standalone and not self-contained within Scotland, nor did it have any particular Scottish focus. Nothing set it aside as something distinctive from the units’ activities that were being considered by the undercover policing inquiry.

Those undercover units’ officers required to be authorised. The HMICS review confirms that, with the exception of a number of authorisations made around the G8, they were authorised under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. That is the appropriate statute for the authorisation of activity by law enforcement bodies in England and Wales. The review comments that a number of G8 authorisations were dual authorised under RIPA and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000. My understanding is that that was seen as a belt-and-braces approach and that the RIPA authorisations, which were made by Tayside Police, were effectively a subset of the wider RIPA authorisations. Those authorisations would have been subject to oversight at the time by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners.

RIPA allows for authorised activity to cross the border north into Scotland, but it does so with one important caveat: it can do so only as long as not all the activity authorised takes place in Scotland. In simple terms, the activity of the English and Welsh undercover officers in Scotland was authorised as part of an operation that began, or mainly took place, south of the border.

In 2005, SDS and NPOIU officers were deployed in support of the Scottish police operation for the G8 summit at Gleneagles. The HMICS review states:

“The SDS, the NPOIU and other deployments of undercover officers at the G8 Summit were undertaken with the full knowledge, co-operation and authorisation of Tayside Police. Outwith the policing of the G8 summit, the undercover deployments by the SDS and the NPOIU to Scotland were the responsibility of the SDS and NPOIU.”

The report makes clear that, outwith the G8, Scottish police forces were unsighted on SDS and NPOIU operations in Scotland.

I welcome the HMICS recommendation that Police Scotland should, in partnership with the relevant United Kingdom bodies, establish a formal process for the reciprocal notification of cross-border undercover operations.

Members in this chamber and others have called on the Scottish Government to establish a Scottish inquiry. Both the Scottish and UK Governments are currently subject to a judicial review relating to the undercover policing inquiry. The case is currently in court, so I cannot go into detail about it, but the basis of it is a matter of public record. It challenges the UK Government on its decision not to extend the undercover policing inquiry to cover Scotland and it challenges the Scottish Government because we have not held an inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005 with similar terms of reference in Scotland.

The HMICS strategic review was always going to be instrumental in informing my decision on how to respond to calls for a separate Scottish inquiry. We have seen no evidence of the sort of behaviour by Scottish police forces that led to the establishment of the undercover policing inquiry.

The HMICS review provides reassurance to the public and to the Parliament around the extent and scale of the use of undercover police officers since 2000, identifies room for improvement and makes a number of recommendations that Police Scotland has committed to implement in full.

I have considered carefully whether I should establish a separate Scottish inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005. Given all the circumstances, I am not satisfied that establishing a separate inquiry is necessary or in the public interest.

There is some legitimate public concern around undercover policing activity in Scotland and I have had regard to that concern in reaching a decision on this matter. However, on balance, I consider that establishing a Scottish inquiry, under the 2005 act, into undercover policing is not necessary or justified. The factors that have led me to that view include the lack of evidence of any systemic failings within undercover policing in Scotland.

In light of the limited scale of the activities of SDS and NPOIU police officers in Scotland, I believe that setting up a further inquiry would not be a proportionate response. I believe that such an inquiry would inevitably create a measure of duplication with the undercover policing inquiry by involving many of the same core participants and law enforcement officers, and that it would have the potential to overlap with that inquiry in its conclusions and remedies. It could, because of the scale and duration of the undercover policing inquiry, be subject to potential delay in obtaining Metropolitan Police service participation and

documentation, and it would be disproportionate in terms of cost.

Responsibility for the actions of English and Welsh police units sits with the UK Government, London's deputy mayor for policing and crime, and the relevant chief officers.

The Scottish Government's position remains that the clearest and most effective way of addressing concerns about what might have happened in Scotland as a result of actions of English and Welsh police officers is for the terms of reference of the undercover policing inquiry to be amended to allow it to look at the activity of English and Welsh police operations that took place across Great Britain.

Accordingly, I have today written again to the Home Secretary to ask her to reconsider the terms of reference. I have provided her with a copy of HMICS's strategic review.

I assure the Parliament that any recommendations that arise from the undercover policing inquiry will be considered and, where appropriate and necessary, implemented in Scotland.

I have every sympathy for individuals if they have suffered due to the actions of undercover police officers who have behaved in ways that are entirely unethical and unacceptable. However, on the basis of the evidence that we have, I am clear that such behaviour by police officers in English and Welsh units is properly a matter for the Home Secretary and that the most effective way for the undercover policing inquiry to see the "whole story" and "complete picture" to which the current Prime Minister referred is for the inquiry to be allowed to consider all the relevant evidence.

The Presiding Officer: I draw members' attention to a couple of points. The cabinet secretary referred to the on-going judicial review in relation to the independent inquiry into undercover policing. I have received advice on that and I have reached the view that the sub judice rule does not apply. I will, therefore, allow questions on the issues that the cabinet secretary raised in his statement.

I am conscious that members have a greater level of interest in the statement following the cabinet secretary's points about the chief constable's resignation. I will allow some additional time to accommodate members.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In his statement, the cabinet secretary said that he would not comment on the case that is in court. Will time now be allowed for him to comment on that case?

The Presiding Officer: Members are at liberty to ask questions and the cabinet secretary himself

can decide how to respond appropriately to those questions.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement, and I thank HMICS for carrying out its important review, which my party supported.

It is vital that undercover policing is carried out in a proportionate, authorised and lawful manner, and it is important that we recognise the report's finding that undercover policing is not widespread and has been carried out within the law; it is a legitimate tactic, which has led to the arrest of many serious criminals.

With that in mind, and given the report's comment about Police Scotland's lack of capacity in relation to serious organised crime and online safety, what work is being done to address that lack of capacity?

In relation to recommendation 19, when does the cabinet secretary expect

"a formal process for the reciprocal notification of cross border undercover operations"

to be put in place? Can he explain why such a process is not already in place and say what discussions he is having with the UK Government policing minister on the matter?

Finally, on the chief constable's resignation, Mr Gormley has said that it was the events of and since November last year, when the cabinet secretary interfered in the SPA's operational decision, that made it impossible for him to continue. Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge his part in the decision, and will he finally do the decent thing and follow the former chief constable out of the door?

Michael Matheson: On Mr Kerr's final question, I will leave him to his amateur politics around the issue while I deal with the serious politics, but it is seriously misleading to misinterpret someone's statement in that way.

On Mr Kerr's more substantive and reasonable points about the lack of capacity in advanced undercover policing in serious and organised crime and online matters, the member will appreciate that those are entirely operational matters for Police Scotland. Instead of there being direction by ministers, it is entirely a matter for the chief constable to determine how those issues are taken forward. The report demonstrates a need for Police Scotland to look at the issues, and it has already accepted the report's 19 recommendations and put in place a steering group to consider them all.

As for cross-border matters, one would have preferred to have had a cross-border arrangement in previous years. However, the matter is covered

by two distinct legislative elements and Police Scotland is now pursuing it with the relevant law enforcement bodies in the rest of the UK to seek to put an appropriate mechanism in place. I will consider whether any representations need to be made to UK ministers to ensure that that particular recommendation is taken forward, but I have confidence in Police Scotland's determination to work with other law enforcement bodies in other parts of the UK to get a mechanism in place. As changes will be required not only to Scottish legislation and codes of practice but to codes of practice for other parts of the UK, that is not something that we can do unilaterally in Scotland—it will have to be agreed across the whole of the UK. However, the recommendation is very practical and sensible and Police Scotland has given a commitment to taking it forward.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement, but it is disappointing that he has chosen to conflate two important issues into a single statement this afternoon. I ask him to come back to this place to give us further time to discuss the leadership and governance of Police Scotland.

The officers involved in undercover policing deserve our thanks for voluntarily putting themselves in challenging and sometimes dangerous circumstances for the public good, and we welcome the review in so far as it provides a series of useful strategic recommendations on improving capacity and oversight of undercover policing. However, unanswered questions remain. Was there infiltration of social justice campaigns before the formation of Police Scotland? What about undercover activity before 2000? Finally, what has been the impact on those targeted by undercover policing and their friends and families, which has been such a large part of the controversy in England and Wales? In light of all that, why will the cabinet secretary not commit to an independent inquiry?

Turning to the chief constable's resignation, I think that it is a sign of strength that our police officers continue to do their job diligently despite the shambles in the governance of Police Scotland. The cabinet secretary might want to draw a line under the issue after today's resignation, but I note that the chief constable refers directly to the events of November 2017. Does the cabinet secretary concede that the events that Mr Gormley has referred to are his interventions and, if so, is he concerned that his actions might have prejudiced the chief constable's return?

Michael Matheson: Let me first of all correct Daniel Johnson's point about conflating two different issues. I suspect that if I had come in here and made a statement without referring to the

chief constable's resignation, people would have found it completely bizarre that I had ignored the issue. I am not trying to conflate two issues—I am merely making reference to a significant policing issue that arose today. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary, please.

Michael Matheson: I confess that I find it rather bizarre that Daniel Johnson has suggested otherwise.

On the issues that Daniel Johnson attempted to raise, I acknowledge the legitimate public concern that has been expressed about undercover policing activities in Scotland. In my statement, I gave a very clear indication of the factors that I took into account in arriving at my decision on whether there should be an inquiry in Scotland: a lack of evidence of any systemic failings in undercover policing in Scotland; and the limited scale of the activity of SDS and NPOIU police officers in Scotland. I believe that such an inquiry would inevitably create duplication with the undercover policing inquiry in England and Wales, would involve many of the same core participants and law enforcement officers and would have the potential for its conclusions and remedies to overlap. It could be that, because of the scale and the duration of the UCPI, it would be subject to significant delay here in Scotland because of the need to obtain information from the Metropolitan Police Service and those participating in that process.

I am also very clear that the activities of police officers from England and Wales on those matters rest with the Home Secretary. It is clear from what I see in the HMICS report that the activities relating to the SDS and the NPOIU rest largely with UK-based operations that were authorised under their processes and should be considered as part of the undercover policing inquiry. If information becomes available that relates to Scotland, particularly in the course of the undercover police inquiry, I will, of course, give that full consideration and consider whether any further measures are necessary here in Scotland.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): What impact does the cabinet secretary envisage the report will have on the future of undercover policing activities in Scotland?

Michael Matheson: The range of recommendations set out in the HMICS strategic review will help to strengthen how Police Scotland takes forward any undercover policing operations. Undercover policing is a legitimate tactic that can be used to deal with issues of public order, serious and organised crime, sexual exploitation and child abuse. It has a legitimate role in helping to tackle

those serious forms of criminal activity. Equally, it is important that we have robust legislative processes around how it operates. That is exactly what the regulation of investigatory powers provisions and the new codes of practice that I have just taken through Parliament, at the Justice Committee last week, are for: to ensure that we have robust measures in place to deal with such issues and on the operational responsibility of Police Scotland in utilising those tactics.

The additional recommendations from HMICS will allow us to strengthen that process even further and will give even further assurance about how the police service in Scotland utilises that tactic.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Regardless of the rights or wrongs of the complaints against Phil Gormley, this issue, and the cabinet secretary's intervention into the SPA decision about the CC's special leave have, at best, been handled appallingly. Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether he has replied to the letter of 28 November 2017 to him from Mr Gormley's solicitors? If not, why not, and when does he intend to do so? If the cabinet secretary has responded, what did his response say?

The cabinet secretary has been in receipt of the report published today on undercover policing since 2 November 2017, which is some 14 weeks ago. Will he confirm whether he made any changes to the report's content? If so, what changes were made?

Of the 50 undercover operations since the formation of Police Scotland in 2013, the report states:

“Operational activity has primarily focused”—

The Presiding Officer: Mrs Mitchell, I am sorry, but you are asking too many questions. The cabinet secretary will answer your first two questions.

Michael Matheson: No changes have been made to the report. My understanding is that—as would normally be the process and the protocol for dealing with reports of this nature—the report will have been shared with Police Scotland for factual accuracy checking. There were no changes in it requested on my part.

I will deal with the other issue that the member raised about the former chief constable and the letter from his lawyers. My accountability on these matters is to this Parliament, and I have answered questions on the issue in this Parliament on a number of occasions.

Significant things have happened since November. I was very clear that the process that the SPA had in place had serious deficiencies. That is not just my view, but the view of the new

chair of the Scottish Police Authority who, having reviewed the situation, has stated that she has found the process wanting in many, many ways, including: the fact that the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner was not consulted during a live investigation; the fact that no welfare arrangements were put in place for complainants within the organisation—we now know that that was the case; and the fact that, at the same time, Deputy Chief Constable Designate Iain Livingstone was not consulted or engaged in the planning around the process at all.

I have been very clear that there were serious deficiencies and that having such deficiencies in the process was unacceptable.

I am also conscious that two further complaints have been made since November, that there has been significant media and public commentary on the issue and that there has been intense interest in the complaints process.

I am clear that my actions in questioning the SPA on 9 November were entirely appropriate and, indeed, would have been expected of me. I have absolutely no doubt that if I had failed to ask basic questions about the process, the member would have harangued me time and again for not having done so. Those questions demonstrated the deficiencies in the process that have been identified by not only me but the new chair of the SPA.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Given that you said that extra time had been allocated to allow both issues to be dealt with, I would like to ask why, in his response to Daniel Johnson, the cabinet secretary did not address Mr Johnson's question about the chief constable. Given that there now seem to be time constraints on questions, which is hardly surprising when two issues are being dealt with in one statement, would you be amenable to the cabinet secretary returning to the chamber to address the issues around the chief constable's resignation?

The Presiding Officer: I thank the member for her point of order, but it is not a point of order for the chair. The questions that she has asked are legitimate ones that she is entitled to ask. There are many parliamentary opportunities that all members can take advantage of—for example, they can lodge written questions and they can write to the Government. If the member wishes further parliamentary time to be allocated to the issue that she raises, that is a matter for her business manager to discuss through the Parliamentary Bureau.

I have allowed additional time, but I point out that, in the exchanges so far, the questions and the answers have been slightly too long. If we are

to get through the questions that members wish to ask, I ask all members and the cabinet secretary to be a little more succinct.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): What impact has the creation of Police Scotland had on undercover policing in Scotland?

Michael Matheson: As the HMICS report demonstrates, Police Scotland has sought to take a much more strategic and centralised approach to how it manages undercover policing in Scotland. As a result, a much more consistent approach is now taken to how undercover policing is utilised in the force, compared with the situation under the eight legacy forces. A much more strategic approach has been taken to make sure that there is consistency in how undercover policing is carried out.

I turn to Daniel Johnson's question about the chief constable. It was an oversight on my part not to respond to the issues that he raised. I am conscious that he has now raised those issues on several occasions, and the answer remains the same. It was perfectly legitimate for me to raise with the SPA on 9 November the deficiencies in the organisation's process. It is clear to anyone who looks at the evidence that we have now heard that the deficiencies in that process were unacceptable, as I have said time and again. I have consistently said that I believe that I took the right action in asking the SPA to consider the matters that I raised. That is why the former chair of the SPA made it clear that the board would consider those issues in making a decision.

It is also worth reflecting on the fact that, since that time in November, the SPA has considered the issue on four separate occasions and on each occasion has decided to continue the chief constable's leave. It has revisited the matter and come to a judgment on it.

The questions that Mr Johnson asked me are questions that he has asked me on several occasions, and the answers remain the same.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): By refusing to hold a public inquiry or to look back beyond 2000, the cabinet secretary fails victims, many of whom are women, and fails our democracy. Now, the only people in mainland UK who will not have access to justice are Scottish victims. How is that standing up for Scotland?

It seems that the rights of the general public in Scotland to get to the truth and to get justice on the issue rest in the hands of one activist, Tilly Gifford, who, as the cabinet secretary knows, is seeking a judicial review, because of the failure of the Scottish and UK Governments to hold a public inquiry to which Scots can have access.

Will Michael Matheson do the right thing by the people of Scotland and establish a public inquiry now? The police inspecting the police in the whitewash that we have heard about today simply will not do.

Michael Matheson: I have already set out why I do not believe that it is necessary or proportionate to hold a public inquiry on the matter here in Scotland. I am aware that many of those people who have concerns about what happened here in Scotland are core participants in the undercover policing inquiry that is taking place in England and Wales.

It is also very clear—*[Interruption.]* As I said, most of them are core participants in the undercover inquiry that is taking place in England and that will allow them to make their case.

However, even with that, it is very clear from the review that HMICS has conducted that those matters relate to units in English and Welsh police forces, and jurisdiction and responsibility for those matters rests with the Home Secretary. That is why the undercover policing inquiry should take that into account in its remit.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): The report says that there is

“no evidence that undercover advanced officers ... from Police Scotland ... had operated outwith the parameters of the authorisation”

in undercover operations. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that key finding demonstrates that that element of policing in Scotland is functioning proficiently and that officers are behaving in the way that their superiors and—this is important—the public would expect?

Michael Matheson: The report highlights that undercover officers

“had strong views that there were a number of safeguards in place to ensure that ethical standards were maintained when they were deployed”

in undercover operations. One of the key findings was that

“undercover officers within Police Scotland ... understood”

the legal requirements that are set out in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 and the codes of practice that go alongside it. Members will be aware that the codes of practice were changed back in 2014 in order to increase the threshold for authorisations for some matters, by moving the authorisation to an assistant chief constable. If the surveillance operation goes on for an extended period of time, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and a deputy chief constable are required to give authorisation.

The report demonstrates the significant safeguards that are in place in Scotland and the ethical standards that are expected of undercover officers in Police Scotland.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):

I thank the cabinet secretary for the early sight of his statement.

The cabinet secretary would ordinarily have an evidence base for his decision making, but I do not believe that he has delivered that in this instance. I will give two examples to show why.

In the cabinet secretary’s statement, he talked about

“the limited scale of the activities of SDS and NPOIU police officers”

and said that

“outwith G8, Scottish police forces were unsighted”

on those activities. However, the most damning feature that I thought that the cabinet secretary would have picked up on and used as evidence to support having an inquiry is in paragraph 166 of the report, which says:

“Our conclusions in relation to SDS deployments were based on the examination of SDS records by Operation Herne”—

which is a Metropolitan Police operation—

“which stretch back some forty years. Unfortunately, it is not possible to establish if the material obtained by Operation Herne is entirely accurate or comprehensive and it is probable that, given the passage of time and the likelihood of human error, that some records are missing or inaccurate.”

I guarantee that they will be missing and inaccurate.

The cabinet secretary needs to take charge of the situation. He needs to call an inquiry and to assert his independence. This is a Scottish matter. Please deal with it.

Michael Matheson: The report states that HMICS examined the scale and extent of the NPOIU operations in Scotland and that it had

“the co-operation of the National Police Chiefs’ Council ... National Coordination Team”,

which is part of operation Herne, in looking at the documentation relating to a number of issues.

John Finnie will be aware that the report recognises that, as things stand, some of the information is provisional and is based on millions of documents that are being indexed and analysed as part of the preparations for the undercover policing inquiry. That is why I said that, if new evidence or information comes to light in due course on undercover policing operations involving police officers in Scotland, I will give due regard to that. However, as things stand, based on the

information that HMICS has been able to get access to and which is available to it as part of the documentation process, I do not believe that that evidence is sufficient to justify establishing a public inquiry at this stage.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for the early sight of his statement.

I echo John Finnie's comments and express my disappointment at the cabinet secretary's decision not to instigate a public inquiry in Scotland. I urge him to reconsider that.

Meantime, with the confirmation of the chief constable's resignation, does the cabinet secretary not accept that, no matter who is appointed to head up Police Scotland and the SPA, the problems are hard-wired into the structures of policing thanks to botched centralisation, and will he now agree to establish an independent expert group to come forward with proposals that inject accountability, transparency and localism back into the system?

Michael Matheson: In relation to Liam McArthur's first point, on the undercover policing inquiry, I have been very clear as to the rationale behind and my reasoning for arriving at that decision. I recognise that some members in the chamber do not agree with it, but I reached it on the basis of the evidence in the HMICS report. I have also said that, should new information become available—particularly during the undercover policing inquiry, if that is not extended to include issues relating to English and Welsh units operating in Scotland—I will give full consideration to it in due course.

In relation to the SPA and Police Scotland, I do not believe that the problems are necessarily hard-wired. It is clear that the new chair of the SPA is keen not to get into a situation in which things are reviewed to death and wants to be given the space and scope to move the organisation forward in a way that involves much more engagement with Parliament, local elected members and other interested parties and stakeholders in Scotland. It is in all of our interests to give Susan Deacon an opportunity to take that forward and to give the SPA the space to make progress on those matters as quickly as possible. No doubt, as a member of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, Liam McArthur will be keen to scrutinise the new chair on how the SPA is moving matters forward and at what speed.

Also, in relation to Police Scotland, I recognise that there has been a significant focus on the chief constable and the senior management team. It is worth reflecting on the comments that were recently made by Deputy Chief Constable Designate Iain Livingstone about the performance

of Police Scotland over recent months. Police Scotland continues to perform exceptionally well: it handled a whole range of events over the festive period, with the homicides all solved or dealt with; it has responded to other major challenges; and officers have continued to perform their duties to an excellent standard. I hope that, as of today, more of our focus will be on the organisation moving forward with its 2026 strategy and the improvements and changes that the new chair of the SPA is keen to take forward at pace.

Mairi Gougeon (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary believe that the advice and guidance for police officers engaging in undercover work is sufficient?

Michael Matheson: I have already said that some new guidance has just been issued on the regulation of investigatory powers codes of practice, which were approved by Parliament last week. I believe that the existing legislative framework is robust and fit for purpose, and provides the necessary safeguards on authorisation. That has changed since 2014, in that the thresholds for authorisation have been increased, as have the checks that have to be made with what was the Office of Surveillance Commissioners and is now the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office for any longer-term investigations.

Clearly, where people have concerns about surveillance matters—for example, if they believe that they have been under surveillance and have questions or concerns about that—there is a process for escalating those concerns. That process is through the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office, with the scope to go into an investigatory powers tribunal that can consider the issues in detail. It can, if necessary, issue findings against the relevant authorities for actions to be taken, if they have acted in a way that is unethical and inappropriate.

There are additional safeguards for individuals who have concerns about such matters, which may be carried out not just by Police Scotland but by any public authority that has provisions that enable it to undertake some form of surveillance.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): The cabinet secretary has confirmed that all 19 of the not-insubstantial recommendations will be implemented by Police Scotland. Can he also give the chamber an indication of what that will cost and where the moneys to do that will come from?

Michael Matheson: Any costs associated with implementation will come from existing budgets. The timeframe for implementation is an operational matter for Police Scotland. I can say to Gordon Lindhurst that the steering group that has been established by Police Scotland has

representatives from HMICS on it, in order to consider the progress and the work that is being carried out. I expect that HMICS will provide an update on the progress that has been made against the recommendations in the report, as it very often does in such cases.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Recommendations 8 and 14 of the report relate, inter alia, to the security of record keeping. Will the cabinet secretary work with the Scottish Police Authority to make sure that a dual-key approach is implemented to ensure that no single individual can gain access to the most sensitive records in a secure computer system or otherwise?

Michael Matheson: The keeping of records in relation to surveillance matters is governed by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 and the codes of practice that are associated with the legislation. Those responsibilities are the subject of annual inspection, which was previously carried out by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners, and is now carried out by the independent and judicially led Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office. Any findings that the IPC has in relation to the storing and retention of data relating to operations is reported directly to Police Scotland and can feature in its annual reports, which has been the case in the past, when the IPC identified deficiencies relating to forces in the UK.

Provisions relating to the matters that Stewart Stevenson has raised are governed by existing regulations and codes of practice that are associated with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000, with oversight by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office, which is independent and judicially led.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary hinted at some of the tactics that are used by undercover police officers. For the avoidance of doubt, those tactics include sexual violence perpetrated by the state against women, who have been spied on by officers and conned into intimate relationships. The cabinet secretary said that he has sympathy for individuals who have suffered due to the actions of undercover police officers. The cabinet secretary must surely see that, by denying a public inquiry in Scotland, his sympathetic words and inaction are an insult to those women, their families and other victims.

Michael Matheson: I have already set out the reasons why a public inquiry in Scotland is not appropriate and the rationale behind my decision. I recognise that not everyone will agree, but that is the position that I have come to, having considered the issue.

I also highlighted the safeguards that are in place in the Police Service of Scotland at the moment. When they consider the report, I hope that members will acknowledge those safeguards, and that they will, from how HMICS has found the safeguards to be operating, be reassured about the ethical standards that the Police Service applies to undercover surveillance operations.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): With the resignation of the chief constable, will the PIRC investigation continue and, depending on the outcome of that investigation, will the chief constable be subject to appropriate action?

Michael Matheson: The Police Investigations and Review Commissioner has already stated that the investigation will come to a conclusion because the chief constable has resigned from Police Scotland with immediate effect. The information that has been obtained to date will be passed to the Scottish Police Authority for it to consider. Any decisions or actions that are taken thereafter will be entirely matters for the Scottish Police Authority.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We will soon be on our third chief constable, and we are already on our third chair and chief executive of the SPA. The justice secretary surely has to ask himself whether something else is going on. Perhaps the structure is the root of the problem and we will continue to have problems, no matter who is at the top. How long will the cabinet secretary allow that to continue before he acts and institutes some change?

Michael Matheson: I believe that a single police force is still the appropriate model for delivery of policing in Scotland. Had we not moved to a single police force, we would have found ourselves making significant cuts to front-line policing as a result of the austerity that has been pursued by the UK Government. That would have had a major impact on such an important public service.

Regarding the Scottish Police Authority, I have always been of the view that it can make improvements in some areas. The new SPA chair has given a clear commitment to making changes and improvements, and to doing so at speed. I will provide the new chair and the board with as much support as I can, as and when appropriate, in taking forward those changes.

It would be appropriate for all members to give the new chair of the SPA the space to allow her to take on those matters. If the new chair says to me that changes will be needed in how the SPA is constituted and in the legislation that sets out those matters, I will consider that seriously to see how the way in which the SPA operates could be improved. That is separate from the issue of the

move to a single force, but there are certainly areas that can be improved.

It is incumbent on us all to allow the new chair the space and opportunity to drive forward the changes that she wishes to instigate. I will provide her with whatever support and assistance I can. Alongside that, if she highlights to me at some point the need for change that she believes will require Government support in order to achieve it, I will give that serious consideration to ensure that the SPA works as effectively as possible.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): What will be the process and timescale to recruit the new chief constable?

Michael Matheson: The recruitment of the new chief constable is a matter for the Scottish Police Authority. It is for the authority to make a decision on instigating the process for that recruitment to be undertaken. From my discussion with Susan Deacon earlier today, I can say that that is an issue that the authority has already planned to consider. It is for the board to determine the time frame for the process.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement and questions.

Single-use Plastics

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-10307, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on stemming the plastic tide: action to tackle the impact of single-use plastics on land and in our seas. I encourage members by saying that I have asked all opening speakers to trim their opening remarks. Even with that, because of the level of interest in the previous statement, we are pushed for time. I am reluctant to extend decision time beyond 5.30 pm—we have already extended it to then—so I ask all members to try to speak to their time slots or within them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I call Roseanna Cunningham to speak to and move the motion.

15:32

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): I am sure that I am not the only person in the chamber who has spent the past six weeks or so surveying their plastic usage and becoming dismayed at the ubiquity of plastic in our daily lives. We are living through an extraordinary moment of individual and collective self-scrutiny that is clearly influenced by all that we have seen on “Blue Planet II”.

Having an intellectual understanding of the damage that is caused by plastics in our environment and seeing the graphic and distressing consequences of it in the real world are two vastly different things. The academic has moved to the real, and everyone has woken up to the need for action. As individuals, as a society and as a Government, we can be in no doubt that we have reached a turning point in public acceptance of the need for radical change. However, that change will not be easy. Plastic has become a fundamental part of our lives: the pen that I write with, the credit card that I use, the takeaway coffee cups and the disposable cutlery are all plastic. We wrap our food in it, store our food in it and build with it. Therefore, it would be all too easy to feel overwhelmed by the challenge.

We might not be able to eradicate all plastics from our lives, but that should not prevent us from removing the use of plastic where we can. The best way to approach that is the simplest way: a return to the “reduce, reuse, recycle” mantra—Claudia Beamish may smile, because that clarification came from a conversation with her—thereby reducing its use at source, through changes in manufacturing and production, and reducing demand by changing consumer

behaviour. There is a role for Government but also a role for manufacturers, retailers and consumers.

Legislation may work but, whether we like it or not, legislation takes time. The #NaeStrawAtAw campaign is leading the way, working faster than we could and showing what can be achieved when an idea's time has come and people get behind it.

We are already acting to reduce the use of single-use plastics and directly address marine litter. Last month, I announced our intention to ban the manufacture and sale of plastic-stem cotton buds in Scotland, building on recent steps taken to ban the sale of rinse-off personal care products containing microbeads. I took that decision because of compelling evidence about the harm that those plastic stems are doing to our natural environment and because alternative biodegradable options are readily available.

Those are just two items on a long list of the types of litter that are washing up on our shores, which includes wet wipes; plastic cotton bud stems; drinks containers; packaging from crisps, sandwiches and sweets; bottle caps; and other plastic in the form of large items and small, barely-recognisable fragments including nurdles. There is our starter for 10.

However, in taking action, it is important that we do not inadvertently disadvantage groups within society or damage the environment by encouraging the use of an alternative that raises environmental concerns. For example, disabled people have expressed legitimate concerns that we must all hear and pay heed to. We need to recognise the benefit that the use of plastics brings to many. Single-person households, low-income families, and older people all benefit from affordable access to hygienically wrapped prepared fruit and vegetables. I will also meet disabled people and representatives from other groups to ensure that our thinking on these matters is grounded in real-world understanding.

I can also announce that I will appoint a disability adviser to the expert panel that I am setting up as part of our programme for government to provide advice on action to reduce the use of single-use items. That will ensure that the panel takes a fully rounded approach and considers all the evidence and consequences before making recommendations.

In some areas, it is not clear what powers are available to the Scottish Parliament to tackle these issues, and some might be reserved. We therefore need to develop the evidence base quickly to allow us to act in a planned, considered and co-ordinated way on the things that will make the greatest difference. I will refer items such as plastic straws and disposable cups to the expert panel for it to consider how to reduce their use.

We need to cut or reduce the use of plastic where possible, not throw it away, which means reuse or recycling. The issue of single-use plastic, which I have just discussed, is probably the biggest part of that challenge, but other plastics, which might not be for single use, are also a problem. Keeping items in circulation makes a difference. There is also a challenge from hidden plastics such as the substances in cigarette papers and tea bags, which might surprise many people.

When we really cannot or will not hold on to an item any longer, where does it go and how is it treated? Any deposit return system that we introduce will have to provide a route through which drinks containers can be collected with minimal contamination for high-value recycling. That is why we are taking the time to develop a Scottish solution rather than importing a model from elsewhere. In late summer, I expect to consult on a range of options for a new system and the types of containers that it will collect.

I want to see an ambitious, modern deposit return scheme that covers not only plastic but cans and glass bottles, so that we can capture as much material as possible and send it for high-value recycling.

Rather than take action in a piecemeal way, we must grasp the full potential to drive environmental benefit and build a truly resource-efficient Scottish economy that harnesses new technology, creates new jobs, and develops new skills. That means catalysing the innovation and infrastructure that is required to make full use of materials. Innovations such as project beacon combine a variety of new technologies to sort and process different types of plastic. Together, the small and medium-sized enterprises behind project beacon have been awarded more than £1 million from our circular economy investment fund. That is exactly the type of approach that Scotland can and must encourage.

It is unhelpful to have the Conservatives trying to shoehorn the issue of incinerators into the debate. That is an important issue, but it needs to be dealt with in a far more thoughtful manner.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I share some of the cabinet secretary's concerns about the way in which the issue has, as she said, been shoehorned into the debate. Nevertheless, it is an important issue and it would be helpful if she could give a commitment to set aside Government time for a wider discussion on the issue of incineration in due course.

Roseanna Cunningham: I would be happy to do that and to talk to any member who is particularly concerned about the issue.

Although we must do all that we can to stem the plastic tide that is lapping at Scotland's shores, plastics are a global problem, and a global problem requires global action. We are determined that Scotland should play its part. Later this year, we will host an OSPAR intercessional correspondence group for marine litter and, as announced in the programme for government, we will hold an international conference in 2019 to discuss collective action on marine litter.

I also welcome the European Union's proposal to require that all single-use plastics be reusable or easily recycled by 2030. That is exactly the sort of market signal that industry needs, and I have no hesitation in signing Scotland up to that vision, Brexit or no Brexit.

We are reminded daily that people make change happen. From Aberdeenshire to Ayrshire, inspiring campaigns and grass-roots action are revolutionising attitudes without the intervention of politicians. They are people such as the children of Sunnyside primary school; communities such as Ullapool that are tackling plastic straw use head on; the children of Gullane, who are busy trying to clean the beach there; and the primary 3 children at Our Lady's primary school in my constituency, with their wild bottle sighting campaign.

I pay tribute to every individual who takes action to stem our plastic tide—the people who pick up litter on their way to work and who support community beach cleans—and I recognise the work of charities, including the Marine Conservation Society and Fidra, for organising events such as the great nurdle hunt, which collected over 500,000 plastic nurdles during an eight-hour beach clean on the Firth of Forth. Nurdles and beach litter in general are a hugely important issue. That is why we have committed £500,000 to begin to address litter sinks around the coastline of Scotland.

I can also announce that, on 18 June, I will host an international summit on marine litter in Oban. The summit will bring together manufacturers and retailers, marine and environmental stakeholders and, crucially, people who live in our coastal communities, who are most affected by marine litter. It will aim to identify and develop actions that we can all take to tackle the issue. We cannot and must not leave it to someone else to tackle. It is not someone else's problem—it is everyone's problem.

All around Scotland, communities, individuals and charities are doing amazing things—big and small, organised and spontaneous. We can be proud of the fact that, once Sir David Attenborough's "Blue Planet II" struck a chord on a Sunday night, Scotland stepped into action on the Monday morning.

We know that many people were already tackling the problem. Those campaigns and actions have created energy for change that we must not waste. We must take an evidence-based approach and consider where further legislation is needed, but we must not wait for the law to change when we can get on and change our behaviours as suppliers and consumers.

Scotland has been voted the most beautiful country in the world. It is our duty and privilege to protect and enhance that beauty and to take bold steps, where they are available to us, to stem the plastic tide.

Presiding Officer, I have given you an extra minute to play with.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges and shares the increasing recognition of the cumulative damage that plastics are doing to the environment and economy, not just domestically but also globally; agrees that there is a need for an evidence-based approach to tackle the problem; welcomes the actions that the Scottish Government and others have taken to tackle litter at source and in areas of litter accumulation, and supports the aim to both encourage behaviour change in society and to seek legislative solutions to this problem where necessary and appropriate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is quite right to let us know about the extra time. The previous item overran considerably, so the opening speakers have agreed to cut their times. I am also requiring all open debate speakers to cut their speeches to no more than 4 minutes and 30 seconds, which will allow everybody who wants to take part in the debate to do so. Everybody is on the same tightrope and everybody has to give up some time.

I call Maurice Golden to speak to and move amendment S5M-10307.1.

15:43

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests with respect to having worked for Zero Waste Scotland.

Having listened to the cabinet secretary, I like her starter for 10, as she described it. There is much that we agree with in her motion, such as using an evidence-based approach, encouraging behaviour change and seeking legislative solutions where necessary and appropriate.

Similarly, Mark Ruskell's amendment is one that we can support. We need to address the issue of microfibres, as they harm humans as well as animals, and our marine animals in particular. Although I appreciate that time will be short, I hope that he will address the question of synthetic versus natural fibres, as sometimes the life-cycle assessment for products that are made with

cotton, for example, can be higher than for synthetics. Until we get the dream goal of fibre to fibre textile recycling, resolving that issue could prove tricky. The love your clothes campaign, which addresses how we go about laundering our clothes, could be helpful in that regard.

We very much agree with Claudia Beamish's amendment and support what it says about developing an alternative to single-use plastic. Where we can, that is something that we should do, either by banning single-use plastic or by using other economic instruments, where there are viable alternatives.

On the remanufacturing of plastics, to be fair to the Scottish Government, I say that it is certainly supporting that through the Strathclyde institute of remanufacturing, which is helping to lead the way in that context.

My amendment aims to ensure that new incineration facilities are not allowed to be built in Scotland. If we are going to do all the positive work on plastics and the wider agenda that we are discussing, it would be incongruous if Scotland were then to become the ashtray of Europe.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Does the member accept that his amendment is simply an attempt to hijack an important debate and is also an attack on local democracy? Can he tell me why his three Tory colleagues on the Central Scotland list did not bother putting in an objection to the proposed incinerator at Carnbroe, as I did?

Maurice Golden: The member could have had a word with ministers in the SNP Government and ensured that there would be a moratorium on all new incineration facilities. It is quite right and appropriate that, if we are serious about tackling climate change, we do not see a twelvefold increase in incineration capacity over the next five years. It is quite within the rights of local authorities to look to build new incineration capacity, but it is a requirement of central Government to consider how that fits with our wider goals. I say that incineration does not fit with those wider goals. It does not make sense to take products that have been produced halfway around the world and have been used for only a short time and immediately burn them.

Time is short, so I will briefly address the other aspects. As we know, 80 per cent of litter in the sea comes from land, and an estimated 12.7 million tonnes of plastic ends up in our oceans every year. In fact, by 2050, it is estimated that there will be more plastic in the oceans, by weight, than fish. That is a very worrying statistic. More than 250 marine species are already ingesting plastic litter, which is a concern for us all.

One of the ways in which we can begin to tackle that is through producer responsibility. Essentially, that helps to ensure that those who produce the product will also pay the cost of its disposal as waste. It can also help to influence design. Designing for disassembly, repair and prevention of litter is critically important. If members cast their minds back to the days of aluminium cans that had a detachable ring pull, they will remember that the ring pull was often the part that became litter. Because of that, we redesigned the ring pulls so that they remained on the can. Similarly, we could ensure that, when someone tears open a confectionary wrapper to get to the chocolate inside, the little corner of wrapper does not tear off and become litter that is difficult to collect. If we can enhance producer responsibility, we can redesign those wrappers so that those corners do not rip off so easily and are more likely to be put in a bin. Ultimately, that will help to tackle litter and prevent some of the environmental harm.

We also need to look at viable alternatives to plastic. For example, in Edinburgh, Vegware makes catering disposables from plant-based materials instead of plastics—I am sure that other companies are available as well. That certified compostable packaging degrades in 12 weeks, which is more advantageous than the 500 years that it could take for plastic to degrade.

We also need to step up our game in terms of our recycling targets, as our recycling rate in Scotland is plateauing and we are in danger of missing the 2025 target. Deposit return, which will be covered by my colleague Maurice Corry, will have a part to play if we can design the correct scheme. Ideally, it will be a pan-United Kingdom system.

Overall on litter, there is a role for increasing fines and for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to investigate fly-tipping in particular. We need to make sure that we achieve behaviour change. Ultimately, we need to have producer responsibility and we need to prevent waste, increase recycling, look at deposit return and achieve behaviour change on litter.

I move amendment S5M-10307.1, to insert at end:

“, and calls for a moratorium on any new incineration facilities to support Scotland's journey towards a more circular economy.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Claudia Beamish to speak to and move amendment S5M-10307.4.

15:50

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the Scottish Government's motion for

debate today, and I add Labour's voice to the call to ban single-use plastics in Scotland by 2030.

If we were to visualise our own individual trails of plastic waste, we would all be horrified—and now many of us have done so. Now that the conversation about single-use plastic is wide open, we can identify more products that are so unnecessarily single use, such as water bottles, straws, cotton buds, microbeads in cosmetics, wet wipes and many more. I was recently contacted by a constituent who highlighted the wastefulness of crisp packets, and that has stressed to me how the issue is at the forefront of collective consciousness.

Reducing the use of such items is the first step, and I reiterate my support for the developing bans. The alternatives are already there, and they are often money saving, too—for example, KeepCups, bags for life and menstrual cups. While I was a teacher at a primary school in South Lanarkshire, the pupils brought in proper water bottles from home to refill at the tap, rather than having them delivered every day from the council. This week, the EU has announced that it will oblige national Governments to provide greater access to drinking fountains in order to clamp down on plastic waste.

Some packaging does not even have information on it about whether it is recyclable, such as the cup that I have here, which I mention without shaming any particular supermarket. Therefore one challenge for the regulators is to set the standard for what is on the bottom of packets.

I congratulate all the private sector initiatives that are tackling the issue. Among others, the Scotch Whisky Association has committed to phasing out plastic straws and stirrers, and that is on top of its commitment for all the industry's packaging to be 100 per cent recyclable by 2020.

Action by the public sector is vital, too. Catherine McClymont, one of our councillors in South Lanarkshire, is leading on a motion to address single-use plastics. I encourage others in the public sector to follow suit.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Claudia Beamish: I do not have time today—I am sorry.

It is essential that the Scottish Government gives guidance and support to manufacturers that are changing the materials that they use, as is reflected in our amendment today.

The successful design of a deposit return scheme in Scotland is an opportunity for environmental progress. The British Plastics Federation states that making bottles out of 100 per cent recycled plastic uses 75 per cent less

energy than creating plastic bottles from initial plastic.

It has been a year since Scottish Labour and other Opposition parties called for the introduction of a deposit return scheme. Although progress has been slow, I understand the reasons for that and it is welcome that the Scottish Government is now working to develop a scheme that is right for the country. The UK Government is also supportive and has set up a working group. However, although UK-wide compatibility is pretty essential, I am determined—along with others here, I am sure—that Scotland should have the most ambitious scheme possible. It should not be a race to the bottom. We must pull the Tory Government with us, rather than the other way round. Issues for rural and small businesses must be addressed, and social injustice must not be a feature of our deposit return scheme.

There is also huge potential for remanufacturing in Scotland. Reaching a more circular economy rests heavily on public behaviour change, and the Parliament should do all that it can to foster and enable such change. With a bill on the circular economy coming up in this session, public interest is encouraging, and reimagining single-use products in an environmentally sound framework will require the right skills and education. In its briefing, Friends of the Earth is calling for “no fracking for packing”. It also calls on Ineos to plan its transition to a low-carbon model, with a focus on recycling.

That creative thinking is exemplified by MacRebur, a south of Scotland company that has innovated a new road surface that is made of waste plastic pellets and flakes. That remanufacturing has created a solution that does not use tarmac and is exactly the sort of enterprise that the Scottish Government should be nurturing; indeed, as the cabinet secretary has highlighted today, it is in many ways already doing that.

Incineration certainly merits analysis in the context of the circular economy. However, we will be abstaining on the Tory amendment today, because further exploration is needed on the merits of having

“a moratorium on any new incineration facilities”

in terms of capacity, exemptions, public health, community concern and the readiness of alternatives. I am glad that the cabinet secretary has made the offer today of a debate on the issue. In fact, Monica Lennon has already requested a members' business debate on the issue, but that is for another time.

We must clean up all the damage that has been done through plastic clogging our coastlines and threatening our marine life. I pay tribute again to Sorcha Cantwell, who is hero of the month for

keep Scotland beautiful. She highlighted to me the concern about small harbours, because it is only large harbours at the moment that get money to support their fishing for litter campaign. I hope that the cabinet secretary will address that.

The rapidly growing plastic manufacturing industry has created an endemic problem of plastic pollution through the convenient use of single-use plastic. However, Scotland should rise to the challenge of that—as we are doing—individuals should make conscious choices and Parliament should lead by example.

I move amendment S5M-10307.4, to insert at end:

“; recognises the important role that education plays in raising public awareness and the value of Scottish Government support for volunteer clean-up programmes; notes the significance of the need for government action to help companies develop alternative materials to single-use plastics, and calls on the Scottish Government to support the remanufacturing of plastics as part of developing the circular economy.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mark Ruskell to speak to and move amendment S5M-10307.2—six minutes, please, Mr Ruskell.

15:56

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The great surge in public awareness around the health of our seas has been building for many years. Documentary films such as “A Plastic Ocean” and “Blue Planet II” have taken us to places of such spectacular beauty that we could have scarcely imagined that they even existed. However, they have also shown us how our blasé throwaway culture has blighted the farthest reaches of the deepest oceans. From the story of the polluted gut of an albatross chick to that of the plastic bottles now lining ocean trenches, the stories remind us that we are never separate from the natural world.

The Greens broadly welcome the Government motion and the Government’s emerging work on the plastic problem. However, I would pick up on the motion’s use of the word “litter”, because we need to reframe the plastic problem as plastic pollution, rather than as just litter. The plastic problem is not simply a matter of picking up waste and keeping things tidy. Seeing plastic debris simply as litter is a view that even the plastics industry itself supports. It is more accurate for us to describe that plastic as pollution, because plastic is a harmful substance that degrades into smaller microparticles over time, entering food chains and contaminating the world around us.

The Green amendment therefore focuses on one of the major sources of marine plastic pollution on which, so far, Governments have not

taken any action: microfibres. They come mostly from our synthetic clothing and enter the water cycle from our washing machines, and pass into our rivers and seas unnoticed and unmonitored. They enter the food chain, being eaten initially by plankton, shellfish and small fish, and work their way up the food chain to humans. Microfibres have even been found in honey, beer and most of the world’s tap water supplies.

We have probably all bought at some point a fleece. Forward-thinking companies such as Patagonia Inc developed the use of fleece garments as a way to recycle plastic objects such as milk bottles in the 1980s. However, researchers have shown that a single polyester fleece jumper can lose almost 1 million microfibres in every wash. Many of the chemicals that are attracted and cling to plastic microfibres are long-lived, accumulative toxic organic pollutants such as PCBs. They concentrate in the food chain, are stored in body fat and are chemicals that are linked to cancer, birth defects and the disruption of development hormones. Many plastics, such as styrene, also release their own toxic chemicals as they break down. Microfibres effectively multiply the effect of toxic chemicals that are already a growing problem in our environment.

That all sounds pretty scary, but our pollution problem with microfibres can largely be solved by mechanical means. To give Patagonia some credit, that company has supported the development of mesh laundry bags that effectively trap microfibres. There are also filtration devices that can be applied to washing machine outflows and laundry balls that can attract microfibre loadings in the water. Just as we introduced catalytic converters on cars, so we can screen out microfibres from the water cycle with the correct technology and product standards alongside the development of fabrics that shed less fibre in the first place.

So far, it appears from answers to my written questions that the Scottish Government has not focused on the microfibre issue. I urge the cabinet secretary to progress work on the matter with stakeholders including industry, the European Union and other Governments. Perhaps the forthcoming national summit in Oban is a good opportunity for Scotland to take a lead and focus on this growing issue.

In my remaining time, I will focus on some guiding principles for how we should tackle plastic pollution. First, the waste hierarchy is essential in guiding any strategy, as the cabinet secretary mentioned. Prevention and reduction of waste needs to be the top priority, followed by reuse, then recycling and other recovery methods. Incineration is not an acceptable way to deal with hard-to-treat domestic plastic waste. If it is that

difficult to recycle, we should not be producing it in the first place.

I accept the cabinet secretary's approach that each type of product on the plastic pollution list, from drinking straws to cotton buds and ketchup sachets to nurdles, needs to be considered individually. The availability of alternative materials, the harm that the plastic item causes, its pattern of use and the value of materials that can be recovered from it will all be different from one product to the next.

We should also consider a hierarchy of use for plastics, placing products that are used in engineering or medical procedures at the top while giving far less importance to single-use plastics such as food packaging, which can and should be phased out.

We then have lots of tools in the box to tackle plastic pollution, from immediate bans to phase-out deadlines, levies, producer responsibility systems and deposit return. I look forward to hearing and reflecting on members' thoughts on those during the debate.

Our planet is in the middle of the Holocene extinction: the sixth tumultuous extinction event that life on earth has had to endure. The ravages of climate change and habitat loss will only be intensified by the plastic pollution that poisons, chokes, sterilises and destroys. We need to end this wasteful age of plastic.

I move amendment S5M-10307.2, to insert at end:

“; remains shocked at levels of plastic found in wildlife across the globe; understands that, during every clothes wash, thousands of plastic microfibers escape from clothing that is made from synthetic materials, and that billions of these small fibres make their way into the oceans; acknowledges that plastic in the environment can be a harmful pollutant, and commits to collective action to reduce plastic pollution from microfibers as part of a comprehensive action plan.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank all the opening speakers for keeping to their time. That practice will now be continued by all the open debate speakers. I call Kate Forbes, to be followed by John Scott. You have no longer than four and a half minutes, please.

16:02

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Fast-food restaurants in the EU are apparently using enough plastic straws every year to get to the moon and back 10 times. If members are shocked by that, they should bear in mind that it is about just one type of disposable plastic from one part of the hospitality industry in one area of the world. Plastic straws are one of the top 10 items of plastic litter that are found on our

beaches, and the people who know that better than anybody else are the beach cleaners who are out on the sands, wrapped up against the bitter wind, gloves on, and picking up an average of 718 bits of rubbish every 100m.

There is public appetite for change—for real transformation. However, no change should put greater burdens on people with disabilities or people who need to use straws, and that is why the cabinet secretary's announcement today of an adviser who will represent on the expert panel on plastics the views of those with disabilities is so important.

In the month since I launched my final straw campaign, calling for a ban on plastic straws, we have delivered change. I am absolutely delighted to say that 11 local authorities have pledged to eliminate plastic straws and an additional six are reviewing the use of plastic straws on their sites. I am still awaiting Highland Council's response. As it is my local council and it has an extensive coastline, I hope that it, too, will back the campaign, as Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Glasgow City Council and North Ayrshire Council have done.

On top of that, public bodies have really risen to the challenge. National Museums Scotland is one of the latest public bodies to support the final straw campaign. As of this month, unpackaged plastic straws are no longer available at any of the catering outlets throughout the national museums of Scotland. That comes after a series of public bodies have pledged to back the campaign and ban plastic straws from their sites. Each of them deserves our gratitude for playing their part in improving the environment by ditching plastics.

In the past month, CalMac Ferries, ScotRail, Scottish Water, Historic Environment Scotland, National Galleries Scotland, the courts, Scottish Natural Heritage, VisitScotland and our very own Parliament, which did this just last week, have all backed the final straw campaign to ditch the use of plastic straws.

Now that public bodies have risen to the occasion, we are switching the focus to private companies. It is not fair that full responsibility lies with consumers and customers to say no when their drink is served with several plastic straws, which are uncalled for, unwanted and unneeded. Full credit must go to coffee chains such as Costa and fabulous cafes such as Mimi's Bakehouse for already having banned plastic straws. As long as there are alternatives for those who need straws, supermarkets should also ban plastic straws from their shelves and cafes.

This week, Asda announced that it was using 2.4 million straws per year in its cafes alone and that it was going to ditch plastic straws. I wrote to

all major supermarkets, including Tesco, Sainsbury's and Morrison's, among others, calling on them to get plastic straws off their shelves and out of their cafes and to ensure that cheap, readily accessible alternatives are available instead. The first response that I received was from Waitrose and—this is hot off the press—at 3.20 pm today it pledged to stop selling packs of disposable plastic straws as of September 2018.

There is a sense of change in the air. That change is being driven by primary schools, the public and by public and private bodies that are voluntarily making a difference. They deserve the credit—credit where it is due.

16:06

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I welcome the debate and I could not agree more with what has been said.

Given that I represent Ayr, I know from my local area just what a problem litter, particularly plastic litter, is on our magnificent golden Ayrshire beaches. It should not be necessary for our council to have to clear the beaches of Ayr, Prestwick and Troon, but it has to do so to make them clean and welcoming for our many summer visitors. It should not be necessary for Ayr Rotary, of which I am a member, to organise litter picking of the dunes and the beach before Easter every year, but it does, and we are grateful for the support of the cubs, scouts and wider local community who turn out to help. After all, Ayr beach is the busiest beach in Scotland and we are all proud of it.

We must welcome the House of Commons report, "Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide". I note that, of the 13 billion plastic bottles produced in the UK every year, only 7.5 billion are recycled, with the remaining 5.5 billion being landfilled, littered or incinerated, which apparently results in 233,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year. Apparently, plastic bottles make up a third of all plastic pollution in our seas and oceans. That is why I support a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles.

I note that in 2001 only 1 per cent of plastic bottles were recycled and today 57 per cent are recycled, but 700,000 plastic bottles are littered every day in the UK, with all too many ending up in the sea.

If we are to encourage people further to recycle bottles, we must use easily recyclable plastic in the bottles in the first place, as happens in Norway, where 98 per cent of plastic bottles are recycled.

We must seek to incentivise producers of plastic bottles and other plastic materials to use easily

recyclable, simple plastics. Quite apart from the effect on the environment in which we live, and of which we are part, the more I become aware of the degradation process of plastics and microfibres in our seas, the more concerned I am about the human health implications of eating fish and seafood regularly. Recent research from Heriot-Watt University, which found the level of microplastics to be the same in the Firth of Clyde, the Firth of Forth and the Scapa Flow, illustrates that concern. It is self-evident that microplastics and microfibres, which are indistinguishable from plankton, are increasingly being ingested by fish and molluscs and, therefore, by those of us who frequently eat seafood. I wonder what that does to the vital organs in our bodies, over time, and I wonder what research, if any, has been undertaken to find out the level of plastics and microfibres in human organs.

Single-use coffee cups should be replaced by more sustainable cups. Perhaps we should go back to the enamel-coated tin cups of yesteryear, which were always chipped, as I remember, but which were certainly unbreakable and light in weight. They were part of every piece bag 50 years ago.

Perhaps this is becoming a genuine back-to-the-future debate. I note the recommendation in the House of Commons report for the reinstallation of drinking water fountains, which have long since been removed from public places and school playgrounds.

We must not only consider such measures but carefully examine the possibility of levies on single-use plastics such as

"straws, stirrers, cutlery, cups and cup lids",

as the Marine Conservation Society suggests. The MCS also suggests extending a deposit return scheme to include plastic, glass and metal. I support such an approach, but that is a personal view.

Such actions would truly be win-win scenarios for our environment, both on land and at sea. The Government will have our support tonight for its motion.

16:10

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): For some time, we have been aware of the threat that plastic pollution poses to the environment, the ecosystem and human health. The term "single-use plastics", which is in the title of this debate, might seem like innocuous jargon, but in reality it translates to an estimated 5.5 billion tonnes of discarded plastics, which pollute our lands, seas and oceans. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation

predicts that there will be more plastic than fish in the sea by 2050.

This is a global challenge, which will require global solutions. I welcome the European Union's commitment that all plastic packaging is to be easily recyclable or reusable by 2030. The Scottish Government is to be commended for matching that pledge with a ban on single-use plastics by that same year.

In Scotland we have taken positive steps, with the introduction of carrier bag charges, the announcement of a deposit-return scheme for plastic bottles, and the announced ban on plastic-stemmed cotton buds. Ending the use of disposable plastic straws is the logical next step. In that context, I applaud the work of my colleague Kate Forbes and the work of the fantastic ocean defenders at Sunnyside primary school, whose #NaeStrawAtAw campaign is gathering pace.

Many others have worked hard to raise awareness of plastic pollution. In June 2017, I was pleased to meet members of Greenpeace outside the Parliament, including my constituent, Rachael, who outlined the findings of a recent scientific voyage to research ocean plastics around Scotland's coastlines. She also gave me a small vial of plastic pollutants that had been recovered on the expedition. The vial now sits in my office and serves as a potent reminder of not only the impact of plastic pollution on our oceans but the collective impact that human society is having on the planet. All the environmental challenges that we face, from global warming and air pollution to the reported commencement of earth's sixth mass extinction, have been precipitated by human activity. Plastic pollution is only the most recent issue to gain significant public attention.

In debates such as this, in which we consider the impact that we are having on the planet and the species with which we share it, I am sure that all members are, like me, struck with a tremendous sense of guilt at the damage that we have inflicted. However, the debates also provoke a sense of duty and responsibility to repair that damage.

That will not be easy. We must take action where necessary, including legislation where appropriate, but we need to do more. Ultimately, if we are to preserve our environment we will require a fundamental change in culture and a vision of human progress that is not predicated upon never-ending, unsustainable growth, fuelled by hyperconsumerism.

The price of growth cannot be the degrading of the environment that we leave behind. A key pillar of the Scottish Government's economic strategy is inclusive growth. That concept must include consideration of those who have absolutely no

voice—the generations who are yet to come. The issue of plastic pollution speaks to a far bigger debate, which is about not only how we treat our environment but our responsibilities to future generations. We cannot ignore or escape our fundamental duties as temporary custodians of this planet.

Edmund Burke perhaps put that best when, describing society as a partnership, he wrote:

"As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaevial contract of eternal society".

Our partnership of the living extends to all communities across the globe, and each of us has a duty to bequeath to future generations a planet that is capable of supporting the complex ecosystems of which we ourselves are a part.

The environmental ignorance of past generations who were bound to the earth and parochial in their views might be understood, if not forgiven. However, for the generation that is represented in this Parliament—a generation that has long known of the existence of great floating garbage heaps in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans—there is no excuse.

Kate Forbes pointed out that the number of plastic straws used in EU restaurants would stretch to the moon, but I note that next year marks the 50th anniversary of the moon landings. Of the many enduring images from the Apollo space programme, that of Neil Armstrong setting foot on the lunar surface did not make the biggest impression on me; instead, it was the photo of the earth captured one year earlier by Bill Anders, as the Apollo 8 mission became the first manned spacecraft to complete a lunar orbit. That image, known to us today as "Earthrise", has been described as

"the most influential environmental photo ever taken".

In showing the earth as an isolated, fragile and lonely world in the vast and empty expanse of space, it informs a sense of collective global responsibility for our environment more fully than could ever be articulated by words alone.

Let us carry that image with us; let it inform every decision that we take in this place; and in this year of young people, let us recommit ourselves to passing on to the next generation a world where plastics pollution and exploitation of the environment are the issues of a bygone age.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Arthur, I hope that one day you learn what is meant by four minutes and 30 seconds.

16:15

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Plastic presents a complex problem for our marine and terrestrial ecosystems, as we have heard; for our economy; and most important, for our environment, and it is clear that urgent action is needed. However, although this is a global issue, it is, as the cabinet secretary has said, very much to be welcomed that here in Scotland the tide seems to have begun to turn in our attitudes toward plastics, perhaps due in part to the BBC programme “Blue Planet II”.

It is for that reason that we support the measures that the Government has announced to begin to tackle this issue. For example, we support the banning of plastic cotton buds; indeed, the cabinet secretary came to Gullane in East Lothian to make the announcement alongside the Gullane beavers, who had written to her, demanding action following their own beach clean.

The seabird centre in North Berwick in my constituency might not have the reach of “Blue Planet”, but it has been very active in increasing awareness of the damage that is done to sea life and seabirds by plastic waste. Not least, East Lothian-based Fidra, which has already been mentioned, has provided a great example of how to raise awareness of plastics and their associated dangers and how to campaign for action. As the cabinet secretary said, Fidra led the great nurdle hunt, which is an important example of community action to tackle these issues head on.

Nurdles are small plastic pellets, billions of which are used each year to manufacture plastic products; however, far too many pollute our coast, ending up as part of the marine food chain, and scientists are becoming increasingly concerned by the potential toxicity of this background pollutant. They are estimated to be the third largest source of microplastic pollution. The nurdle hunt project encourages volunteers to attend their local beaches and map out the nurdles that they find. As Ms Cunningham mentioned, half a million were collected from a small beach at Bo’ness on the Firth of Forth, with many more left behind, and I would add that almost 100 nurdles were discovered in only five minutes during a beach clean at Yellowcraigs in my constituency. Some 400 such hunts have been organised, but although we certainly commend the volunteer groups for taking practical action to improve the environment for us all, the truth is that the burden cannot rest with them. Removing all those pellets from our beaches and seas, once they enter the ecosystems, is clearly impossible.

Although it is important to raise awareness and change public behaviour with regard to products that we all use, tackling the use of plastics in industry supply chains is key. The majority of

nurdles end up on our beaches through industry spillage and mishandling, both of which are, of course, entirely avoidable with good practice. The leaks happen at all points in the supply chain. Initiatives such as operation clean sweep, an industry scheme that was devised to reduce the loss of these pellets through the implementation of systems and the sharing of best practice, are geared towards addressing the problems, but the scheme is voluntary, uptake remains worryingly low and no checks are in place.

Fidra suggests that a Government-backed certification scheme—backed by legislation, if necessary—that would allow companies throughout the supply chain to check for responsible handling could help to prevent that source of plastic pollution. That idea is more than worthy of consideration as part of the Government’s plastic and marine strategies. I know that the cabinet secretary is aware of the suggestion and I hope that she will respond positively in making her closing speech. Strong words must be matched by more action if we are to improve our coasts, our economy and our environment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Gray—you showed Mr Arthur how it ought to be done.

16:20

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Last Friday, a primary 7 delegation from Glencairn primary school visited my constituency office. Katie, Kara, Thomas, Regan and their classmates told me of their concerns about potential budget cuts in North Lanarkshire. I was very impressed by their passion for their education.

The pupils went on to tell me about their school’s efforts to ban single-use plastic. The whole school is working to replace disposable drinking cups and plates with reusable ones. Each day, one class provides volunteers for washing-up duties. The school has banned plastic straws and is in negotiation with its supplier to replace milk cartons with attached straws with a bulk supply of straws that can be used with reusable drinking cups. I hope to visit the school to find out a bit more about the project—perhaps the cabinet secretary will consider doing the same.

I was struck by the pupils’ enterprise, endeavour, empathy and concern for our world. They are a credit to their teachers, their parents and to Motherwell town. They were inspired by the focus that has been brought to the issue by other young people across Scotland, which Kate Forbes and Iain Gray have spoken about, and by the powerful images in “Blue Planet II”.

What might be surprising is that work has been done to show that, shocking though the images from “Blue Planet II” are, there may be fewer bits of plastic in the world than might be expected. Modelling work on that was published in the *New Scientist* in May 2017. The research has led scientists to believe that—perhaps—there are as yet undetected micro-organisms in the ocean that are degrading plastics. It might also be the case that the plastic sinks to the bottom of the ocean where we cannot detect it or see it, which could cause problems that we are unaware of down the line.

It is interesting to consider that mother nature herself might be helping us with the plastics problem. We should be thankful, once again, for the observation and curiosity of the scientific mind. In April 2017, the *New Scientist* published the experience of Federica Bertocchini, from the institute of biomedicine and biotechnology in Cantabria. After she had picked honeycomb moth caterpillars from a beehive and placed them in a plastic bag for disposal, she noticed that her efforts were somewhat in vain, as the caterpillars were escaping from the plastic bag. She decided that, rather than getting on with her own research, she would investigate what was going on. The article states:

“To make sure that the caterpillars were actually digesting the plastic, the team ground some of them up and spread a thin layer of the paste on a polythene film.”

Within 14 hours, the caterpillars’ enzymes

“had broken down 13 per cent of the plastic. The team also found traces of ethylene glycol, a sign of polyethylene breakdown.”

At the time, Bertocchini said:

“If this is the case, I can picture a scenario in the future where we can isolate it, produce it on a large scale and use that to biodegrade plastics.”

Although the research is really exciting, Bertocchini was, at the time of publication last year, yet to secure funding to continue her work. We are all doing our bit, mother nature is doing her bit and the young people from Glencairn primary school are doing their bit, but on this issue we all must do our bit in order to reduce plastics usage.

In the short time that I have left, I would like to commend the work that Dell has done in sourcing material for its packaging from beach collections in Haiti instead of using virgin plastics. It is such efforts throughout the world that will make a difference.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you—what you said about the caterpillars was fascinating.

16:25

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I am not sure that I can match that, Presiding Officer.

As the issue of plastic pollution accelerates up the political agenda, reflecting a growing public awareness and appetite for action, today’s debate is timely.

As others have done, I pay tribute to the catalytic effect of the BBC’s “Blue Planet II”. The issue is not just a niche aspect of the wider debate on waste and the consequences of a throwaway culture. As we have heard, plastics have a huge impact on our environment. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s prediction that there could by 2050 be more plastic in our seas than fish is arresting. It is all the more arresting for me, as the MSP for Orkney, given that I am already reeling from the findings of the researchers at Heriot-Watt University on the prevalence of microplastics in Scapa Flow. Therefore, I very much welcome the Government’s commitment to ban single-use plastics by 2030, but I also welcome the cabinet secretary’s remarks about the need to take cognisance of the impact on certain groups or individuals. As somebody whose brother is a quadriplegic, I am well aware of the use that is made of plastic straws.

The Labour and Green amendments helpfully nudge us further in the right direction, but I am struggling a bit with the Tory amendment. It is true that we need to focus on the waste hierarchy, but at the moment Orkney waste is shipped to Shetland for incineration. Surely Orkney Islands Council should at least have the scope to assess the feasibility of a local waste-to-energy plant. Maurice Golden’s proposed moratorium would make that impossible.

Maurice Golden: Will Liam McArthur take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

That said, each party has rightly offered options on how we can deal with the challenges of tackling harmful use of plastics. The Liberal Democrats recently launched a save our seas campaign, as part of which we set out a range of proposals from deposit return schemes to global action to tackle the crisis of ocean pollution. As members would expect, our proposals are a mix of strategic and more targeted measures. The latter are important. Cumulatively, small steps can make a significant difference. Given the heightened public interest and appetite that exist, the scope for securing such behavioural changes is greater than ever.

As others have done, I commend Kate Forbes for her efforts in relation to plastic straws, just as I commend organisations including the Scottish

Parliament, Asda and NorthLink Ferries. The Marine Conservation Society is leading the wider “Stop the plastic tide” initiative, which is aimed at reducing single-use plastics through levies and by pressing fast-food and coffee chains to up their game. That offers a rich seam of possibilities.

The question of how we reduce use of disposable cups was included in my amendment. A recent Liberal Democrat freedom of information request revealed that 1,200 disposable cups each day are bought by the Scottish Government for use in staff canteens and offices. That is almost half a million a year. I use that statistic only to illustrate an opportunity that ministers have to take a lead by changing what they do daily. We have seen the dramatic difference that a levy has made on public attitudes to single-use bags. Why not adopt a similar approach to disposable cups? That could increase take-up of reusable cups, cut waste and raise significant sums for charity. I accept that a panel has been set up to look at such issues, but we need a firm commitment from the cabinet secretary.

I welcome the comments that the cabinet secretary made about nurdles. She will be aware that Iain Gray is not alone in having a passion for the issue—my colleague Willie Rennie does, too. The Scottish Government needs to ensure that responsible practices are put in place across the plastics supply chain so that the companies that make pellets, those that transport them and those that manufacture new products from them are all covered. Iain Gray mentioned Fidra’s call for a certification scheme, which would, as much as anything else, improve transparency. I hope that the cabinet secretary will take that seriously.

There has never been a better opportunity—or, indeed, a greater need—to stem the tide of plastic pollution, so we must seize that opportunity.

16:29

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I want to start with a quote from the 1967 film “The Graduate”. A young Ben Braddock was being given some career advice. He was told one word: “Plastics”. That was the business of the future—and so it proved to be. In the following decades, there was exponential growth in the plastics industry, to the point at which plastics are now everywhere including, unfortunately, in our seas and oceans and on our beaches.

There is no greater issue for us to consider in Parliament than the impact that our actions today have on the environment of tomorrow. We have all been shocked and moved by the powerful images of marine plastic pollution on our screens. The issue will impact on us, but it will have a far greater impact on the generations that will follow.

It is therefore fitting that much of the drive for progress has come from our younger citizens. That includes great work by Sunnyside primary school, which is in my Glasgow Provan constituency. I have visited Sunnyside primary school, stood next to the #NaeStrawAtAw wa, and been extremely impressed by the school’s whole-school approach. Every year group has a different focus in its environmental work, which ensures that the focus is not lost when the pupils in that year group move on.

The young people at Sunnyside primary school have a very mature approach to the issue. They understand very well the need to work with rather than against businesses to ensure that the transition to a low-plastic environment is achieved with buy-in from all stakeholders. That is the fastest way to deliver real and sustainable progress. They have engaged with local retailers and with household names, including Müller, Tetra Pak and McDonald’s, and they have had success with CalMac Ferries among others. I was therefore delighted to put Sunnyside primary school in contact with Scotland’s manufacturer of reusable nappies: the locally owned business TotsBots, which is also based in my Glasgow Provan constituency. Engaging with TotsBots will show Sunnyside primary school pupils that their excellent environmental work provides opportunities as well as challenges for business and employment.

Given my prior experience and expertise in the manufacturing sector, I intend to focus in my brief comments on the business and industrial dimensions of the issue.

Although we can work hard to discourage the use of plastics and encourage recycling, the big wins will be to shut off the supply and provide alternatives. With that in mind, I encourage the expert panel to take a whole-life-cycle look at the plastics supply chain, to assess the impact on businesses and industries of the move to low-impact products and, most important, to identify the opportunities for businesses, working with academia through our innovation centres, to step in with innovative and environmentally friendly alternatives—products and processes that will not only help to save our planet, but will do so in a way that will generate economic and export opportunities. The Government should work with businesses to support that transition. In that regard, there is much to learn from the approach of the young people at Sunnyside primary school.

I am aware that the split between reserved and devolved powers in the area is not clear. The use of tax powers is constrained, and the use of powers to ban products outright will need to be argued case by case. Notwithstanding that, I encourage our Government to act where we can,

to pressure the UK Government where we have to, and to continue to argue for increased powers where they are needed.

Let us be in no doubt about the significance of the issue: the future health of our planet and the health of future generations depend on it.

I will finish where I began. Fifty years after “The Graduate”, we have come full circle. A present-day Ben Braddock would no doubt be given very different careers advice. Plastics—or at least manufacture of those that pollute our environment and our oceans—is an industry that has had its day. The opportunities of the future will be in environmentally sustainable industries—in products that biodegrade and in renewable energy sources. Scotland’s potential in the renewables energy sector is well known. We should exploit the move away from disposable plastics to innovate in the implementation of sustainable alternatives. I trust that the cabinet secretary and other ministers across the Government will lead the way on the issue.

16:33

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Shocking images that showed a seahorse holding a cotton bud, as featured on “Blue Planet II”, have alerted us all to the impact of single-use plastics on the environment. It is now clear to everyone that the 8 million tonnes of plastic that are discarded in the ocean each year pose a significant risk to biodiversity. Nationally and internationally, marine plastic pollution has caused a global biodiversity loss at a rate that is consistent with a sixth mass extinction. It has injured wildlife and harmed habitats.

Studies have shown that a staggering 48 per cent of fish that were sampled from Scotland’s coastal waters contained plastic in their digestive system. Scotland is an important region for seabirds: it incorporates 60 important bird and biodiversity areas, which must be protected from the effects of that devastation.

Scotland’s coastal landscape is also affected by plastic. The Scottish continental shelf contains the highest proportion of marine litter anywhere in the United Kingdom. It is therefore clear that action must be taken to protect our lands and seas from the impact of single-use plastics.

Legislative solutions and policy initiatives can, where necessary, play an important role in reducing use of single-use plastics. I welcome the action that has been taken by the Scottish Government in banning Q-Tips, and its work alongside the UK Government on banning the manufacture and sale of products containing microbeads.

It is clear that in order to reach the target of zero avoidable plastic waste by 2042, any long-term policy solutions should aim to foster a change in culture, to transform attitudes and to motivate everyone to think more about the waste that they produce. As we heard in the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee last week, there is the stick and carrot approach, but also the tambourine approach, in which we want people to enjoy doing the right thing.

Consumers are already encouraged to use reusable bags. Beverage containers, however, are among the most common items accumulating on shorelines, the sea surface and sea floor. In Britain, an estimated 2.5 billion disposable coffee cups are used every year, which creates about 25,000 tonnes of waste. That is why I have asked the chief executive of the Scottish Parliament to look into banning single-use coffee cups, which are not recyclable, so that we can lead by example on the issue and show that making small behavioural changes can be straightforward.

Although policies that are undertaken to tackle the impact of single-use plastic must be thorough, it is important that they do not come at the expense of vulnerable groups. I echo the sentiments that the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform shared in a letter to the convener of the ECCLR Committee on the subject of the Scottish Government’s current approach to plastics and the deposit return scheme, and I welcome today’s announcement of the appointment of a disability representative. The cabinet secretary said

“It is vitally important that we do not disadvantage groups within society”

in tackling issues around single-use plastic. I concur with her that the thinking behind any initiative should be

“grounded in real world understanding.”

I am encouraged that, when acting to minimise consumption of plastics, the Scottish Government will take into consideration the needs and views of people who are not able to visit a supermarket regularly and who rely on plastic-wrapped goods to keep their food fresher for longer, for example, or members of the public who need to purchase prepared fruit and vegetables that often must be transported and stored in plastic packaging. It is crucial that the Scottish Government incorporate that inclusive approach into the deposit return scheme. Support should be provided to groups who cannot take part in the scheme, in order to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by it.

I recognise both the importance of tackling the impact of single-use plastics and the grave consequences that inaction on the matter will bring to land and sea in Scotland and further afield.

“Stemming the Plastic Tide” will allow us to better safeguard our environment, keep our sites of natural coastal beauty free from litter, and contribute to an overall improvement in the quality of the marine environment. I therefore support the general aims of the Scottish Government in encouraging behavioural change on the matter, while encouraging it to ensure that all members of society are included in any and all solutions to the problems that are posed by single-use plastics.

16:38

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): As a member of the Rural Affairs and Climate Change Committee in the previous session of Parliament and now the convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, I have found myself immersed in climate change and environmental matters for approaching seven years. A common theme through all the work that that has entailed has been the need to encourage and facilitate behavioural change.

We have often talked about the balance between the carrot and stick approaches. A week or so ago, a Government official appearing before the committee introduced a third element: the tambourine—and no, I was not entirely sure what he meant either. It was explained as meaning wishing, wanting or feeling compelled to do something. To be fair, I believe that, as a society, we are moving into that territory. Those of us who have had a hand in shaping policy in the area have assumed that there is a need to prompt behavioural change and—absolutely—to facilitate it.

I think that we are now in a completely new phase in the battle to preserve our planet, in which the politicians are at least to some extent following a direction of travel that is being set by a willing public. In changing attitudes towards the need to do our bit for the environment, we have come a very long way in a relatively short space of time, and I predict that behavioural change is about to take a giant leap forward from this point, driven by a public with an appetite who are banging their tambourine, if you like.

The “Blue Planet II” series has played a huge part in raising the issue of marine littering, but a movement was already afoot before the series. Right at the heart of that movement was concern over certain plastics, of which the stems of cotton buds and plastic straws are the two most obvious examples.

I welcomed the recent Government announcement on cotton buds. Last year, I was at Lunan Bay, in my constituency, taking part in a beach clean that was organised by Surfers Against Sewage. It was gobsmacking to see the

range of plastics that was found on the beach. The number of cotton buds was a particular take-home message for me. It was a behaviour-changing message as, since that day, I have ceased chucking used cotton buds down the toilet.

Assuredly, we are, one way or another, moving towards addressing the issue of disposable straws long before the total ban on throw-away plastics comes into force, in 2030. Although I commend the work that has been done by my colleague Kate Forbes in raising awareness of the need for a ban, we should recognise, as she did, that schoolchildren the length and breadth of Scotland have been driving the campaign.

Another plastic-related blight on the environment is cigarette butts. Like many MSPs, I visit a number of primary schools in my constituency. The question-and-answer sessions are invariably wide-ranging and, from those sessions, it is clear that children have a genuine fascination with issues such as climate change and the environment. I always give them an example of the harmful impacts of littering that inevitably provokes a surprised response. The example is that of the cellulose acetate filters in cigarettes, which take up to 12 years to degrade. Across that timeline, those fag butts leak toxins that contaminate water and harm marine and bird life.

I like the proposal from ASH Scotland that we deploy the polluter-pays principle and force tobacco companies to meet the cost of removing cigarette butts. However, I guess that we might be racing against time given that the UK Government’s intention is not to transpose that proposal into UK law post-Brexit. Individually, cigarette butts might not give the appearance of causing a significant detrimental environmental impact, but we are told that, globally, 4.5 trillion cigarette butts make their way into the environment annually. That simply cannot continue. We need global action to tackle the issue.

I welcome the opportunity that the debate has provided to explore plastic pollution of the environment but, as I said at the outset of my speech, it is not a case of politicians setting the agenda. The public are ahead of us in wanting the issues to be addressed.

16:42

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I am glad to speak in today’s debate, as it is on a subject that I feel passionately about. When it comes to plastic washing up on our coastline, the area that I represent must be one of the hardest-hit areas in Scotland. Whether it is on the sides of the Firth of Clyde, up in the Gare Loch or in Loch

Long, it feels as though tonne upon tonne of plastic is being deposited on Scotland's west coast.

The most vivid example of that in my region—and probably in Scotland—is Arrochar. Due to its position at the top of Loch Long, it is a litter sink for the sea. Plastics and other rubbish run with the current up to Arrochar and, when the tide goes out, that rubbish is dumped on the shore. Arrochar's case is so special that it was recently included in the documentary "A Plastic Tide".

Local people are fighting back against the plastic tide alongside brilliant organisations such as the Marine Conservation Society, which, this year, is celebrating the 25th year of the operation of its beach watch project. Beach watch is a UK-wide project that uses volunteers to undertake a national beach-cleaning and litter-surveying programme. It is helping people all around the UK to care for their coastline and to collect useful scientific data. This year, it will culminate in the Great British beach clean, which will run from 14-17 September. I have lodged a motion for a members' business debate on the campaign, for which I look forward to cross-party support.

Last year, when a beach clean took place in my West Scotland region, six beach-clean events took place at Lunderston Bay, Irvine, Portencross beach, Blairvadach beach and Rhu spit, in Gare Loch, and on the Arrochar shores. They involved 117 volunteers who, between them, picked up 8,329 pieces of litter, 4,845 of which were made of plastic. That was 58 per cent of the total number of pieces of litter that were collected.

Catherine Gemmell and Calum Duncan from the Marine Conservation Society are in the public gallery for today's debate. They will be entirely responsible for organising the Great British beach clean in Scotland, and I whole-heartedly welcome them. It is good to see them here, smiling away. I challenge my fellow MSPs to help to organise and attend one of the Great British cleans in September this year. I look forward to taking their names after the debate.

I feel very strongly about deposit return schemes. My family's business was in the drinks manufacturing industry, and it had a deposit return scheme for glass rather than plastic bottles. It was a success and had a lot of buy-in from our customers and distributors in Scotland and Northern Ireland. I believe that such a scheme for plastic bottles would end up with the same buy-in as we had for the scheme for glass bottles.

It is a shame that the DRS was abandoned some time ago, with the move to plastic bottles, but some countries kept their DRS in place and subsequently reaped the rewards. The experience of Norway, which kept its DRS in place after the

move to plastic bottles, shows what is possible. A charge of 1 Norwegian krone—the equivalent of about 10p in the UK—is applied to each standard 500mg bottle and a 2.5 krone deposit—25p—to larger bottles. Those are small amounts, but Norway's DRS is claimed to be the most effective in the world, with 96 per cent of plastic bottles returned for recycling.

The benefits for the oceans and in general are enormous, which is demonstrated by the fact that, of all the plastic bottles that are washed up on Norway's shores, six out of seven are foreign. I could not find the exact figures for the UK and Scotland, but the vast majority of what washes up on our shores comes from the UK and Scotland. I was lucky enough to meet Kjell-Olav Maldum last year when he visited the Parliament. He is the chief operating executive and managing director of Infinitum, the Norwegian corporation that co-ordinates their national deposit return scheme. That meeting convinced me further that we can replicate Norway's success here in Scotland. However, it is vital that we have a UK-wide scheme to get the maximum benefit from the DRS. The UK Government has already announced that it is willing to work with the UK's devolved Administrations to ensure that we have a UK-wide approach, where possible, for the scheme.

Before it is too late, we must do whatever we can to stem the plastic tide that is choking our oceans. With the work of organisations such as the Marine Conservation Society and innovative schemes such as the DRS, we can do just that.

16:48

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): I take up Maurice Corry's challenge and say that I expect, once again, to join the staff from the Scottish Dolphin Centre at Spey Bay at their local beach clean, as I have done for many years. I pay tribute to the groups in our constituencies and others throughout Scotland who clean our beaches and have supported this kind of debate.

The debate, which is dedicated to single-use plastics, is taking place 19 years into devolution and is a sign of the times. It illustrates the momentum of public support for addressing the issue that there has been in recent years. Another sign of changed times is Maurice Corry's reference to the fact that any deposit return scheme should be a UK-wide one. The UK Government is now contemplating such a scheme south of the border, which is also a change of policy by the Conservatives south of the border. For many years, when I was in the Government, I went to extreme lengths in trying to persuade my UK counterparts to get behind a UK-wide deposit return scheme. I hope that we will now reach that position very soon.

The introduction of the 5p charge for single-use carrier bags and the research that has been conducted into the potential for a deposit return scheme in Scotland are policies that, just two or three years ago, were put in the “too radical” tray, whereas they are now taken for granted as absolutely necessary and are in the “urgent” tray. Things have moved apace in the past few years, a lot of which is down to modern technology, science and research. That modern technology includes social media, and we have many campaigns in Scotland, Europe and globally asking for the likes of plastics to be tackled. The word spreads quickly and, of course, “Blue Planet II” on our television screens played a huge role in raising public awareness of the impact of plastics and humans on our natural environment.

In 2002, WWF said that, if people around the world were to consume the world’s natural resources at the same rate as UK and US citizens, we would need an extra two planets to survive. Thankfully, more people are now aware of the impact that they are having on our natural resources and natural environment. I pay tribute to the organisations, such as the Marine Conservation Society, Greenpeace and many others, that have played a role in raising awareness of those issues in recent years. I was privileged to be at the launch event for the Greenpeace ship *Beluga II*, which went around Scotland’s coasts for two months last year to highlight the impact of plastics on our oceans.

These issues are often seen as arising in other parts of the world, such as in the Arctic, in the Pacific, in the Atlantic or wherever, but not necessarily within the Scottish six-mile and 12-mile limits. However, the *Beluga II* found that single-use plastic bottles have been washed up on the beaches of uninhabited islands in Scottish waters. People now realise that, when we throw away plastic bottles or other items, they are being washed up on beaches far away and they are impacting on the natural environment.

Governments legislate against the predation of precious and rare marine species using the hook, harpoon or net, or through inappropriate economic development, but we must recognise that we are killing or injuring those same marine species by dumping plastics and other alien materials into our oceans. We must recognise that we just cannot do that. Just as we outlaw other things, we must outlaw anything that harms the natural environment, or at least move towards reducing the impact in the short term. I believe that, at some point in the future, these activities will be illegal, when society has moved on that bit further.

It is good to see lots of private sector businesses getting behind tackling plastic packaging, as was discussed by the World

Economic Forum a couple of weeks ago. Multinational companies are recognising that consumers around the world want them to cut down on their plastic packaging to do their bit to save the planet and to stop plastics damaging marine wildlife and our fantastic landscapes.

I commend the cabinet secretary for picking up the cudgels and taking the issue forward, and I ask her please to regulate, regulate and regulate. It is the best way forward.

16:51

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): David Attenborough’s “Blue Planet II” series has been mentioned by just about every member so far; in time, it might prove to be one of the most significant catalysts for behavioural change among the ordinary public, possibly even eclipsing the awareness-raising that is done by environmental organisations.

The “Blue Planet II” series took more than four years and 125 expeditions across 39 countries to film and, as we have heard, it has touched the lives of many people who had previously not given the slightest consideration to our oceans. After he saw the series, six-year-old Harrison Forsyth wrote to ask Aldi to stop using plastic bags. That was but one of the many reactions seen in people who now want to protect our oceans.

Finlay Carson talked about the image of the sea horse with the cotton bud, but it was the film of the mother whale carrying her dead calf, which had died from her polluted milk, that upset me and has stayed with me.

The vibrant colours and the breathtaking life forms drew us into a series with sights that we could not have imagined. The episode called “The Deep” offered us a glimpse into an environment that we seem to know less about than we do about the surface of Mars. Once we were drawn into the series and captivated by it, the later episodes hit us with the disturbing facts that these beautiful creatures are fighting for their survival because of climate change and worse: the amount of plastic that is flowing into the sea and poisoning our marine life.

David Attenborough said:

“Unless the flow of plastics ... into the ocean is reduced, marine life will be poisoned by them for many centuries to come.”

The equivalent of a rubbish truck of plastic is being dumped into the world’s oceans every minute to be ingested by seabirds, fish and other organisms.

I am one of the many millions of people who have been shocked into action by the “Blue Planet II” series. I have to be honest and say that, but for “Blue Planet II”, this debate might have passed me

by. It will pass me by no longer. The subject should be centre stage in this parliamentary session and I give credit to Roseanna Cunningham for her command of the brief and the work that she has done, and to Claudia Beamish, who has had a lifetime of involvement.

I have turned my life around and I am now the chief recycler in my household. That is all down to being shocked by the “Blue Planet II” series and what I have heard.

The United Nations oceans chief, Lisa Svensson, said last year:

“This is a planetary crisis . . . We are ruining the ecosystem of the ocean.”

It seems that she is right.

Others have talked about what the effects might be on humans who eat fish that contain plastics. The answer is still largely unknown, but we can hazard a guess. The public should at least be aware that a recent survey by the University of Plymouth found plastic in a third of fish that are caught in UK waters, including haddock. Scientists in Belgium recently calculated that people who eat seafood ingest up to 11,000 tiny pieces of plastic every year.

We have heard all about everyday products that we think we cannot live without, but we might just have to live without some of them if we want to change. However, it will take the collective efforts of behavioural change, education, collaboration, regulation and legislation to reverse the damage that has been done to our world. Politicians have a duty to set an example. If people understand why they are being asked to change their behaviour, and if they know that they are doing it for the greater good, I am sure that we can do great things.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The last of the open debate contributions is from Kenneth Gibson.

16:55

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Nothing better illustrates our throwaway lifestyle than plastic, the production, use and disposal of which is a serious environmental and health problem. Globally, we use 160,000 plastic bags every second and components of that man-made material can take centuries to degrade.

Items that are designed to last might be used only once before being thrown away. Vast quantities of plastic debris and particles pollute our planet, with millions of tonnes dumped in our seas each year.

Sunlight gradually degrades plastic into tiny microplastics. Widely dispersed in water, they

attract other toxins, and thus pass up the food chain to eventually contaminate entire ecosystems. Sea creatures, from the most microscopic, swallow toxic chemicals from plastic decomposition. People eat fish that have eaten other marine organisms, which in turn had eaten toxin-saturated plastics. In essence, we are eating our own plastic waste.

Plastic pollution inspired the environmental scientist Lucy Gilliam and the skipper Emily Penn to launch eXXpedition, a unique series of all-female sailing voyages that strove to make the unseen seen, from the toxins in our bodies to the plastics in our seas. Last summer, the eXXpedition crew docked in Arran, in my constituency, during their month-long voyage around Britain. They also called at Leith and, on 25 August 2017, I hosted an event in Holyrood that was attended by 70 folk. That was before “Blue Planet II” raised the consciousness of millions about the impact of plastics on our seas.

The eXXpedition examined the plastics, chemicals, endocrine disruptors and carcinogens in our marine environment and linked them to the ecosystem and products that we consume. At the same time, it considered the long-term health impacts on future generations. Everyone alive today carries within their body at least 700 contaminants, and 29 of the 35 most toxic chemicals in plastics are present in human tissue.

Having organised and participated in numerous litter picks and beach cleans, I see how much plastic washes up on our shores. Single-use plastics such as bottles, straws, spoons and cups contribute most to the problem. Although a plastic-free society is unlikely, switching to reusable alternatives allows us to be part of the solution rather than part of the pollution.

Packaging should be dramatically reduced, and if the people who work at this Parliament took a proper lunch break, they would not use any of the polystyrene packs that they take their lunch back to their offices in. We can also reduce single-use plastic personal care and hygiene products, such as liquid soap, shower gel, shampoo and conditioner, which often come in wee plastic bottles.

It takes a litre of fossil fuel and 22 litres of water to produce a 1-litre plastic bottle, emitting 55 grams of greenhouse gases in the process. In the United States alone, 17 million barrels of oil are used annually to produce plastic water bottles.

Microbeads are solid plastic particles of less than 1mm. A ban on both the manufacture and sale of microbeads in rinse-off cosmetics and personal care products comes into effect this year. Having raised this issue numerous times, I am particularly pleased by that ban.

Around half of plastic bottles are currently recycled, which represents an important step towards a society in which resources are valued and nothing is wasted. A plastic bottle deposit scheme would surely help further.

Although the Parliament is resolutely opposed to disposable plastic, in life, solutions are not always simple. The plastic bag charge has been remarkably successful in cutting the colossal number of bags that are sent to landfill, but a study in 2005 by the Liberal-Labour Scottish Executive stated that

“a paper bag has a more adverse impact than a plastic bag for most of the environmental issues considered”.

In 2011 the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs also concluded that a cotton shopping bag needs to be used 173 times before it is responsible for fewer carbon emissions than a plastic bag, because cotton is a very water-intensive crop that requires lots of fertiliser and oil to fuel the machinery that is required for cultivation, and the run-off is very damaging.

Polylactic acid or PLA, a biodegradable and bioactive thermoplastic aliphatic polyester derived from renewable resources such as sugarcane, corn starch, cassava roots or woodchips, is a possible alternative, but it requires vast areas of land. Europe uses 60,000 tonnes of plastic a year. Switching to PLA would utilise around 100,000 square kilometres of arable land, which is nearly a tenth of all land under cultivation across Europe. Biodegradable plastic decomposes straight to methane, a greenhouse gas with 20 times the potency of CO₂. Ultimately, we must more effectively husband earth's precious natural resources, reusing and recycling them, as the cabinet secretary said in her opening statement.

A totally single-use-plastic-free Scotland is a long-term goal that will take time to achieve. However, plastic pollution is an entirely man-made problem and the solutions, too, must be of our own conception.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches.

17:00

Mark Ruskell: We have had an interesting and wide-ranging debate. The cabinet secretary started off with a long list of plastic pollution, from wet wipes to bottle caps and cotton buds; Claudia Beamish added crisp bags; Kate Forbes added enough straws to get us to the moon and back, but thankfully not via Waitrose—I congratulate her; Liam McArthur added half a million coffee cups in Scottish Government canteens; Graham Dey added some fag butts; and John Scott was concerned about the microfibrils that possibly lurk in his body.

There have also been a number of speeches about the importance of community action, with members highlighting the excellent work that has taken place in their constituencies for many years. Sunnyside primary school has been mentioned, as has the excellent work in Ullapool on the banning of plastic straws, and we heard about the beach cleans at Lunan bay, Arrochar and Spey bay. Such activity is hugely important, not in terms of removing huge volumes of plastic pollution from the coast and seas, but in terms of helping us to understand the scale of the problem of plastic pollution and driving the behaviour change and education that we need. In that regard, I commend the Marine Conservation Society, Surfers Against Sewage and the schools and communities across Scotland that have been doing that work.

In my constituency, I have taken part in beach cleans at Kinghorn bay. The community there really understands and cares about their local environment. That comes down to what Tom Arthur was saying about the partnership that is needed between generations. That is evident in the communities that I am talking about. Sadly, one individual, Mary, is no longer with us, but she did fantastic work 10 years ago on the campaign against ship-to-ship oil transfers. We can see that baton being passed from one generation to another. The work of people in these communities is vital to helping us understand the impact of plastic pollution.

Iain Gray mentioned nurdles. I congratulate the charity Fidra on its excellent work in that area. Certainly, the call for a certification scheme to address where in the supply chain the nurdles are getting lost is hugely important.

That leads me to another issue around supply chains, which we perhaps have not addressed in this afternoon's debate: where our low-grade plastic waste recycling ends up. Early in the new year, we got news that China intends to ban the low-grade plastic imports that we have in effect been dumping there to be reprocessed. There have been some investigations into traceability issues in the plastics supply chain. Plastic waste is meant to be certified and exported through something called a packaging export recovery note, but investigations have found that some of that waste has ended up in Asia being stockpiled, landfilled or even burned.

In order to maintain public confidence in recycling, it is important that we ensure that that plastic waste is traceable and auditable. If it is intended to be recycled, it must be recycled. I ask the cabinet secretary to comment in her closing speech on what we can do at the Scottish Government level to ensure that we have that traceability. As soon as news of the Chinese plastic ban came out, I asked the Scottish

Government what the implications will be for us. The answer that I got back was that we do not know yet. However, I would like to know when the Government will know, because local authorities around Scotland have spent millions of pounds reconfiguring their waste collection systems, often with the aim of increasing the collection of mixed lower-grade plastic, and it would be useful to know what the future holds for that.

I congratulate the Government on making substantial progress on deposit return. Richard Lochhead and Maurice Corry mentioned deposit-return schemes and the prospect of there being a UK-wide one. I noted the cabinet secretary's comments about such schemes moving beyond plastic and potentially on to cans and glass bottles. I ask her to say a little bit more about that in her closing remarks. It will be a very exciting initiative if we can take the deposit-return concept and start to apply it to bottles that we used to take for granted as being able to be reused.

I also take on board the points that a number of members made about the importance of equalities-proofing this push. I go back to my initial point about the importance of a plastic hierarchy and recognising that we do need to use plastics—possibly even single-use ones—in some cases, but that the kind of regular, wasteful use that we as a society are involved in at the moment is clearly inappropriate.

In closing, I will briefly mention incineration. I say to Maurice Golden that while this is perhaps not the best debate in which to raise the subject, I share his concerns. We are seeing speculative applications for waste incinerators appearing across Scotland, including in Westfield in Fife, which is in my region. They are slipping through the planning system. I raised the question with the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy, and we had a statement on energy in December. I was promised a meeting with Mr Wheelhouse and Roseanna Cunningham, but that has not happened yet. We need to get a grip on the issue, particularly given that we have the national planning framework coming this year.

In conclusion, I wish the Government well, as I do the summit that will take place in Oban later this year. I hope that it will address the problem of microfibres that was raised in the Scottish Green Party's amendment.

17:07

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

As the cabinet secretary and many others have said in this debate, following the final episode of the recent documentary series "Blue Planet II", the spotlight has been placed on the scale of destruction being caused by the excessive use of

plastics right across the world. All of us who watched the programme could not help but be shocked by scenes showing the tragic impact that such waste is having on marine life. Although the problems that are caused by plastic pollution have been known about for some time, the public mood and a desire to change things for the better mean that there is now an energy across all age groups and all sectors of society that will help to drive the change that we need—a point that was well made by Graeme Dey, Claudia Beamish, Kenneth Gibson and others.

Today in this Parliament there have been many good speeches highlighting what is being done across Scotland—and what needs to be done. As Tom Arthur and other contributors mentioned, the report prepared by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation for the recent World Economic Forum in Davos stated—incredibly—that, by 2050, the amount of plastic in the ocean will outweigh fish. It is just incredible that the human race would do that. As Pope Francis said:

"What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us?"

He went on to say:

"May the relationship between man and nature not be driven by greed, to manipulate and exploit, but may the divine harmony between beings and creation be conserved in the logic of respect and care".

Friends of the Earth Scotland strikes a similar note when it says:

"The increase in single use plastics has coincided with the development of a damaging mind-set of take-make-dispose and a culture of hyper-consumerism."

As others have said today, plastic has been around for a long time, but it now dominates our lives in clothing, cooking, engineering and product design. The rate at which we are producing plastic has accelerated. A report in *Science* magazine in July 2017 estimated that 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic has been produced to date and that some 80 per cent—6.3 billion tonnes—of that is now waste.

Speaker after speaker in this debate has made the point that we cannot continue like this; we cannot simply ignore the issue and we all have to take responsibility for doing something about it. However, it is clear that a problem of such a scale and complexity will not lend itself to a quick fix. We will need global co-operation and, indeed, global action to achieve the lasting change that we desire, but action can also be taken much closer to home by individuals, communities, local authorities and Governments. I am therefore pleased that the Scottish Government's motion recognises the need to take action on a number of fronts and that Labour's amendment recognises that public involvement, volunteer action and a

rethink of how we as a country use resources all have a part to play.

Individual behaviours will play a big part in reducing the impact of single-use plastics. There are currently around 480 billion plastic bottles sold across the globe every year, which is 20,000 per second. Anything that we can do to reduce that figure will make a difference. Simple but effective action such as the introduction of the refill scheme, whereby shops and offices can permit the public to come in to refill their water bottles, will have an effect. I know that some MSPs have signed up to that scheme already. However, we also need to find ways to provide drinking water in public areas, following the example set by London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, and we could take a step back to the kind of drinking fountains that used to be found in many towns, villages and parks. Indeed, a report from Seas at Risk points out that Copenhagen in Denmark has recently installed 60 drinking fountains across the city, which is just one of many examples that the report gives of local leadership in taking action.

Kate Forbes highlighted that Ullapool was the first village in the UK to ban plastic straws, which followed a campaign driven by local schoolchildren. In my home county of Fife, the chief executive of the council told me this morning that Fife is in the process of working on a plan to ban plastic straws. The Scottish Government's charge for plastic bags is working a treat. I also welcome the great work done by local communities such as Kinghorn, as mentioned by Mark Ruskell, and Carnock, and by voluntary organisations in organising clean-ups. We must recognise the challenges that local authorities face as they seek to manage their waste as well.

The public can, to a degree, choose whether to use items such as plastic bottles, plastic straws, wet wipes, cotton buds and plastic cutlery; and, with the right support, we can choose to use alternatives. However, as individuals, we have less choice over the materials used in packaging everyday consumer goods such as supermarket fruit and vegetables, in disposable nappies and—yes—even in tea bags. The plastic contained in those things can take hundreds of years to biodegrade.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a close, please, Mr Rowley.

Alex Rowley: We should ensure that the new energy to tackle plastics is not just a reaction but the start of sustainable action.

17:13

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am delighted to be able to close this debate for the Scottish Conservatives and I note

that there have been several constructive suggestions by members from across the chamber; it is indeed refreshing to be able to unite as a Parliament on such a serious issue. In addition, I pay tribute to my colleague in the Highlands and Islands, Kate Forbes, for her sterling work in leading the fight to eliminate plastic straws, a campaign that we wholeheartedly support. I know that she is an influential woman with friends in high places, but as I read the *Sunday Mail* front page this week announcing that even Her Majesty the Queen has heeded her call and banned plastic straws from her palaces and residences across the country, I was in awe of Kate Forbes and her powers of persuasion. Indeed, I would like to thank all the community groups, schools, charities and businesses across Scotland that have responded so positively to the campaign and wider calls to eliminate the use of plastics where possible. That is a positive starting point for the bigger debate.

It is encouraging that the UK Government has delivered a clear 25-year plan to eliminate avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042. The plan includes an ambition to have zero avoidable waste by 2050, meeting all existing waste targets including those on landfill, reuse and recycling and seeking to eliminate waste crime and illegal waste sites over the lifetime of the plan. I am also encouraged by the UK Government's action to see what overseas projects it can invest some of our £13 billion overseas budget into in order to prevent the devastation of marine life. WWF Scotland has argued specifically for that, and I am glad that steps are being taken in that direction.

I have noted the Scottish Government's backing for the 2030 single-use plastics plan. We are yet to see a clear strategy on how that will be delivered, but I wait in good faith for that. One observation that I offer is that having excellent ad hoc campaigns such as #NaeStrawAtAw and have you got the bottle? is one thing, but there must also be a degree of co-ordination so that a holistic and all-encompassing approach is undertaken. To be fair to the cabinet secretary, I note that she referenced co-ordination in her opening remarks.

That brings me to our amendment and what might be termed the Mauricetorium. [*Laughter.*] We on the Conservative benches support the Government's motion, but, as my colleagues have noted, we want it to go further. At the end of the day, although dealing with plastic pollution is a step in the right direction, we must be wary of treating it as the be-all and end-all to reducing waste and promoting a more circular economy. As our amendment states, we want Parliament to support a moratorium on any new incineration facilities.

Clare Adamson: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Cameron: I am sorry. I do not have time, I am afraid.

As Maurice Golden said, there has been a twelvefold increase in incineration. It is appropriate to put a marker down about incineration and reduce the need to burn what has been used. I welcome the sympathy that was expressed by Mark Ruskell, among others, for the view that incineration of plastics is unacceptable.

That is why the promotion and uptake of recycling is important, it is why the need to innovate is vital, and it is why we need to identify new ways in which plastic can be reused. Ivan McKee spoke powerfully about alternatives that could be explored. Only a few weeks ago, many members attended an event here in Parliament with the Dumfriesshire-based firm MacRebur, which takes waste plastic, and in particular non-reusable plastics, and turns them into new roads.

As many members throughout the chamber have noted, the introduction of a deposit return scheme is integral to this debate. My colleague Maurice Golden did a lot of work on that as convener of a sub-group of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee last year, and Maurice Corry has also been a vocal campaigner. Given the overarching nature of this afternoon's debate and the time that is available to me, I do not intend to go into the arguments around a DRS, but it is important to note how it will impact on our ability to collect, recycle and reuse plastics.

In addition, we must face up to the reality that recycling uptake is lagging, with the rate of recycling increasing by only 1 per cent from 2015 to 2016 and less than half of household waste being recycled. If current trends continue, we will not meet the 70 per cent recycling target by 2025, which would be extremely disappointing.

The fact that non-degradable plastic accounts for 73 per cent of litter in any aquatic environment and the fact that over 170 marine species have been recorded as ingesting human-made polymers, which can cause life-threatening complications such as gut perforation and reduced food intake, affecting cells and tissues, are simply unacceptable.

In addition, it is not just a problem for the many species that roam our lands, skies and waters; it is a problem for the economy, too, as others have said. Marine plastics cost the Scottish fishing industry between £10.3 million and £11.5 million a year, with the average fishing vessel spending between £15,000 and £17,000 every year in repairs and direct loss of earnings. As an MSP for the Highlands and Islands, that is of particular

concern to me. According to Zero Waste Scotland, councils needlessly lose around £54 million a year in landfill tax due to the fact that 60 per cent of items in landfill could have been recycled.

In order to tackle the many challenges that our environment faces, we must all work together to ensure that the many noble words shared here today are turned into action. Tackling single-use and unnecessary plastics is just one part of the much greater objective to ensure that our environment is protected and that future generations can benefit from a cleaner and greener planet.

17:20

Roseanna Cunningham: I welcome those who are not the usual suspects to this environment portfolio debate. It is good to see such wider interest, which obviously reflects the wider concern in society. No doubt, that is because our natural environment is being threatened by casual attitudes towards resources, so we must learn to rethink our relationship with plastics. That is challenging and it is not always straightforward.

I am grateful to Fiona Robertson from Aberdeen, who entered the Twitter debate about cauliflower steaks with a gentle reminder that not everyone finds peeling, chopping or slicing easy, or even possible. Her intervention is directly responsible for the decision to have a disability adviser on this issue.

We have to move from being a throwaway society to being a society that takes much greater responsibility for how we use, dispose of and recycle materials, to derive the greatest value from the planet's finite resources. We can encourage businesses to innovate through the design of their products and services in order to support their customers to make reuse an easy choice, or help them to recycle more.

We can lead by example. Liam McArthur challenged the Scottish Government itself, quite rightly. I assure him that the permanent secretary is very much on the case and that a timeline of action is currently being worked through.

We can set an example as individuals, too. I commend the refill app mentioned by Alex Rowley. Colleagues can register their constituency offices as water refill stations and encourage people to use them—it is free and easy to do. For obvious reasons, that means that we support the move by Network Rail to introduce public water refill points, and we are exploring with Scottish Water options for the introduction of public water refill points in private and public buildings and spaces. A great deal of work is being done out there; members need to be confident that that is happening.

It makes good business sense to listen to what our customers want. I hear loud and clear the message that people want a clean environment. Over the years in parliamentary debates, we have agreed on the need for change, so let us now agree evidence-based actions to tackle the problem.

I cannot possibly summarise all the contributions. Suffice it to say that I guess that I was not the only one scrutinising their own plastic use—my initial view turned out to be rather prescient.

I am happy to accept the Labour and Green amendments. Claudia Beamish lodged an amendment that focuses on a number of issues and includes well-made points about education, particularly in relation to educating the next generation of designers—which of course is probably a whole other debate in itself—and action to help companies develop alternatives to single-use plastics. Those are important elements of the debate.

The Green amendment focused very much on “microfibers”. I am a little distressed by the somewhat Americanised spelling in the amendment, but I will agree to the amendment in spite of it. We recognise that microfibrils are a major problem and we monitor their presence in the water column and subtidal marine sediments. We are also conducting research into plastics as a vector for toxic contaminants in the ecosystem. Some work is already being done on that. We all agree that it is a major challenge, because that material exists where we do not realise that it exists, which is one of the huge issues.

I cannot accept the Conservative amendment. First, of the total waste in Scotland only about 1 per cent is incinerated. It is a bit unhelpful of the Conservatives to have tried to shoehorn a debate about incineration into this debate about marine plastics. It is not clear whether incinerators that require upgrading to make them more energy efficient and less polluting would be captured by a moratorium such as the one that the Conservatives suggest. It is also unclear what effect such a decision might have on planning applications that are already going through the appropriate local process. Would we be running the risk of multiple judicial reviews?

I gently say to Maurice Golden and his colleagues that I am advised by my friend Maureen Watt, who is sitting on my right, that Conservative councillors in Aberdeen are pushing hard to build an energy-from-waste plant. There perhaps needs to be a conversation in the Conservative Party before Conservative members lodge such amendments.

Today’s debate is about celebrating everything that communities are doing to address marine plastics, as well as setting out our stalls on what else the Government and Parliament collectively might take on board in relation to the issue. I have heard a lot of new ideas this afternoon, and every idea will be treated seriously. I will consider further legislation where there is compelling evidence that legislating is the right thing to do to achieve change. My mind is open to further ideas, and I think that Mark Ruskell’s hierarchy of priorities is helpful.

We will continue to work in partnership with business, local government, charities and others to support the outcomes that we seek. The summit that I intend to hold later this year will bring together wide interests to explore what else can be done across boundaries to achieve the change that we need and create a better environment for current and future generations.

I have signalled our willingness to work with other parts of the UK on deposit return. We want to work with partners world wide to develop and implement best practice measures to address marine litter and responsible use of plastics. Maurice Corry called on us to work with the UK Government. Both sides need to be engaged in that regard. My officials have not yet been able to get confirmation of what the UK Government commitment on deposit return will be, and we understand that no decision has been taken so far. It is a little difficult to work in an environment in which no decision is being taken on the other side.

I reiterate the commitment that we do not want the scheme to be just about plastic bottles; we want to make it about cans and glass, too. We want to be as ambitious as we can be.

In our programme for government, we have recognised the need for funding to address, for example, litter sinks, and we will strive to help affected communities.

I welcome the enthusiasm and energy of members who highlighted specific issues and called for action. I want to approach the issue in a strategic fashion that avoids unintended consequences for society and the environment. The 2030 vision for ending single-use plastics in our society gives us a focus for beginning to consider the strategy for achieving it.

Work is being done to implement a code of conduct for the Scottish plastics industry and on the safe handling, packaging and transportation by sea of plastic pellets, or nurdles. We continue to encourage the voluntary work that can be done; the message is that good handling practice can easily reduce pellet loss. There are legislative and regulatory challenges in seeking to ban certain materials. Voluntary initiatives might succeed, but

we will explore whether and how legislation could be developed to address the issue.

The Government believes that the case has been made for deposit return. We want an ambitious system, as I said. We are consulting on a scheme this year, so concrete action is being taken.

Any solution to the cumulative damage that plastics are doing to our environment and economy involves us all, so I will work with anyone who has an appetite for change. The success of the carrier bag charge, which members mentioned, shows what can be achieved through small, simple actions.

We have a long way to go, although members have been able to reference the huge difference that is already being made. Media coverage in recent months has thrown into sharp focus the fragile beauty of our environment; it has also captured the imagination of audiences, which we need to mobilise—this is a moment when we need to act quickly.

The Scottish Government will encourage and indeed legislate to address the problem, but we also need to inspire individual and societal change. That means leading from the front in our own lives. It means setting an example of the society that we want to be, for the environment that we want to protect. I am certain that not a single member in this chamber feels less strongly about that than I do.

I hope that I am concluding at about the time when you needed me to conclude, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Yes, cabinet secretary, and I thank you and all members for keeping to time this afternoon.

Business Motions

17:29

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two business motions: motion S5M-10351, setting out a business timetable; and motion S5M-10352, setting out a stage 2 timetable.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 20 February 2018

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Rate Resolution

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 21 February 2018

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Rural Economy and Connectivity;
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 22 February 2018

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 Government Debate: A Migration System that Meets the Needs of Scotland

followed by Legislative Consent Memorandum: Financial Guidance and Claims Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 27 February 2018

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Wednesday 28 February 2018	
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions Culture, Tourism and External Affairs; Justice and the Law Officers
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday 1 March 2018	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Stage 3 Proceedings: Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

and (b) that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 22 February 2018, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders or their representatives to question the First Minister".

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Repeal) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 9 March 2018.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the bureau, to move motions S5M-10353 to S5M-10355, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments; motion S5M-10356, on suspension and variation of standing orders; and motion S5M-10357, on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Police Act 1997 and the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 Remedial Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Registers of Scotland (Digital Registration etc.) Regulations 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 9.10.2A of Standing Orders be suspended and the following be substituted as alternative provision for the purposes of consideration of the Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill at stage 3—

"2A. Subject to paragraph 6, where a member of the Scottish Government or a junior Scottish Minister intends to move an amendment to the Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill at Stage 3, that member shall give notice of the amendment by lodging it with the Clerk no later than 16:30 on Friday 9 February 2018. Amendments may be lodged until 16:30 on any day when the office of the Clerk is open."

That the Parliament agrees that the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Scottish Crown Estate Bill at stage 1.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Decision Time

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question this evening is, that amendment S5M-10307.1, in the name of Maurice Golden, which seeks to amend motion S5M-10307, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on stemming the plastic tide, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)

Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 34, Against 62, Abstentions 26.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-10307.4, in the name of Claudia Beamish, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-10307.2, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-10307, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, as amended, on stemming the plastic tide, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges and shares the increasing recognition of the cumulative damage that plastics are doing to the environment and economy, not just domestically but also globally; agrees that there is a need for an evidence-based approach to tackle the problem; welcomes the actions that the Scottish Government and others have taken to tackle litter at source and in areas of litter accumulation; supports the aim to both encourage behaviour change in society and to seek legislative solutions to this problem where necessary and appropriate; recognises the important role that education plays in raising public awareness and the value of Scottish Government support for volunteer clean-up programmes; notes the significance of the need for government action to help companies develop alternative materials to single-use plastics; calls on the Scottish Government to support the remanufacturing of plastics as part of developing the circular economy; remains shocked at levels of plastic found in wildlife across the globe; understands that, during every clothes wash, thousands of plastic microfibers escape from clothing that is made from synthetic materials, and that billions of these small fibres make their way into the oceans; acknowledges that plastic in the environment can be a harmful pollutant, and commits to collective action to reduce plastic pollution from microfibers as part of a comprehensive action plan.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that five Parliamentary Bureau motions S5M-10353 to S5M-10357, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Police Act 1997 and the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 Remedial Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Registers of Scotland (Digital Registration etc.) Regulations 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 9.10.2A of Standing Orders be suspended and the following be substituted as alternative provision for the purposes of consideration of the Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill at stage 3—

“2A. Subject to paragraph 6, where a member of the Scottish Government or a junior Scottish Minister intends to move an amendment to the Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill at Stage 3, that member shall give notice of the amendment by lodging it with the Clerk no later than 16:30 on Friday 9 February 2018. Amendments may be lodged until 16:30 on any day when the office of the Clerk is open.”

That the Parliament agrees that the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Scottish Crown Estate Bill at stage 1.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Veterans Charities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-09384, in the name of Liam Kerr, on increasing awareness of the work of veterans charities in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the important work undertaken by veteran charities and organisations in Scotland; highlights the difficulty of veterans seeking help for physical or mental health problems, especially within the armed forces community where it believes the culture can make seeking help appear difficult; notes the work of the Aberdeenshire-based military charity, HorseBack UK; understands that, for just under 10 years, HorseBack UK has helped injured soldiers and veterans using horsemanship skills, and continues to do so today; acknowledges that the purpose behind the charity is to inspire recovery, regain self-esteem and provide a sense of purpose and community to the wounded, injured and sick within the military community; notes that, for the last four years, the charity has taken its knowledge gained from working with veterans to other communities, including activities involving sport and disengaged young people, in order to enable those who have been injured mentally or physically to then help others, after clinical care, and further notes that the charity has developed mentoring programmes to create a sense of community and purpose for those hurt and who now have a real desire to change public perception towards mental health and disability.

17:34

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am very proud to bring forward this members' business debate today, and I thank all those from across the chamber who added their support to the motion, allowing us to debate and highlight an extremely important issue and the solutions that are offered by various charities. I welcome all in the public gallery, particularly those from HorseBack UK, and thank them for coming to listen to what I am certain will be an informative and productive debate.

Before we get to the challenges and solutions, tonight's debate gives us the opportunity to pay tribute to our armed forces and veterans community and to recognise the immense contribution that service personnel have made to Scottish society whether during or after service.

My motion seeks to highlight the considerable challenges that are faced by veterans who may require help for physical and/or mental health problems. That help is important. A YouGov survey for the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association Forces Help—SSAFA Forces Help—that was conducted in October 2017 shows the extent of the problems that veterans face: 33 per cent of former services personnel feel isolated

or lonely due to mental or physical health issues, 34 per cent feel overwhelmed by negative feelings and 27 per cent admit to having suicidal thoughts after finishing their military service. I also understand that only 60 per cent of working-age veterans are in work compared with 73 per cent of the United Kingdom population.

Of course, that is not to say that all veterans will experience those problems, but we must acknowledge the statistics and ensure that our veterans who require assistance receive the very best advice and support as they readjust. That is where the vital work undertaken by veterans charities and organisations in Scotland comes in, and I take this opportunity to highlight some of the outstanding work that they do.

About 320 armed forces charities operate in Scotland, providing a wide variety of services including but not limited to health and wellbeing services and activities, education, employment and careers services, advice and advocacy services and housing provision.

The scale and nature of the charities differ massively. There are the large nationally recognised organisations, such as Poppyscotland and the Royal British Legion Scotland. Poppyscotland will no doubt want me to flag that it has launched its largest-ever campaign outside the annual poppy appeal to inspire groups, schools, businesses, clubs and organisations around the country each to raise £1,918—or more—this year.

Smaller—but no less valuable—organisations also play a vital role in helping with the complex transition back on to civvy street. In the words of Wings for Warriors, which works with wounded and medically discharged ex-service personnel to provide them with the skills to be professional pilots, they help to ensure that veterans return to their communities as professionals

“to look up to instead of look after.”

Another of the smaller organisations—I am very pleased to have it represented here today—is HorseBack UK. Co-founded by ex-Royal Marine Jock Hutchison, whose work was recently highlighted by the Prime Minister no less, HorseBack UK

“uses horsemanship to inspire recovery, regain self-esteem and provide a sense of purpose and community to the wounded, injured and sick of the military community”.

Learning to work with a horse is one of the most intricate and challenging things that anyone can do, and the courses and voluntary programmes at HorseBack UK give participants a place where they can learn new skills while overcoming any physical limitations and, by taking a holistic approach, aid mental and social recovery.

The impact that the charity has had on the lives of those that it has supported has been extraordinary. Talking of his own experience, a former Royal Marines corporal said that the charity had started

“an important new chapter in his life”

and had shown him that there was “still hope”. The spouse of another stated:

“The effects have lasted longer than I expected too, we had a few moments before he left when he would normally have gone into the darkness but much to my surprise and delight he was very chilled and relaxed.”

Members will be able to hear more testimonials at the reception that I am holding right after the debate in the Burns room, committee room 1.

Debates such as this one are so important because they give us the opportunity to highlight not only those organisations that are going above and beyond but what is out there. During the veterans and armed forces community debate in November 2017, Richard Lochhead rightly highlighted the difficulties that some armed forces personnel may have in understanding what each of the organisations delivers. To that end, I will highlight and welcome the work of veterans gateway.

Veterans gateway, many of whose team are veterans themselves, is the first point of contact to put veterans and their families in touch with the organisations that are best placed to help with the information, advice and support that they need—from healthcare and housing to employability, finances, personal relationships and more.

Additionally, as representatives, we have an important part to play.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government and the UK Government are proactively seeking to address the issue. In particular, I welcome the UK Government’s plan to introduce different driving licences for veterans. The scheme, which could be implemented by the early 2020s, will provide the first universally recognised identification for veterans in the UK. It will create a new proof of service for veterans, thereby ensuring that they will have access to healthcare benefits, among other things. That is important, because those who serve our country deserve recognition, and the new scheme should help.

On that note, I would like to highlight the Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland’s count them in campaign. Despite the fact that it is estimated that one in 10 of the UK population are members of the armed forces community, there is limited information about where they are or what their needs might be. By adding new questions to the 2021 census, we should be able to improve our understanding of that unique community and

ensure that the needs of our forces personnel and veterans and their families are fully met.

I urge the Scottish Government to continue to look at ways in which we can highlight and support veterans charities and groups, particularly smaller ones such as HorseBack UK.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank Liam Kerr for securing a debate on the issue, because it is one that is close to my heart and to the hearts of the veterans I work with in my constituency. Will he join me in encouraging our parliamentary colleagues to find out about and make connections with the armed services advice project—a project by Poppyscotland and Citizens Advice Scotland to signpost veterans to the right people—which was piloted in Hamilton and rolled out to the rest of Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will get additional time, Mr Kerr.

Liam Kerr: Christina McKelvie makes an important point, and the answer is yes.

Without organisations such as HorseBack UK, the cost and impact on our local services and local authorities would be great, and the negative impact on veterans would be even greater. The positives that accrue to society, individuals and the economy as a result of that work are considerable.

I thank the members who are in the chamber for coming together to discuss this important matter, and I hope that some of them will be able to join me at the event that I am sponsoring with HorseBack UK in the Burns room after the debate.

17:42

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I thank Liam Kerr for lodging his important motion to highlight the work that veterans organisations do.

Only yesterday, we celebrated 100 years since the Representation of the People Act 1918, which gave many women the right to vote for the first time. According to a tweet by Poppyscotland yesterday, one of the main reasons that that was made possible, and was supported by the public and some of the establishment, was the contribution that women made to society during the first world war.

The first world war, the 100-year anniversary of which we will commemorate in November this year, changed the UK for ever, and the effect that it had on those who served and their families is immeasurable. More than 6 million men served in the war; 750,000 of them never returned home, including my great-grandmother’s brother, who died at the battle of the Somme; 1.75 million

suffered some kind of disability; and millions more could not find work on their return from the front.

To care for those who had suffered, whether through their own service or through that of a family member, the British Legion, as it was then known, was formed. To this day, Scotland still has a large and vibrant armed forces community, which includes reservists, regular personnel and their families. Estimates show that the community encompasses more than half a million people. In a previous members' business debate, I spoke about the many veterans who have been supported and cared for at Erskine Hospital, and the dedication of the staff who have worked there for the past 101 years.

The impact and effect that war continues to have on our forces and their families is substantial, so the support that our veterans charities and organisations provide is as crucial today as it ever was. One of my Blantyre constituents, David, has had support from the Royal British Legion and the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association.

David served in the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and was stationed in Germany prior to the first Gulf war. In late 1990, he received multiple injections, all at the same time, in preparation for possible deployment to the Gulf. As it turned out, he was not deployed there, but he has suffered from ill health ever since. He left the Army in May 1992, and he suffers from a combination of health issues, including impaired mobility, that he believes are directly attributable to those injections.

The problem is that David and many other veterans have never found out the exact cocktail of vaccines that they were given. The Ministry of Defence says that David's medical records are missing, and the Army initially denied that any such injections took place. However, certain declassified documents indicate that the vaccines may have contained strains of anthrax and botulism. The MOD's lack of transparency on that issue inhibits civilian doctors from giving an accurate diagnosis and treatment for the health issues that such veterans continue to experience. More than anything, David simply wants an acknowledgement that the injections took place and information on what he was injected with, because he believes that that will inform his on-going treatment.

The National Gulf Veterans and Families Association has provided David with advice and support, but it is limited in what it can do in this instance. It would be helpful to it and to the good work that it continues to do for David and hundreds of other veterans in Scotland if the MOD were less retentive of medical information that it holds. That would be helpful in improving veterans' quality of life.

From the first world war through to the Gulf war and beyond, successive Governments have let down too many of our veterans and their families. Being thrust into their new civilian life or a family being left to deal with the loss of a loved one is often too difficult for someone to deal with alone. We can dispute the merits of going to a particular war, whether troops should be deployed and who our allies should be, but we cannot dispute that our veterans charities and organisations are very often left covering gaps in support that the Government should be offering.

We all owe a great debt to our armed forces and their families, who have sacrificed much for us, and to the veterans charities and organisations that endeavour to support them. However, the UK Government must step up and protect our men and women who go to war to protect us.

17:46

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, thank Liam Kerr for bringing the motion to Parliament and allowing us to debate this important subject.

At the outset, I declare that I am officially a veteran, although I do not consider that to be an entirely appropriate label, because the word "veteran" comes from a Latin word that means "old", and I do not consider that I am old. I will park that comment, because my children continually tell me that I am old. I want to look at what veterans charities—in particular, HorseBack UK—achieve.

I spent two years of my career in the services undertaking mounted ceremonial duties in London. I have to confess that, when I was posted to London to do that, I was not keen—in fact, I was sent to Knightsbridge kicking and screaming. When I started, I subscribed to the old adage that horses bite at one end and kick at the other. At that stage, I would have added that the bit in the middle tried very hard to ensure that a person landed in the line of fire of the kicking bit or the biting bit.

However, 24 weeks of riding school taught me different. I joined a ride of young soldiers, most of whom had never touched a horse, let alone ridden one. Most lacked confidence in their abilities and questioned the wisdom of having joined a regiment that had to ride horses. Within a week of finishing our course, we all rode in the Queen's birthday parade, which was quite an achievement for young soldiers. During those 24 weeks, we all learned a lot about horses. I saw young soldiers maturing and gaining confidence in their ability that they never had before. Those who did particularly well were those who came to trust their horses and build empathy with them: they worked together and trusted each other.

I understand that HorseBack UK is about building confidence and self-esteem, and a bond or reliance that is not questioned, but is just accepted. Let me be clear: horses are not stupid, but they look to their human counterparts to take the lead. They do not judge their human counterparts on their physical stature; rather, they judge them on how they treat the horse. For servicemen, and for adults and children who lack confidence, horses provide a vehicle through which to rebuild faith in their inner being.

Horses are not solitary animals, and neither are humans: both need a community. I recognise the importance of there being a veterans community. I served in much more peaceful times than many younger recently discharged veterans served in, but I suspect that many soldiers have seen things that they would rather not have seen. Sometimes being with friends and colleagues who do not need to ask any questions, in unspoken understanding of what has gone on before, is a very important kind of therapy.

There are many veterans charities: I wish them all well. I believe that the independent charities can do much more than Government charities, which are often bound by regulations. The independence of veterans charities gives them the ability to invest as they see fit, and makes them the envy of the world. We all need to remember that to keep their independence they need our help, which we should give them freely.

17:50

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank Liam Kerr for bringing the debate to the chamber, and for highlighting the important work that is done by HorseBack UK and veterans charities throughout Scotland. As members from across the chamber have done, I pay tribute to the work of those charities and thank them for all that they do.

As members know, the majority of my involvement with the armed forces stems from HM Naval Base Clyde at Faslane being in my constituency. A significant number of serving men and women, and veterans, live in my constituency with their families, and I know how incredibly important it is for them to be supported throughout their careers and when they retire.

As Liam Kerr's motion highlights, there is a stigma surrounding

"seeking help for physical or mental health problems"

in the veterans community. The support of charities such as the ones that I will mention allows veterans to live full and independent lives after leaving the forces.

I will start by talking about a charity that we all know well—SSAFA, which is the Soldiers, Sailors,

Airmen & Families Association. It aims to ensure that the needs of our armed forces and veterans are met, and that they have independence and dignity after they leave the services. It provides a range of valuable support for people's physical needs and mental wellbeing, which is hugely practical support for veterans and their families.

SSAFA works throughout the UK; I am blessed to have it operating in my area. At this point, I want to give a huge shout out to Mary Burch, who is the divisional secretary of my local SSAFA. Aside from being enormously helpful and sympathetic, she is tireless in her fundraising and in support of organisations including Erskine Care Homes and the Skylark IX Recovery Trust.

I have referred constituents to SSAFA when they have been struggling to get help elsewhere. Let me tell members about a veteran's widow who was struggling to get in and out of the bath and so needed adaptations to her bathroom. The council was unable—and, indeed, unwilling—to help, but SSAFA stepped in. It funded adaptations to her bathroom that included a shower being fitted. That let her maintain her independence and continue to live in her own home. That is a real example of the service that charities such as SSAFA provide for armed forces families. That practical lifelong support, not only for veterans but for their families, is so helpful.

Another prominent veterans charity in my constituency is the Armed Forces Veterans Association Dumbarton. Its office is based, unusually, at Dumbarton Central train station. Given the infrequency of the trains, people can spend some very useful time in there, because it has developed a museum of military artefacts as well. I encourage colleagues to visit. The charity provides information and advice for military veterans, and a counselling service is also available. It is open every weekday for people just to pop in and have a chat and cup of tea, and it is supported by volunteers who can continue to be part of the forces community after they finish their service. I have first-hand experience of just how important that service is in helping veterans, who are perhaps dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, to access health and housing provision, and I have worked with it to help veterans in very practical ways.

The work that is done by veterans charities in my constituency and across the UK is invaluable. Veterans who have served their country deserve our thanks, recognition and support, but there is still more to be done. We must ensure that veterans get access to the right support at the right time. I encourage all members in the chamber to find out about veterans charities in their local area, because as MSPs we can play an important role in raising awareness of veterans

charities in our own patches and across Scotland, and in ensuring that everyone receives the support that they need and deserve.

17:54

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): As other members have done, I thank Liam Kerr for securing tonight's debate. Before I go any further, I should say that I am a veteran, having served some 15 years in the Army at home and abroad, and another 17 years with reserve liability. I left the Army in 1994, before "veteran" became the accepted terminology for former services personnel, so I have the same feelings as Edward Mountain about the word "veteran".

It is really important to increase awareness of the work of the many veterans charities around Scotland. They do a really good job. In a moment, I will highlight the work of Age Scotland's veterans project—in particular, in the north-east.

Before that, I must say how disappointed I am at the withdrawal of the veterans first point service in Grampian, which occurred last year. The service closed simply because, even with the Scottish Government offering to meet 50 per cent of the funding, Grampian NHS could not find the cash to enable the specialist service to continue. I have repeatedly raised the fact that Grampian NHS has been consistently underfunded for many years—by £165 million over the past nine years. The board believed that it had no option but to decline funding that important veterans service.

However, I do not want to focus on the negative; I want to be positive about the issue tonight, and I know that Age Scotland has stepped into the breach with help. The organisation is active in the north-east and has a community development officer there, and its aim is to ensure that veterans aged over 65 get the help that they need, when they need it.

I emphasise that no matter how long ago an individual served their country or for how long they served, they can get help and advice from the Age Scotland veterans project. Its helpline is now a gateway to a range of veterans support organisations and projects and, if Age Scotland cannot help an individual or family, it makes sure that someone else helps.

Time is short this evening, especially after the later decision time, so I end by congratulating Liam Kerr on securing the debate, because such debates are important. I hope that the Age Scotland veterans project continues to be a success, especially for the veterans in my patch in the north-east who need the help and advice that the project provides.

17:57

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I thank Liam Kerr for lodging his motion, and for its particular focus on HorseBack UK, which is a charity that undertakes excellent work in supporting our service personnel and veterans. I know something of the organisation, certainly with regard to its fundraising aspect, even though it is not based in my constituency.

Not long after being elected to Holyrood, I was asked to officiate at a cycle ride around Arbroath that was being held to raise funds for HorseBack UK. There, for the first time, I met Jock Hutchison, the chief executive officer and co-founder of the charity. Jock tends to leave a bit of an impression on folk when they meet him, but my abiding memory of that day was not of Jock with his cowboy hat and larger-than-life persona. Instead, it was of chatting to some of the severely wounded veterans who had benefited from the charity's work. It was a genuinely heartwarming experience.

The invitation to welcome the cyclists across the finishing line came from Ian Wren, who was a volunteer fundraiser for HorseBack UK at the time. Ian has since taken retirement from his previous work and assumed the role of the charity's fundraising manager. He is a constituent of mine and, along with his wife Bev, he is a well-kent face at community events, where he flies the flag for the charity. He is something of a force of nature. Ian is one of my Facebook friends, and it is fair to say that he posts as regularly about his fundraising activity as Murdo Fraser takes to Twitter on the wind-up. Just as charities and causes need something that sets them apart from the crowd to be successful, they need committed fundraisers such as Ian, and I pay tribute to him for all that he does on behalf of HorseBack UK.

There is another Angus South connection with Horseback UK. Jock Hutchison previously served at RM Condor in Arbroath, which is a base that is close to the cabinet secretary's heart. The idea for the charity came about in 2008, which was a particularly traumatic year for members of the 45 Commando unit. In their recently completed tour of Afghanistan, they had lost nine of their own in combat and a further 16 members had suffered life-changing injuries. Jock and Emma Hutchison offered the farm at Aboyne as a place where the injured marines could visit for a break away from clinical recovery and, over the following 12 months, several groups took advantage of their hospitality.

HorseBack UK's work has spread much further in the north-east of Scotland, and, as a constituency MSP for RM Condor, I highlight the support that the organisation has provided to those who have served with 45 Commando.

Lance Corporal Jason Hare, who is now the organisation's operations manager, was previously based in Arbroath. He served for 14 years, during which he undertook three tours of Afghanistan. In 2008, while on patrol in Helmand, he was severely injured after triggering a landmine. Following extended treatment, he returned to his unit to continue his rehab and transition to civvy life. While he was there in 2010, he became aware of HorseBack UK and joined colleagues on a visit. He believes that the activities that it gives to participants provide not only an insight into horsemanship and rural activity, but potential careers, as veterans brace themselves for transition to civvy life. He describes the organisation as giving him

"a renewed spark and enthusiasm for life".

Another RM Condor beneficiary of HorseBack UK is Corporal Matthew Turnbull, who says that the charity shows that there is "still hope in life". He notes that the charity's work is valued not just by him but by his family—that is an aspect of HorseBack UK's impact that we should not forget. As the recovery of injured personnel progresses, the stress and emotional toll that is carried by the wider family can ease.

There can be no praise high enough for the work that the charity does and the positive benefit that it brings to the lives of injured service personnel. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to join others tonight to recognise that work.

18:01

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I thank Liam Kerr for securing this important debate; I always welcome the opportunity to speak on veterans' issues in the Parliament. I also thank HorseBack UK for its work with our wonderful veterans. Liam Kerr gave a great description of its work and the benefits that it brings to veterans by building up their confidence and self-belief.

I draw attention to what Claire Haughey said in relation to our service personnel who were involved in Gulf war 1 and their vaccinations. I am very interested in that issue, which is on my mind. We are hearing more about it and I fully support the points that she made. I would like to discuss with her, in my role as chairman of the cross-party group on armed forces and veterans community, how we might take the issue forward. I have no doubt that the minister will address the issue later. It is a big problem and we need to get to the bottom of it.

As Liam Kerr's motion notes, veterans' charities are important and it can be a difficult area to work in. He pointed out that there are at least 320 groups in Scotland that deal with veterans. Some

of the groups deal with more than 200 veteran cases a month, in lieu of support from local authorities. I have had conversations with several of the charities, and they tell me that they struggle with finance from month to month to provide that support. It is important that we support them, because they provide a high level of individualised care that could not be replicated by the public sector. They deliver care that is desperately needed by our veterans.

On 16 November last year, I called on the Scottish Government to see what could be done to provide financial support to the charities that deal with those costs. I hope that the cabinet secretary will be able to update the chamber on what progress has been made with regard to that request.

18:03

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I join colleagues in thanking Liam Kerr for securing this debate. I recognise and pay tribute to the tremendous contribution that our forces community has made, in service and as veterans.

I confess that I first came across HorseBack UK in our debate in November when it was mentioned by Liam Kerr. He began to tell us an anecdote and kept us in suspense, in which I think we are still waiting. I am unfortunately not able to make it along to the reception this evening. I wish the organisation all the best for it.

I was struck by the comments made by Edward Mountain, who spoke of horsecraft and of the veterans who engaged with horses being able to

"rebuild a faith in their inner being".

That is a very powerful way to describe it. A colleague mentioned that veterans' work with the horses mean that they return to their communities as

"professionals to look up to, not to look after".

Reading and learning about the work of Horseback UK shows that the work is incredibly empowering. One aspect of its work that struck me is that veterans who come along to use the service can end up working with HorseBack UK. It is tremendous to see the empowering nature of the opportunities that it provides.

Particularly telling are the services that HorseBack UK is now providing to the wider community. Its website describes services for children who are, perhaps, socially or academically marginalised. That speaks to the tremendous contribution that our veterans and the forces community make more widely across Scotland.

In Renfrewshire, we have Erskine, which has been mentioned already, and the newly opened Scottish War Blinded Hawkhead centre. Erskine provides a tremendous future for people right across the west of Scotland and it has fantastic links with the local community. As someone who was musically engaged throughout high school, I had the opportunity every Christmas to go out and perform for the veterans at Erskine. That was a great honour and privilege that many students sought. It speaks to the great partnership between veterans' charities and the wider communities in the areas that they serve.

I commend Erskine for its recently published strategy, which, while recognising some of the challenges that Erskine faces, is very ambitious in adapting to the needs and demands of the veterans community.

I also want to recognise the Scottish War Blinded Hawkhead centre in my colleague George Adam's constituency of Paisley. It is a fantastic centre that provides financial support and advice on the use of specialist equipment, and it helps people to increase their confidence in independent living. It now has more than 30 staff, some of whom are from my constituency of Renfrewshire South. Having spoken with them, I know how much they value the opportunity to work there. I recognise the tremendous work that goes on at the Hawkhead centre.

I thank Liam Kerr for bringing this important debate to the chamber. It is great to be debating the issue in February, and I hope to have more such opportunities—not just around remembrance Sunday—to recognise the fantastic contribution that our veterans charities and communities make to Scotland.

18:07

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): I thank Liam Kerr for bringing this worthwhile and interesting debate to the chamber. The Scottish Government and I are always keen to increase awareness of and to champion the valuable work that veterans charities do throughout Scotland. Liam Kerr's efforts are doing precisely that, as is the reception that will take place immediately after this debate, which I mention again for advertising purposes.

The third sector in Scotland is strong and dynamic, and it plays a crucial role in the wellbeing of our communities. We are fortunate to have a good mix of people and organisations within the veterans community who are making a real difference. I am told by people who are active outwith Scotland that we have the real advantage of scale. The sector is close-knit, as was noted by the Forces in Mind Trust in its report "Armed

Forces Charities in Scotland", which was published in 2016. I continue to be grateful to all the charities, a number of which have been mentioned. Veterans Scotland, Poppyscotland, Legion Scotland, Erskine, Scottish Veterans Residences—one of whose properties is just across the road from the Parliament—Combat Stress and many others work hard to bring everyone together and make sure that there is support for those who need it most.

I will pick up on one or two of the points that members have made. Graeme Dey talked about the impact of the offer that HorseBack UK made to the Marines who had come back from Afghanistan with what are chillingly called life-changing injuries. I have visited HorseBack UK, and it is sometimes able to reach out to veterans in a way that other charities or organisations have not been able to do. When one visits HorseBack UK, it is odd or surprising, in a way, to see how dealing with a horse and the relationship that is established can change people. It is extraordinary, and I confess that I was not aware of it before I visited HorseBack UK.

Jackie Baillie talked about the Dumbarton train station veterans centre, which I have visited. I can confirm that the train service was excellent on that day, as were the coffee and the reception that I received from the veterans who were there.

Clare Haughey made a very important substantive point, which I am glad that Maurice Corry picked up on as well. The issue of the cocktail of drugs that was given to service personnel who were going to Iraq and Afghanistan is important in its own right, but I am talking about Clare Haughey's point about the MOD being very retentive of health records. I have made that point repeatedly to UK ministers. If they could facilitate the passing on of the complete health records from a person's service period to their general practitioner or the health service, that would make a lot of difference for exactly the reasons that Clare Haughey mentioned. Physicians could take a much more balanced, rounded and informed approach to a person's care if they were aware of the person's medical history from their time in service.

Christina McKelvie: With regard to medical records and Clare Haughey's point that veterans need that support, will the cabinet secretary join me—he will not be surprised that I am raising the issue in this debate—in saying that, once and for all, the UK Government should take responsibility for the men who were used in nuclear testing sites on Christmas Island and give them their medical records and their compensation?

Keith Brown: The member has raised the point before and has met those veterans, as I have done. I think that the same point applies. Anybody

who has served in the forces surely has a right to have their medical records made available to them, as civilians do. Much more important, the people who are looking after them medically should also have access to those records. That is a relatively non-contentious point, and progress has been made south of the border. When I raised the matter with a UK minister, however, the latest excuse that I got was to do with there being different computer systems in Scotland. That is not sufficient reason for us not to be moving much more quickly on the issue.

As Christina McKelvie has intervened, I will mention her earlier intervention on the armed services advice project—ASAP. It is a tremendous charity but one with a very different impact from, for example, HorseBack UK. Veterans who have accessed a series of benefits that they are perfectly entitled to but were not aware of have seen their situations transformed by the advice that ASAP gave them. I am lucky to have the benefit of having just outside my constituency an ASAP office that is co-located with Citizens Advice Scotland, in which one particular individual has changed the lives of many veterans. It is extremely important that we mention such charities.

Mike Rumbles made a point about the health service that he has raised before. As I pointed out in a recent meeting with Maurice Corry, the Scottish Government gets not one single penny to fund anything that we do for veterans in Scotland. We do not receive anything for that through the block grant. We want to spend money on veterans because we think it is important that we do so. Whether it is the millions of pounds that have gone to Combat Stress and to providing housing—not least at Cranhill in Glasgow—or the money that has gone to the Scottish veterans fund, which I will mention shortly, we have spent that money because we think that veterans are a priority. I think that the UK Government's role in relation not just to Scotland but to Wales and Northern Ireland is to acknowledge that it took on those people in the first place and has an enduring responsibility for them, which should be recognised in the block grant. We could do much more if that was possible.

Mike Rumbles: I hope the cabinet secretary recognises that I made the point that the Scottish Government offered a 50 per cent cash payment to Grampian NHS Board and the health board did not take it up. I do not doubt the cabinet secretary's personal commitment to veterans in Scotland, and I want to make it clear that I acknowledged that.

Keith Brown: I acknowledge that. However, I am trying to make the point that, when it comes to things that we want to do specifically for veterans—veterans first point had an element of

that, not least in the peer-to-peer support that it made available beyond the health services—we have to find the money for it in other budgets such as the education budget. I think that there is a case to be made for saying that the UK Government has a responsibility when service has been rendered.

HorseBack UK has been mentioned. I had the privilege of visiting it in 2012 to see the work that it does. After suffering traumatic injuries, service personnel and veterans can feel isolated and their confidence can be affected. HorseBack UK has helped more than 1,000 individuals over the past decade. It recognises that recovery is often more than a clinical process and that people need help in regaining their self-belief after injury. We heard from Edward Mountain that horses can provide a route back to increased self-belief. HorseBack UK also empowers the injured to help others by creating purpose and a community for recovery.

For our part, the Scottish Government has been able to directly support Horseback UK and other charities and organisations that help veterans and their families through the Scottish veterans fund. Through that fund, we have invested in more than 140 projects in areas including housing, healthcare and other services. Since its creation in 2008, over £1 million has been awarded through the fund to organisations that support the veterans community and ex-services charities.

One of the reasons why we created the veterans fund was the fact that a report from the House of Commons Health Committee in 2007 was pretty damning of the provision for veterans in Scotland, not least through the health service. That is one reason why we have sought to improve matters there.

The fund's panel met last week to review the applications that have been made to the fund in the 2018 round of applications, and the funding that will be awarded will be announced in the coming weeks. Unlike in previous years—apart from last year—I am no longer the person who is responsible for saying what funds should benefit from that. That is now done by the Veterans Commissioner and others.

More broadly, the Scottish Government continues to be committed to ensuring that all armed forces personnel and veterans living in Scotland have access to the best possible care and support, including safe, effective and patient-centred healthcare.

We are also fortunate to have outstanding public and third sector organisations that help to keep our veterans and—as Jackie Baillie rightly mentioned—their families in good health. For example, our network of champions for armed forces personnel and veterans supports those

people and their families to get access to high-quality services and treatment when they are required. I make the point unashamedly that the system is arguably more effective here in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK. That view has been fed back to me by organisations that work across the UK. Although they—and I—acknowledge that there is always more that we can do, they are very complimentary about what we are doing.

The Scottish Veterans Commissioner is also examining the issue of veterans' health and wellbeing. His interim report, "Veterans' health and wellbeing in Scotland—are we getting it right?" was published last year and positively concluded that veterans are not experiencing disadvantage in health and social care provision in Scotland. That might seem odd language to use, but there is a consensus in the veterans community that, rather than provide an advantage, Governments and other agencies should ensure that there is no disadvantage. We ensure that there is an advantage in some circumstances, not least in relation to prosthetics and other extremely expensive items, which I think is right, but, by and large, we aim to ensure that there is no disadvantage. Why should someone be disadvantaged just because they have served in the armed forces?

I look forward to the commissioner's next report, which is due to be published in the spring. That report will consider the physical and mental health of veterans in Scotland and ways of improving health outcomes for all veterans and their families. The Scottish Government will consider his recommendations carefully.

Mental health rightly continues to be an area of key focus for the veterans community. We all have a responsibility to realise our vision of a Scotland where people can get the right help at the right time, although I am well aware that the Government has a special responsibility in that regard. People should also be able to expect recovery and to fully enjoy their rights free from discrimination and stigma. Increased investment to support the delivery of our national mental health strategy will help to drive that improvement. Recognising the priority that we attach to that, we have also supported Combat Stress, in partnership with the national health service in Scotland, to deliver specialist and community-based mental health services to veterans. In total, more than £8.5 million has been provided since 2012.

The vast majority of the members of our armed forces transition to be real contributors to our society. That point was made earlier in the debate—I apologise for not being able to remember who made it. That is one of the areas in which I most frequently agree with Tobias Ellwood,

who is one of the Ministry of Defence ministers. However, for many veterans, the very fact of having to take responsibility for their health, their housing and their employment can be the scariest thing that they have ever faced and can present real challenges. They need to have support from us in relation to their mental health or their physical challenges.

Our armed forces and veterans charitable sector, of which HorseBack UK is a vital part, offers a strong and effective network of help. I reiterate my appreciation of all our partner charities and organisations and state again my commitment to continue to work closely with them to further support our veterans community.

Meeting closed at 18:19.

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