



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Tuesday 7 June 2022

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# Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 7 June 2022

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection and our time for reflection leader is John Loughton BEM, chief executive of Dare2Lead and founder of Scran Academy.

**John Loughton (Dare2Lead and Scran Academy):** Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, I thank you very much for having me here. It is an honour to address you. The last time I stood in the chamber to speak to the room was in 2008. I was the chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament and was speaking to a room of members of the SYP, so I can give feedback on who the tougher audience was.

Today, I want to share with you one story and, perhaps unusually, to make one confession. The story is of a 12-year-old boy who changed my life. He wrote to himself, thinking that no one would ever see it:

"I hate my life. I'm sick of all the drugs, awful hooses, getting bullied and all the crime and that. We dinnae see Dad now, and Mum is always depressed on the couch. When I go to sleep, I hope I dinnae have tae wake up. Naebody seems tae care about people like me. My life will never, ever change."

Those are powerful and sad words of hopelessness. They remain etched deep in my heart and they typify truth for too many of the young people whom I work with. We must use our platforms of power not simply to raise ourselves, but to build ladders of hope so that others can rise—ladders like the charity Scran Academy, which I founded five years ago and pivoted during lockdown to help thousands of the people who are most in need. We witnessed the transformational power of local people with authentic lived experience becoming experienced and stepping up to be their own solutions.

I promised you a confession: the boy in the diary was me. I stand here as a proud working-class queer citizen who faced the bullies, trauma and poverty. I chose not to concede and not to give up, but to dare to lead, especially in the darkest of times. Ever since my first wee campaign aged 11 in Pilton, I try to act with bravery and passion and to be an inspiring ginger example to others. That is something that we can all choose to do—although, perhaps not the ginger part.

We can and must redefine the paradigms of what is possible for people. We can let yesterday's scars become today's strengths. I want people to know that our vulnerabilities can become the content of our voices. That is hope. We must have space for vulnerability and openness in our leadership models and examples, today.

My purpose is really clear to me: it is to live as the adult whom the young boy in that diary needed. I invite you all to do the same. We are all role models to a young person somewhere. Let us never allow this legislature to settle on the notion that your life's starting point is your life sentence. Let us never settle on the idea that some people from some places are just destined to fail, or that radically compassionate change is somehow too big or too hard.

Please stay impatient. Let us all build ladders of hope. Let us all be the adults that a generation of kids so desperately need.

## Topical Question Time

14:05

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is topical question time. In order to get in as many members as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions and responses.

### Nursing (Staffing Levels)

**1. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):**

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that less than a quarter of nursing shifts have enough staff. (S6T-00764)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** Before I answer that question, I will say what a fantastic and incredibly powerful time for reflection that was. It was a great honour to be in the chamber to hear it.

I am, of course, concerned about any reports of understaffing in our national health service. The Government recognises the challenges that are associated with ensuring that the health service has the right number of staff in the right place at the right time. We also recognise that the demand pressures that are placed on our health service continue to be significantly exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic.

The recently published “National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care in Scotland” sets out how we are working to deliver workforce recovery. That is on top of the 1,000 additional new healthcare support workers who have recently been recruited and the nearly 200 new international nurses who have been recruited, with more than 200 in the pipeline.

Tess White will be aware that NHS workforce statistics were published this morning. They show that NHS staffing levels continue to be at a record high, which includes increases in nursing and midwifery.

However, I am not complacent. I recognise that, notwithstanding our best efforts, the NHS continues to face significant demand pressures, so I welcome conversations on safe staffing. We will continue to have regular dialogue with the Royal College of Nursing and other staff-side unions on that important matter.

**Tess White:** The findings of the Royal College of Nursing’s last-shift survey are shocking. Almost 70 per cent of staff in Scotland felt that safe and effective patient care was compromised on their last shift, due to insufficient staffing levels. That is significantly higher than the number anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

We have asked this question before without getting a clear answer, so let me try again. When will the Scottish Government provide a timeline for implementing the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019, which was passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament three years ago?

**Humza Yousaf:** I intend to publish a timetable for implementation of the safe staffing elements of the 2019 act very shortly—in fact, I hope to do so in the coming month.

I point out to Tess White that the RCN survey was a UK-wide survey. In relation to concerns that were raised by RCN members, the vast bulk of those members would have come from England. This is a UK-wide issue; there is no doubt that the effects of the global pandemic have been UK wide, but we have a good track record in Scotland of investing in our nurses. That is why we probably have more qualified nurses per 100,000 people than other parts of the UK have: we have 8.5 qualified nurses and midwives per 100,000, compared with 6.1 per 100,000 in England.

As I said, we will make sure that we continue to invest in our staff, and we will take forward the safe staffing element of 2019 act in a considered way, but at pace, as is its due.

**Tess White:** The number of nursing and midwifery vacancies has increased by nearly 40 per cent in a year, with more than 6,200 vacancies currently open across NHS Scotland. I repeat: the vacancies are in NHS Scotland.

The shortfall in registered nurses has risen to a record high under the Scottish National Party Government, while in Scotland growth in nursing and midwifery is the slowest in the UK. The situation is so bad that the RCN has evidence that students are being enlisted to plug staffing gaps, which is a potential breach of the law.

Given that record shortfall, does the cabinet secretary agree with RCN Scotland that the SNP-Green Government’s plan to increase the workforce by just 1 per cent over the next five years is totally inadequate?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will say two things. I will engage with the RCN later today—in fact, I am going to speak at its congress. Let me put some facts on the record. The number of qualified nurses and midwives has increased by 13.7 per cent since this Government came to power. Nursing and midwifery student funded places have doubled to a target intake in 2022-23 of 4,837. We have, of course, plans in our workforce strategy to ensure that we continue that growth; the 1 per cent to which Tess White is on top of that natural growth.

I am certainly not dismissing the very serious concerns that the RCN has raised, but I am very proud of our record on staffing. On vacancies, it would have been good for Tess White to have read today's workforce statistics, because they show that nursing and midwifery vacancies have decreased since the previous quarter.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary has already mentioned some of the steps that have been taken to build on the existing workforce—which are set out in the national workforce strategy—and he has mentioned the increase in staffing levels since 2007. What action is the Government taking to continue to attract more people into the profession? What support is given to people as they undertake their studies—in particular, in midwifery and nursing?

**Humza Yousaf:** Compared with the rest of the UK, we have a very attractive offer for students studying in Scotland—particularly those who are studying nursing and midwifery. They will not pay tuition fees in Scotland, and there is additional support.

Gillian Martin's first question, on recruitment and retention, is exceptionally important, especially for rural, island and remote parts of Scotland. Although we are, as I have said, increasing the number of student funded places in nursing and midwifery, we will, of course, recruit from the rest of the UK. International recruitment also has a key part to play in attracting people to remote, rural and island parts of Scotland. I have mentioned that we have recruited almost 200 registered nurses internationally, and that we have another 200 in the pipeline. I am working very closely with rural health boards to ensure that there is not just recruitment to the central belt, but that recruitment is evenly and widely distributed throughout Scotland.

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** The member survey by the RCN, coupled with new statistics today that show record nursing vacancies in Scotland, is shocking. Nurses are at breaking point, and there are reports of nursing staff walking off wards due to stress and the pressure that they are being put under. That comes after 15 years of the Government slashing bed numbers, failing to tackle delayed discharge and failing the nursing profession by cutting training places and presenting no meaningful workforce planning.

I put that issue to the Deputy First Minister at First Minister's question time a few weeks ago. He said:

"we are working to ensure that we can address the issues that are of concern to members of the Royal College of Nursing."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2022; c 20.]

With yet more deeply concerning evidence, what exactly is the cabinet secretary doing to address those extremely serious issues, which threaten not only the wellbeing of staff but the safety of patients? Is not it time to offer nurses a proper pay award and decent terms and conditions?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will address the RCN directly today; I will meet it tonight. I will hear from it and take questions, and I will, I hope, provide it with some reassurance in my answers. Regular dialogue with the RCN and the other trade unions will continue, just as it continues across Government, with other trade unions.

Paul O'Kane asked about record nursing vacancies. I do not know whether he heard my response to Tess White's question. If he looks at today's statistics, he will see that they show that vacancies have reduced since the previous quarter. We are therefore moving in the right direction. I fully accept that the number of vacancies is too high, but the number is absolutely moving in the right direction.

Paul O'Kane also mentioned our 15 years in government. I remind him that, in the 15 years since we took over from his party, the workforce in the NHS has gone up by 23.5 per cent, and we have increased whole-time equivalents by almost 30,000. Nurse numbers are up by 13.7 per cent, and medical and dental consultant numbers are up by almost 60 per cent. We have the best-paid staff in the entire UK, including Labour-run Wales.

We have a very strong record of investment in the NHS—a record by which I am proud to stand. However, members are, of course, absolutely right to raise those challenges, which have my full focus and attention.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** The legislation that we pass in the chamber is not worth the paper that it is written on without implementation to back it up. Safe staffing is not just about headcount; it is also about the skills mix and experience. We are losing skills and experience to staff burnout. Will the cabinet secretary revisit the Liberal Democrats' suggestion about an urgent burnout prevention strategy? Will he instruct today the creation of an NHS and social care staff assembly so that we can learn from the lived experience of staff on the front line?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will consider seriously Alex Cole-Hamilton's suggestion about a staff assembly. There are other ways in which we reach out to NHS staff, whom I meet regularly, but I will certainly take on consideration of his suggestion.

Alex Cole-Hamilton has previously referenced a burnout strategy, and I have often said to him that we are investing record amounts—£12 million over the last financial year—in staff wellbeing. I do not think that it requires another bit of paper, or that

another document be drawn up. It requires action; we are taking action. However, if the member would like a broader discussion on wellbeing, rather than just asking us to devise a strategy, I would be more than happy to arrange time for that to happen.

I take Alex Cole-Hamilton's and Tess White's points about implementation of safe staffing legislation. That is why I am committed to publishing an implementation timetable very soon.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** The RCN survey found that students and support staff are being asked to fill staffing gaps and to undertake the work of registered nurses. How will the Scottish Government work with health boards to ensure that all students and staff are aware of their rights, and that there are clear channels for them to raise concerns if they are being asked to fill in for nurses inappropriately?

**Humza Yousaf:** Gillian Mackay's message is important and I will reiterate it when I meet the RCN. If any member of staff, including from among our hardworking student nurses and student midwives, has any concerns, the environment in their health board, hospital or community setting should be such that it allows them to raise those concerns.

I met all the whistleblowing champions from all the health boards and the independent national whistleblowing officer for NHS Scotland, and we agreed action points, because we think that there is more that we can do with staff cohorts so that they know their rights in relation to whistleblowing. We can co-operate and ensure that students across the medical and clinical cohorts are part of that communication strategy.

### **ScotRail (Abellio Contracts)**

**2. Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. To ask the Scottish Government, in light of recent reports, whether it will provide further information regarding existing ScotRail contracts with Abellio. (S6T-00768)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** As part of the transition to a publicly owned railway, it was necessary for Transport Scotland to undertake a review of all existing contracts. It was identified that four Abellio contracts would be required to continue with ScotRail Trains Ltd from 1 April this year, to ensure consistency of service for passengers and to facilitate a smooth transition.

The contracts that have been retained include those for the Abellio shared services centre for customer service calls and correspondence, payroll services and payment processing facilities; Abellio rail replacement for the provision of

planned and unplanned replacement bus and taxi services; Advance Ventures for management of station tenancy and advertising management; and the bus link between Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street stations.

**Katy Clark:** The information in the media came from a freedom of information request. Can the cabinet secretary inform the Parliament how much money is involved in those contracts?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I cannot disclose the financials involved in the contracts because they are commercially sensitive. However, the member is right that public ownership of Scotland's railways needs to mean exactly that. To that end, her question requires a level of context.

First, it was prudent to carry over a limited number of contracts, whether delivered by Abellio or other suppliers, to maintain ScotRail services from day 1 of public ownership and to give that continuity of service for passengers and staff alike. It is also pretty common practice across the United Kingdom and Welsh Governments in relation to handovers that have happened in the past.

Secondly, only four Abellio contracts out of the contracts with almost 200 suppliers remain in place. Three of those contracts have a one-year break point clause, which will allow for the consideration of competitive alternatives.

The approach that we have taken is pragmatic. That is particularly pertinent when we consider the fourth contract, which secures jobs at the ScotRail services centre in Glasgow.

**Katy Clark:** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that answer. Perhaps she will reconsider some of the issues around confidentiality and write to me in detail on the contracts, given that we are talking about fare payers' and taxpayers' money.

I hope that the minister agrees that every penny of money that we put into our railways should go into the system, rather than leaking out of the public sector. Could she outline whether any rail replacement services are being provided by Abellio, given that we know that there are contracts relating to that, yet there is currently a lack of rail replacement services? Will she commit to looking at that commitment and the other Abellio contracts in order to bring them back in-house as soon as possible, as she has indicated? Will she give us a timescale in relation to that?

**Jenny Gilruth:** The member has covered a number of points. First, I make it clear that none of the contracts is a permanent feature of public ownership. Indeed, to that end, I have asked my officials at Transport Scotland to continuously review whether the contracts are delivering best value for money.



I am sympathetic to the principle behind the member's point about the financial benefits leaking out of the public sector. However, we need to consider the continuity aspect. On 1 April, staff and passengers alike were experiencing levels of anxiety, and it was essential that there was a level of continuity. Furthermore, the contracts were reviewed at the point at which ScotRail came into public ownership on 1 April.

On the member's ask, more broadly, as we move forward with public ownership, as she knows, I want our trade union partners, passengers and staff alike to have a vested stake in Scotland's railways and what that vision will look like. That is why we have committed to a national conversation on rail.

The member asked a question about rail replacement buses. That links to one of the contracts. As she might be aware, ScotRail has confirmed that securing rail replacement transport is significantly more challenging at this time than it has been in the past. That relates to a decrease in the number of available bus and taxi drivers coinciding with a number of other challenges, not least the challenge that the bus industry faces in relation to the Covid pandemic. Some challenges have been compounded by the wider impacts of Brexit.

I am happy to take the general question about rail replacement bus services to ScotRail. The member will understand that, over the past couple of weeks, I have been making such representations. There is a challenge here for ScotRail—I recognise that. I am happy to write to the member with more detail on the timescales that are associated with any delivery of further bus replacement provision.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I think that we all accept that a transfer such as this into the public sector will happen over time. Will the minister clarify how many staff are involved in the contracts? Obviously, they will be a bit concerned about their future. Can she give them any reassurance, including that fair work principles and practices will apply to them in the future, irrespective of whether they are in-house staff or they work on contracts?

**Jenny Gilruth:** The move to ScotRail Trains Ltd has given stability for all ScotRail staff, and the Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to a policy of no compulsory redundancies.

The member asked about the number of jobs that are affected. The four contracts that are being retained have supported a number of jobs, with around 160 being secured for the next three years at the Abellio shared services centre in Glasgow. Both Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd and ScotRail

Trains Ltd are required to comply with the 2015 Fair Work Convention, the "Fair Work Framework 2016" and the Scottish Government's fair work first guidance. That requirement is set out in the framework agreement and grant agreement, which underpin the new arrangements that came into effect on 1 April.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** It seems to me that we need full transparency here. The minister should be telling us what the contracts are worth and not hiding behind commercial sensitivity. While the minister is thinking about that, will she commit to telling us what the new chief executive and chief operating officer are being paid out of the public purse? We do not know that, either.

**Jenny Gilruth:** On his final point, the member is right—he does not yet know that information and he should know it; it should be in the public domain. I make it clear that information on those salaries will be published in the coming weeks—I have had an assurance from ScotRail on that.

In relation to the figures that are associated with the four Abellio contracts—members should remember that a number of other contracts are involved in the process—that is commercially sensitive information, which I am not able to disclose in the chamber today. However, I have undertaken to ask my officials in Transport Scotland to continuously review the contracts that are currently in place, to ensure best value to the taxpayer.

## Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics 2020

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson on greenhouse gas emissions statistics 2020. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:23

### **The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):**

Last autumn, Scotland was at the forefront of global climate action when we hosted the international community at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26. We could not have imagined then today's unprecedented cost of living and energy crisis, or the deeply concerning new landscape of international relations. However, we must not lose track of the threat that the climate crisis poses to all our futures, the facts around which are becoming even starker.

In April, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a warning that it is "now or never" to limit warming to 1.5°C. In response, John Kerry, US climate envoy, said:

"We have to still fight for the 1.5, as hard as it may be. But I remain an optimist, because I think that if we do what we've promised to do, we can have a 45% global cut globally between now and 2030."

I, too, am optimistic, and I urge all countries to deliver on the Glasgow climate pact. Of course, that applies to us here in Scotland, too. The purpose of my statement is to update Parliament on progress on Scotland's statutory climate targets and to set out our next steps.

Those steps are constrained by the current limits of devolved powers. We will continue to work with and, when needed, challenge the United Kingdom Government to ensure that urgent action is taken in key areas that remain reserved and in which a lack of pace impacts our ability to meet our more ambitious targets. However, it is clear that the contribution that Scotland could make to global climate action would be significantly enhanced if we had the normal powers of other independent states.

Official statistics that were published this morning show that the interim greenhouse gas emissions target for 2020 of a 56 per cent reduction from the 1990 baseline was met, with a 58.7 per cent reduction achieved. That outcome is welcome, as is the fact that the data shows continued underlying progress in reducing emissions across many key sectors of our economy, such as energy supply and waste

management. The statistics also confirm that we continue to outperform the UK as a whole in delivering long-term emissions reductions.

However, it is clear that the largest changes in emissions during 2020 were significantly influenced by the public health measures that were taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, transport activity was limited because people were asked to stay at home to save lives. No satisfaction can be taken from emissions reductions that result from such economic and social harms, and we must be prepared for emissions from the transport sector to have substantially rebounded in 2021.

All that said, today's data provides a valuable lesson regarding the scale of the transformational changes that are needed in response to the climate emergency and the centrality of the transport sector to achieving that aim. The challenge before us is to achieve those outcomes in sustainable and just ways.

Although the 2020 data reflects the impacts of the pandemic, it does not yet capture the step change in action that has arisen through the updating of Scotland's climate change plan, which was finalised in March 2021. The updated plan is aimed at achieving, over the 2020s and early 2030s, our ambitious goals, which go beyond what is needed globally to achieve the 1.5°C goal, as part of a green recovery from Covid-19.

The latest set of annual monitoring reports on the plan—which were laid in Parliament last month, alongside our positive response to the Climate Change Committee's latest progress report—contain more up-to-date information than today's high-level emissions statistics. The reports show welcome early signs of progress on policy implementation and delivery across many sectors. The Scottish Government's focus is on urgently delivering that comprehensive policy package to ensure that future targets can be met through sustainable, long-term reductions in emissions across all sectors.

On transport, in which the impacts of Covid-19 on emissions have been so pronounced, the updated plan contains actions across all modes, and we have already set out a positive route map for reducing overall car kilometres by 20 per cent over the longer term.

The resource spending review confirms our commitment to increase investment in active travel by over 200 per cent from 2024-25 onwards. Low-emission zones have been introduced in four of our cities as of last week, and we are supporting the electrification of public transport, including decarbonising Scotland's railways by 2035.

Scotland's shift to renewables and support for energy efficiency are also central to our plan, and

they are the only real long-term solutions to the current crisis around energy costs. The resource spending review supports our climate actions and prioritises delivery of critical activities such as increased spend for our heat in buildings strategy and for nature restoration. Our national strategy for economic transformation has the journey to net zero at its heart.

I now want to look ahead to the key steps in the remainder of this parliamentary session. We are developing just transition plans for Scotland's sectors and regions, beginning with a refreshed energy strategy and just transition plan later this year, which includes detailed work to assess the pace of transition in the oil and gas sector. Those plans will form part of our economy-wide emissions reduction plans, ensuring that future targets can be met in ways that are fair to all, support green jobs and seize opportunities for sustainable economic growth through leading the global energy transition. We have recently announced the first £20 million of the just transition fund to support those efforts.

We have committed to setting out, by November 2023, a draft for Parliament's scrutiny of Scotland's next full climate change plan. That plan will extend the emissions reduction pathway towards the ambitious 2040 target of a 90 per cent reduction and will include estimates of the costs and benefits of the policies to achieve that.

In line with the requirements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, in April I wrote to the Climate Change Committee to request its next set of regular advice on Scotland's statutory targets. That is expected in December and will help to ensure that our approach continues to reflect the rapidly evolving global landscape of economic circumstances and scientific evidence.

COP27, which will be in Egypt later this year, will need to build from the legacy of Glasgow. As set out in our new global affairs framework, and building from the trebling of our climate justice fund in this parliamentary session, Scotland will continue to play a full part on the international stage, helping to ensure that climate action supports the most vulnerable people and communities. As I have set out today, we are also working to ensure a track record of domestic delivery that matches the high ambition that the Parliament set in response to the Paris agreement.

The impact of the Covid pandemic on emissions during 2020 has further highlighted the transformational scale of action that is needed in response to the global climate emergency and has provided a terrible lesson in the imperative need for that transition to be a just one. In response, the Scottish Government's commitment to building a net zero and climate-resilient nation, through

planned approaches that are sustainable and positive for people and the economy, is unwavering.

**The Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of the statement.

For the first time in four years, Scotland's emissions targets have been met. It is bittersweet news, however, because it was accomplished only through a nationwide lockdown. Even the Scottish National Party has conceded that point and accepts that it cannot rely on lockdowns to meet climate targets, but that is exactly what it is doing. Before today, the SNP had missed its emissions targets for three years running.

In addition, it had failed to meet a whole series of important targets such as household recycling, biodiversity, green jobs and active travel, not forgetting its failure to deliver a promised ban on sending biodegradable waste to landfill in 2021. Add in the Green coalition partners' failure to meet the renewable heat target and their abandonment of their manifesto promises on a deposit return scheme launch and a ban on new incineration capacity, it has been fail, fail, fail.

All that shows that the Scottish Government needs to be bolder and to implement its proposed policies on heating, agriculture and transport, in particular. Chris Stark, the head of the Climate Change Committee, predicted that the 2020 emissions target would be met but issued a warning that the 2021 target would "almost certainly be missed". Does the cabinet secretary accept that expert view, or is Chris Stark wrong?

**Michael Matheson:** I suppose that time will tell, but the likelihood is that transport emissions, which were a sizeable component in the shift that we saw in the 2020 data during the pandemic, will rebound. That will have an impact on the figures next year, as I said in my statement.

I recognise and agree that it is bittersweet that we are in a situation in which we have met the targets. No one takes any pleasure from the fact that some of that has come about as a result of the lockdown. However, I say to the member that it is simply wrong to say that we are depending on lockdowns to progress our climate change policy. That is not what we have set out in our "Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018—2032", which we published back in March last year, and which sets out almost 200 different policies that we are putting in place to ensure that we meet our climate change targets.

Alongside that, I have no doubt that the member will take the opportunity to consider the underlying data in some of the information that has been published today. That shows that we continue to move in the right direction in reducing our emissions overall and that, in the long term, we continue to be ahead of other parts of the UK. I want all parts of the UK to be on a similar trajectory and working towards reducing emissions, but it is important that we continue to make the progress that we have been making.

I also want to emphasise another point. The member referred to the need for the Scottish Government to get on with delivering the policies that it has set out on heating, agriculture and transport, specifically. I will take that as an endorsement from the Conservative Party and that it will support us in those key policy areas. Often, when we propose such policies, we find that the Conservatives are in opposition to us on those issues. If the Conservative Party is serious about tackling the climate emergency that we face at domestic and international level, it means stepping up to the plate and demonstrating the leadership that is necessary on the policy ideas that will deliver on that, rather than just thinking about the next day's headlines.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** After years of environmental failures and missed targets, last year's lockdown granted the SNP-Green Government a stay of execution. However, although the cabinet secretary claims that we outperform the rest of the UK, he knows that our per capita greenhouse gas emissions remain higher than those in other parts of the UK. If this year's fall is not simply going to be a blip on the radar, we need a change of course. Transport emissions fell this year, but does the cabinet secretary really believe that we would have seen that fall had we not had the pandemic? What assessment has the Government made of the impact on transport emissions of the current cuts in rail services? Does the cabinet secretary really think that we will see a fall in transport emissions next year, compared with pre-pandemic levels, based on the current policy?

**Michael Matheson:** Let me deal with the three points that the member has raised.

On the first point, he is wrong. The baseline data that is used for assessing progress across the whole of the UK is that which is set out in the Climate Change Act 2008, which is informed by the methodology that is set out by the Climate Change Committee. That demonstrates very clearly that Scotland continues to be ahead of the rest of the UK on the basis of long-term policy, and it is significantly ahead of areas such as Wales, where the Labour Party happens to be in control. Notwithstanding that, I want to see Wales doing

well in tackling climate change, as I want to be the case across the whole of the UK and at global level.

On whether we would have met our target had the pandemic not taken place, as the member will be aware, the statistics that I present today do not provide that information. Figures are not disaggregated on the basis of a pandemic not having taken place, so we do not have data that can demonstrate that either way.

I acknowledge and recognise that meeting our stretching statutory targets in Scotland is challenging, and rightly so. It is important that we put in place policies that will help us to achieve that.

On transport, in particular, the ambitious targets that we are setting—including a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres—the range of measures that we are taking and the investment that we are putting into active travel and decarbonising our public transport network are all key contributors to ensuring that our transport emissions become a smaller part of the overall global climate challenge for Scotland. I believe that our policies will help to deliver the outcome that we seek to achieve.

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** The independent Climate Change Committee has been clear that Scotland's ability to deliver a green recovery and reach our targets very much depends on action from the UK Government in areas that, unfortunately, as the cabinet secretary has indicated, remain reserved. What interventions at UK level are important to help us to achieve our climate ambitions in Scotland?

**Michael Matheson:** A number of important factors need to be taken into account. For example, on a number of occasions we have raised with the UK Government the fact that the approach that it took with its net zero strategy did not take account of policy decision making in Scotland. The UK Government did not consult us in that process to ensure that the strategy reflected the domestic policies that are necessary at UK level for us to meet our statutory 2045 target. The UK Government is of course working to a 2050 target.

There are a number of areas in which greater flexibility would allow us to make greater progress, including fiscal powers, taxation powers and carbon capture, utilisation and storage. For example, we have not been able to move forward with track 1 status for the Acorn project. Alongside that, it is important to ensure that we end the discriminatory charging that is applied to renewable energy projects in Scotland connecting to the Great Britain grid. Such policies actively make it more difficult for us to meet our statutory

climate change targets, so the UK Government must work with us to ensure that it puts in place policies that support us to meet our 2045 target. To date, that approach has not been taken.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we move to the next question, I would be grateful if we could have more concise responses, because there is a great deal of interest in your statement, cabinet secretary.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The UK Climate Change Committee has expressed doubt about whether the Scottish Government's 2030 climate targets can be met and it has called for much greater detail and transparency on policy delivery. One of the policies that will be critical in delivering the 2030 targets is the retrofitting and decarbonisation of heat in more than 1 million homes in Scotland. Will the Scottish Government accept the UK CCC recommendations, and will the cabinet secretary commit today to publishing annual targets for the retrofitting and decarbonisation of dwellings for each of the years between now and 2030, so that we have the necessary level of transparency for delivery of the targets?

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the challenge that has been made by the Climate Change Committee, the independent advisers on these matters. It is important that the Government responds constructively to the challenge and, in particular, the challenge that we have around decarbonisation of domestic and non-domestic premises between now and 2030.

I assure Dean Lockhart that our heat in buildings strategy is an ambitious plan for achieving that target. It sits alongside a record investment of £1.8 billion. I assure him that the approach that we will take is focused on delivery, and we will go about it through an open and transparent process.

**Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** A recent report that was published by Met Office researchers indicates that climate change is having a significant impact on global rainfall patterns. Notably, Scotland, along with the majority of northern Europe, is anticipated to experience increasing rainfall during winter. Communities in my Stirling constituency already struggle with the impact of annual flooding. Given that that is anticipated to get worse, what investment is being made in flood defences and mitigations in Stirling?

**Michael Matheson:** There is no doubt that we are experiencing the locked-in effects of climate change, which is resulting in more intense weather patterns that are having a disruptive influence on communities and our transport network, not only in Scotland and in the UK but on a global scale. We have all witnessed that in the past couple of years.

That is why it is important that we take the right climate adaptation measures. We are increasing our investment to tackle flooding to around £150 million during this session of Parliament. We are also investing some £12 million in communities that have been impacted by coastal erosion. Off the top of my head—if I recall correctly—projects in Stirling, Bridge of Allan and Callander that focus on tackling flooding are being supported with funding. I hope that that reassures the member about the investment that we are making, along with local authorities, to tackle flooding in areas such as Stirling.

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** Thanks to the decline in emissions from the energy sector, statistics show that domestic transport is now the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. The report notes a marked decline in those emissions due to the Covid lockdown, but that circumstance is now behind us. It is crucial for our climate targets that we keep those emissions as low as possible. That must include having a functional rail network and expanding the network into rapidly growing communities such as Winchburgh, which is in the Lothian region that I represent, to ensure that people have the choice of opting out of private transport.

Does the Scottish Government truly understand the importance of functional and widely available public transport in meeting our net zero targets? How will it get from the current chaos to that goal?

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the importance of reducing transport emissions in helping us to achieve our statutory climate change targets. That is why we have been expanding, developing and decarbonising our rail network, with further electrification programmes being taken forward to support exactly the approach that the member is looking for.

I am also well aware of the issues in Winchburgh. I have visited the site. The member will be aware that developers have a stated interest in that matter and that it is clear where the financial responsibility rests.

I assure the member that investing in and decarbonising our public transport network are key parts of the strategy to meet our climate change targets.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will know of my deep concern about the frankly unbelievable decision by the UK Government not to give track 1 status to the Scottish Cluster carbon capture and storage project, which includes the Acorn project in the north-east. He referred to that in his answer to Alasdair Allan.

The economic and just transition issues are obvious and of great concern. Setting those aside,

what discussions has the cabinet secretary had with his UK Government counterparts about the impact that that decision has had on our drive to meet our net zero targets, as set out in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019?

**Michael Matheson:** I have repeatedly raised that issue with the UK Government, which I believe was badly wrong in not awarding track 1 status to the Acorn project. Many in the sector also recognise that the UK Government got that badly wrong.

I assure the member that I will continue to press the UK Government on that issue, particularly as it moves towards track 2, to get clarity about the timescale and process for the Acorn project in order to ensure that there is every possibility of it succeeding in achieving track 1 status. Negative emissions technologies such as CCUS are critical to meeting our climate change targets. That is why we must ensure that progress is being made.

The Scottish Government is fully behind the Acorn project. That is why I have agreed to make £80 million available to support delivery of the project at a faster pace. We now need to see the UK Government giving the green light to allow the project to move forward so that we can reap not only the environmental but the economic and social benefits that will come from it.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement. I welcome his acknowledgement that our meeting the emissions target after three years of failure has more to do with the lockdown that was attributable to Covid than with the actions, perhaps, of the Scottish Government.

For all the discussion of constitutional grievance, we know that more than 50 per cent of the energy that is used in Scotland goes into heating buildings and that the SNP's funding promises fall short of it achieving its retrofitting targets. Given that, and the on-going cost of the energy crisis, can the cabinet secretary explain how the Government plans to urgently scale up Scotland's retrofitting activity and capacity to ensure that we meet our future targets on both emissions and fuel poverty?

**Michael Matheson:** I think that the key to tackling the energy crisis that we are facing just now and which many households are suffering from is to help to reduce individual consumption through greater energy efficiency programmes. That is why we have record investment going into energy efficiency programmes and why we have committed to investing a record £1.8 billion in the current session of Parliament to support the decarbonisation of domestic premises. That is the type of ambition that will help to deliver the scale

of change that is necessary. We are also working with private sector organisations to look at how we can lever in additional finance to support that transition so that it happens even more quickly.

The level of ambition that we have set out in our strategy, alongside the ambition to tackle emissions from properties in our heat and buildings strategy and the record level of investment that we are making with the £1.8 billion in the current session, is testament to this Government's ambition and determination to reduce energy use in people's homes.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** The Russian invasion of Ukraine has made many countries rethink their energy policies and focus on energy security. Does the cabinet secretary agree that energy security is best achieved through a focus on renewable and low-carbon energy?

**Michael Matheson:** The issue of energy security has become central in energy policy in a way that was not the case some six months ago. It is now very clear that, as recent publications from the European Union say, domestic renewable energy production is seen as the key way in which we can both reduce energy costs and deliver greater energy security. That certainly accords with the Scottish Government's view and it is the approach that we will set out in our energy strategy later this year.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Although transport remains the biggest climate emitter, it is clear that the sharp rise in walking and cycling and the decline in aviation and private car use led to huge cuts in emissions in 2020. Transport Scotland's research into travel trends during the pandemic show us that a new normal for domestic travel is within reach. Does the cabinet secretary believe that demand reduction is important for all polluting modes of travel, including aviation? What plans does the Scottish Government have to establish that new normal?

**Michael Matheson:** Demand reduction is an important part of trying to change behaviour. We know that the vast majority of the actions that we need to take in order to reduce our emissions involve behaviour change. That is why we have set out in our national transport strategy our investment hierarchy, which sees greater investment going into active travel and public transport before we look at single-car use. Alongside that, we have made a very clear commitment to work with the aviation sector to look at decarbonising aviation by 2040 while, at the same time, looking at the economic opportunities that exist in the production of sustainable aviation fuel here in Scotland.

We believe that the policies that we have set out through the NTS and the wider climate change strategy will deliver the types of reductions that we need to see in the years ahead.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** One way of meeting our targets will be to support rural properties to transition to renewable heat. The Scottish Conservatives pledged in our manifesto to introduce a rural heat decarbonisation fund, which was also recommended by Scottish Renewables. The SNP and the Greens copied that into their manifestos and restated it in the Bute house agreement, yet nothing has come forward. Can the cabinet secretary show that this Government is serious about delivering against its targets by stating precisely when such a fund will be introduced?

**Michael Matheson:** The member will be aware that we are presently looking at a range of measures around our heat decarbonisation strategy and how we can help to support homes in both urban and rural areas to decarbonise. There are specific aspects and challenges around the decarbonisation of properties in rural areas, given that many of them are off grid and the costs that can be incurred by rural households are therefore much greater when it comes to decarbonisation.

However, I assure the member that we are giving consideration to that issue and to how funding is made available for it. I undertake to write to him to set out more details that he can share with his constituents, because I am aware that it is an on-going concern for him.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** How we reduce our emissions is as important as the reduction itself, and Scotland is world renowned for having underpinned our net zero targets with a legislative commitment to a just transition. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the Scottish Government's just transition fund, which is vital for my constituency, and on whether there has been any indication that the UK Government will match what is a £500 million investment over 10 years?

**Michael Matheson:** On the latter point, we have had no confirmation from the UK Government that it will match our £500 million just transition fund for the north-east and Moray. Just last week, we opened up the consultation process to ask for expressions of interest. We have allocated the initial £20 million to that, in order to start some of the initial work around the just transition fund. That process is now open, and I take the opportunity to encourage the member's constituents and businesses in her constituency that have an interest in the just transition to engage in that consultation so that we shape the use of the fund in a way that delivers a just transition for the north-east and Moray.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the ministerial statement on greenhouse gas emissions. There will be a brief pause before the next item of business.

## National Parks

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-04799, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scotland's national parks. I invite those members who wish to speak to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Lorna Slater to speak to and move the motion.

14:57

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** Scotland is a rich, diverse and beautiful country, from the rolling hills in the Borders to the rugged mountains and sinuous sea lochs of the west, the crofting landscapes, the towering sea cliffs that teem with noisy seabirds on our many islands, the vast patterned peatlands of the flow country and the vibrant agricultural landscapes of lowland Scotland. Throughout the country, over millennia, the people of Scotland have worked with and shaped their natural surroundings—and, in doing so, they have shaped their distinctive cultural heritage, which is famous around the world and draws millions of visitors every year. I therefore find it astonishing that we have just two national parks, and I know that that view is shared by many members.

Our national parks are part of a global national park movement that values and protects nature around the world. That brings opportunities to showcase globally what Scotland is doing for nature restoration, to address climate change, in visitor management and on a range of other issues. It also gives us the opportunity to learn what approaches are being taken elsewhere and to adapt and improve them for our own, Scottish needs. Our parks are more important now than ever before. We are amid the interlinked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, which require urgent action to keep our planet habitable, our crops growing, our climate bearable and our ecosystems alive.

We know that, no matter how quickly net zero is achieved, some effects of global heating are now locked in, such as a rise in temperatures and an increase in extreme weather events. People and nature are therefore going to need to adapt to the changing environment. The window for action is closing. This is the decade in which we must redefine our relationship with nature, or the degradation of our natural environment and climate breakdown will have gone past the point at which they can be managed. By working with and restoring nature at scale, we can reduce the effects of climate change, and wider benefits to individuals, communities and the country can be realised as carbon from the atmosphere is

captured and stored and as plants, animals and other species flourish while humans live and work alongside a thriving natural environment.

There are three elements that I would like to bring to the attention of Parliament: first, the work of the two existing parks in tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss; secondly, the work of the parks in welcoming and managing visitors; and, thirdly, the national conversation that is currently under way to capture what stakeholders most value about national parks and how that will inform the identification of the areas to be taken forward for designation as Scotland's next national parks.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that a fourth consideration should be added to the three that she mentioned—namely, the fourth aim of the national parks in Scotland, which is the social and economic development of the areas and communities? That is extremely important to the people whom I represent who live in Cairngorms national park.

**Lorna Slater:** The member is quite right that the aims of our parks were established in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. I remind all of us that the four aims are:

“(a) to conserve and enhance ... natural and cultural heritage ... (b) to promote sustainable use of ... resources ... (c) to promote understanding and enjoyment”,

and, as the member rightly points out,

“(d) to promote sustainable economic and social development”.

Our existing national parks, in the Cairngorms and in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, are at the forefront of actions to tackle climate change and restore nature, and they welcome, educate and manage millions of visitors a year.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and Cairngorms National Park Authority devote significant resources to leading and working with partners and their communities on nature restoration and climate change mitigation in their park areas. As we know, halting and reversing biodiversity loss is inextricably linked to restoring nature and addressing climate change. The park authorities set out their ambitious plans for the natural environment in their areas through the future nature proposals in Loch Lomond and the nature plan in the Cairngorms. Both recognise that we can no longer be passive in protecting the biodiversity that we have but need to be proactive in vigorously rebuilding and restoring nature.

To do that, both parks are working with partners to address head-on pressures such as overgrazing, pollution, invasive non-native species and climate change; to restore degraded areas;



and to better link areas to give nature the space to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. There can be no better places to see the aspiration becoming reality than the Cairngorms Connect partnership, with its 200-year vision to restore ecosystem functioning and biodiversity in huge areas of the eastern part of the national park, or in the work to secure and restore the great Trossachs forest—over 160km<sup>2</sup> within the heart of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park.

Running through many of the projects that the parks are leading is active community involvement to identify and prioritise areas for action and to mobilise the volunteer workforce who will carry out much of the on-the-ground action such as the removal of invasive non-native plants.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** We know that national parks must have a coherent identity as well as being of outstanding quality in terms of natural and cultural heritage. They must not become playgrounds or museums for visitors. How will the minister ensure that the social and economic needs of the host communities will be met, particularly given the importance right now of food security?

**Lorna Slater:** Of course, the member is correct. Our parks are living, breathing, dynamic spaces with communities in them who live and work there, including our agricultural communities. As I progress through my speech, I will talk about the process for creating new national parks and how we can make sure that stakeholders' views are incorporated.

A striking example of how initiatives in our parks can draw in additional funding is the £12.5 million that was recently secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the “heritage horizons Cairngorms 2030: people and nature thriving together” project. However, the work of chasing down and securing additional funding for nature restoration does not stop with individual landscape-scale projects. Both our national parks are working in partnership with the other national parks in the United Kingdom to develop a private finance mechanism to bring in investment for nature restoration. Through the wild Strathfillan project, the Loch Lomond authority is piloting approaches to leveraging significant private investment to improve ecosystem services and restore nature.

Our two national parks host internationally important habitats such as Atlantic rainforest and high-altitude moorland and grassland, as well as the plants and animals that rely on them, including unique species such as the Scottish crossbill, which is a distinct subspecies of the common crossbill. Sadly, the capercaillie—one of the iconic species of our Caledonian pinewoods—has, over recent decades, experienced sharp declines in its

population as a result of the pressures of climate change and disturbance. However, the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project has recently secured £2.9 million to allow local communities to deliver habitat management and improve visitor management in order to reduce the disturbance of those magnificent birds.

**Fergus Ewing:** Does the minister recognise that one of the reasons for the decline of the capercaillie and the lack of new members of the species is the lack of predator control—the control of foxes, in particular? Does she acknowledge that NatureScot now recognises that that approach was a mistake and is seeking to correct it, and does she support that?

**Lorna Slater:** I discussed that at a meeting with the park authorities last week. They are looking at a broad range of measures for improving capercaillie numbers, including visitor management to reduce disturbance, and they are looking at predator control.

That brings me to the crucial role that both national parks play in welcoming visitors and informing them of key messages around the climate and biodiversity twin crises, and in managing some of the negative effects of high numbers of people, particularly at popular sites. As we have emerged from the pandemic lockdowns, with travel abroad severely constrained, the people of Scotland have looked to the countryside on their doorstep for recreation. Both parks now have excellent ranger services to ensure a positive and safe experience for visitors, residents and nature in our national parks.

In the light of all that evidence of the importance of the work that the parks do, how popular they are to the millions who visit them and how enthusiastically various regions of Scotland are already campaigning to host a park, there is undoubtedly a compelling case for expanding Scotland's national parks network. I am delighted that several areas have put themselves forward as candidates for national park status, some through long-established campaign groups, and I hope to see more join the discussion over the coming months.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Can the minister explain why it has taken so long to look at a third—and possibly, I hope, a fourth, fifth and sixth—national park in Scotland?

**Lorna Slater:** Absolutely—I will cover the timescale in the course of my speech. I will continue, so that I can get to the point at which I can answer the member's question.

The process of creating at least one new national park gives us the opportunity to have a national discussion about not just where new parks should be, but what our national parks are

for. Beyond the aims that are set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, no criteria have been set for what national parks should be delivering for Scotland, for their communities—as some members have pointed out—and for nature.

On 13 May, I launched a national discussion, which will carry on over the summer months, about what stakeholders and the public value most about national parks and how that should be delivered. That national discussion on the future of national parks will do two things. First, it will help the existing park authorities to evaluate and adapt what they are delivering across their remit through their partnership plans. Secondly, it will allow the development of an evaluation framework to identify the next areas of Scotland to take forward for designation.

That is essential, as it will allow for an open, fair and transparent process. It will include a consultation on the draft evaluation framework to ensure that it meets the aspirations of stakeholders for their new national parks and that there is no unintended bias that might lead to the favouring of one area over another. Officials are also working to put in place support for communities, local authorities or interest groups in putting together a nomination for national park status against the criteria established in the evaluation framework. Furthermore, although it will be my responsibility to approve the areas to be taken forward to the statutory process outlined in the 2000 act, the decision that I take will be guided by the advice that I will receive from an independent panel that will be established to consider all nominations and rank them against the criteria contained in the evaluation framework.

As members will appreciate, identifying the areas to be designated as national parks is only half the story, as the legal process that is laid out in the 2000 act to define the boundary of the new parks and establish new park authorities must then be followed. That process will follow a specific timeline.

**Finlay Carson:** My question is on a technicality. Will the minister set out what the process will be, should there be multiple bids from different organisations or individuals in one area that could be designated? How will that situation be dealt with?

**Lorna Slater:** The specifics of the evaluation criteria have not yet been established; we will look at the process as we go forward. The member raises an excellent point, however. Of course, we will need to be able to accommodate that possibility so that coherent applications can go into the process and be evaluated fairly.

I return to the process for creating new national parks. Once we have followed the legal process

laid out in the 2000 act, the process will entail further scrutiny of the areas concerned against the aims and conditions specified by the act and further consultation led by NatureScot in its formal role as rapporteur. The designation order will then progress through Parliament for further evaluation and shaping of the proposal, which will include further opportunity for stakeholder input. Mr Whitfield will see that we will have to go through many steps to follow the correct legal process.

I very much look forward to the debate and to hearing members' views on what role our national parks—established and new—should play in their local areas and nationally for the benefit of nature, the people of Scotland and visitors to our beautiful country. I welcome the constructive approach that has been taken by my Labour colleagues and the support that they have shown for our proposal to create new national parks in Scotland. I am happy to support the amendment in Colin Smyth's name. I also welcome the fact that my Conservative colleagues recognise the important role that our national parks play in our environment and the economic benefits that they can bring to local communities. However, they need to acknowledge that such an important process requires full consultation. In addition, the clear legal process that is set out in the founding legislation needs to be followed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, please bring your remarks to a close.

**Lorna Slater:** Therefore, I cannot accept calls to shortcut the process or to shorten it at the expense of public engagement.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the key role that national parks are playing in tackling the twin biodiversity and climate crises, and the important cultural, social and economic benefits that they bring to Scotland; welcomes the announcement by the Scottish Government that at least one new national park will be designated during the current parliamentary session; understands the need for an open and transparent evaluation process to identify the areas to be progressed to national park designation, and welcomes the start of stakeholder engagement to set the criteria for identifying the areas to be designated as new national parks.

15:12

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank the Scottish Government for bringing such an important debate to the chamber. Scottish Conservatives broadly agree with the sentiments expressed in the motion, but we feel that they have been painted with a broad brush. Our amendment seeks to develop the point of the motion somewhat, while also noting that it is the clear desire of people behind the campaigns for new national parks, and the wider public, to move

faster on designating Scotland's next national park.

We note that the motion makes a number of references to the evaluation process and stakeholder engagement. However, across Scotland there is a clear sense that the Scottish Government has been dragging its feet on the issue.

Similarly, we are of the view that the value and importance of Scotland's rural landscape and communities deserve greater recognition than they receive. Although designation of one or—it is to be hoped—more new national parks could go some way towards addressing that, we feel that it will not go far enough towards recognising the many areas across Scotland that, although perhaps not suited to be national parks, deserve greater access to support and opportunities to preserve and capitalise on their natural assets.

Scottish Conservatives will support Labour's amendment, in the name of Colin Smyth. It is clear that, across the chamber, there is broad agreement about the value of national parks and their potential to make a substantial contribution not only to their local areas but to meeting the wider twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity.

It is on the subject of biodiversity that I want to begin my contribution, not least because it is often overshadowed by climate change in discussions, although it is no less important. There has been little change in the decline of biodiversity in the past 10 years, under the current Scottish Government. The 2019 report "State of Nature: Scotland" found that the overall abundance and distribution of Scotland's species have declined, including in the past 10 years, and that the pressures that drive biodiversity loss collectively continue to have a negative impact on nature. It said:

"There has been no let-up in the net loss of nature in Scotland."

It should come as no surprise that, in 2021, RSPB and the Natural History Museum found that Scotland is in the bottom 25 per cent of nations and territories for biodiversity intactness, ranking in the lowest of the G7 countries.

We require integrated land management that park authorities can use to encourage a co-operative framework between sectors and break down silos. Farming and forestry can be viewed as sectors that narrow biodiversity. However, with proper support, those sectors can deliver on their biodiversity targets as well as their commodity markets.

In her Scottish Government priorities statement, the First Minister announced the aim to

"protect and enhance our natural habitats"

by increasing

"woodland creation"—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2021; c 13.]

by 50 per cent. However, planting non-native Sitka is not increasing woodland, nor is it addressing biodiversity. We need a more robust forestry plan, as a diversity of native trees has been shown to store more carbon emissions than Sitka alone and lead to a more resilient ecosystem.

**Fergus Ewing:** I understand that there is a target for 40 per cent of new trees planted to be from native species. However, does Brian Whittle recognise that Sitka spruce has excellent qualities and is an essential raw material for our panel products sector and timber sector, which operate within our national parks?

**Brian Whittle:** Fergus Ewing is absolutely right, but there has been a predominance of Sitka over the past wee while. It is recognised that overplanting Sitka decreases biodiversity in the relevant areas.

I will use the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park water vole project as an example. The removal of self-seeded Sitka spruce trees allowed grass and other native wetland vegetation to return. As well as increasing the diversity of native plants for water voles, a healthy wetland ecosystem will absorb more carbon and retain more water, thereby helping to prevent flooding downstream.

Marine diversity is also often overlooked. For example, 12 breeding seabird species declined in abundance by an average of 38 per cent between 1986 and 2016. Plankton communities have changed in response to climate change, which impacts fish and birds higher up the food chain. The management of marine environments by Marine Scotland is often indiscriminate, which does not allow for the targeted and effective management of our blue resource.

Siloed management of our environments on the whole drastically reduces our management effectiveness. Organisations from non-governmental organisations to fisheries unions are calling for more integrated management on land and at sea. There is a lack of data from Marine Scotland to allow them to make better management decisions. However, third-party groups have done considerable research that is publicly available for them to adopt and use.

National marine parks could help to establish Scotland's blue economy and blue carbon, much as national parks have aided Scotland's rural economy and peatland carbon sequestration. Using national parks in that way would help with sustainably developing that economy and would increase collaboration with local stakeholders

through the park authorities. We can put the management of such areas back into the hands of local people with traditional knowledge.

Farmers and landowners play an important role in that. Conservation efforts need to be based on co-operation and collaboration, not on unilaterally imposing restrictions. National parks represent an opportunity for farmers to diversify their businesses and make the most of opportunities in tourism and direct-to-market sale of local produce. Indeed, a number of farmers in the proposed Galloway national park are supportive of that proposal. A national park should empower farmers and give them more opportunities to farm sustainably, earn a better living and be even more effective custodians of the countryside.

Members will know that it is a rare speech by me that does not manage to include a reference to health and they will be delighted to know that this one is no exception. The motion acknowledges the cultural, social and economic benefits of national parks. However, it is equally important to recognise the substantial contribution that they, and Scotland's rural areas more widely, can make to public health.

I do not wish to be accused of bias, of course, but there are few places in the world better suited to walking and cycling than the Scottish countryside. The benefits of physical activity of any kind—from walking to mountain biking—are well recognised. Regular physical activity can help to prevent illness, aid recovery and improve mental health.

National parks, and Scotland's countryside more widely, are an incredible and undervalued asset in the fight to improve public health. Many communities in rural areas are already recognising that and taking action.

Any action that we can take that encourages people to make the most of what our countryside has to offer will inevitably make a difference to public health. At a time when our NHS is under pressure like never before, it is incumbent on us to promote steps that people can take to prevent illness and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

There is no question but that Scotland needs more national parks. We in the Conservative Party are clear that we support the Galloway proposal, and I am sure that my colleague Finlay Carson will expand on that. However, a successful bid from Galloway should not be the end of the discussion of national parks for another two decades. The Scottish Government cannot go two days without making demands for new powers, but it has managed 20 years without using the powers that it has to designate national parks.

As our amendment sets out, we want the definition of what constitutes a national park to be

as wide as possible. We should be thinking about what other options are available to areas smaller than national parks to give our rural communities the opportunities and the tools necessary to protect their local environment and capitalise on local assets.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Whittle, did you move the amendment?

**Brian Whittle:** I apologise.

I move amendment S6M-04799.1, to insert at end:

“; notes the significant local support from communities involved in national park campaigns across Scotland, such as the Galloway National Park Association; acknowledges the concern expressed by many of these communities for what they feel is the unacceptably slow pace of the designation process; applauds the public demand for greater formal recognition of the value of Scotland's natural landscape and rural communities; believes that the interpretation of what constitutes a viable area for designation as a national park should be as broad as possible to ensure economic and environmental sustainability while recognising the diversity within Scotland's natural environment, and calls on the Scottish Government to explore other avenues to formally recognise and capitalise on Scotland's many outstanding areas of natural capital where national park status is not deemed appropriate.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call the next speaker, I remind everybody who is seeking to speak in the debate to make sure that their request-to-speak button is pressed and continues to be pressed. I am not looking at anybody in particular.

15:21

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** More than two years ago, Parliament unanimously agreed to support an amendment that I lodged that recognised the contribution that our current national parks make and agreed that new national parks should be designated. Slowly but surely, we edge towards to the will of Parliament, and that cannot come quickly enough.

It is more than two decades since my colleague Sarah Boyack—who, I have to say, has not changed a bit—took the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 through Parliament. That groundbreaking legislation paved the way for the then Labour-led Scottish Executive to create the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, which my colleague Jackie Baillie—who also has not changed a bit—will have much to say about in her contribution.

That legislation also led to the creation of the Cairngorms national park in 2003. Labour is proud of that achievement and the real social, economic and environmental benefits that those parks have delivered for those areas. However, it is very much unfinished business.

When those parks were created, no one anticipated that the SNP would fail to continue the work that my colleagues began in creating national parks in Scotland. Despite our outstanding natural beauty and the fact that national park status is a successful and internationally recognised brand, we still have only two here in Scotland, which the minister rightly said is astonishing. Compare that number with 10 in England, three in Wales or 47 in Norway.

Given our world-class scenery, the protection and management that national parks provide for that scenery and the benefits to tourism and rural development of the national park brand, the case for expanding the number of parks in Scotland is clear, and it has been for years. That is why Labour's long-standing policy has been to do just that.

It is no secret that I have been vocal in my view that one of those new parks should be in Galloway—a proposal that has significant public support, including from Dumfries and Galloway Council as far back as when I chaired its economy and environment committee, and from councils in Ayrshire.

With an internationally designated United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization biosphere, the first dark skies park in Scotland, the stunning Galloway forest, a rich mosaic of farmland that is important to delivering food security and amazing wildlife, Galloway has been a national park in waiting for years.

Indeed, it is five years since a report for the Galloway National Park Association revealed that a new national park could add between 250,000 and 500,000 new visits each year to Galloway and South Ayrshire—worth £30 million to £60 million in additional spend—helping to create and support between 700 and 1,400 additional jobs to complement existing jobs in crucial sectors such as agriculture. That could be game changing for the local economy in one of the most peripheral parts of Scotland, whose challenges of low pay and outward migration of young people are well documented.

That is why if the Government is serious about a more inclusive economy, it is vital that the criteria for new national parks recognises the areas where the potential economic boosts will be greatest—for example, areas that do not currently have the highest visitor numbers and are too often forgotten. As well as Galloway, other areas, including the Scottish Borders, would receive a significant economic boost from national park status. The southern part of the Borders in particular, which is the favoured area of the campaign for a Scottish Borders national park, is in pressing need of an economic boost.

With easy access to the central belt and the north of England, a Borders national park would help to deliver that boost and bring in more visitors to the area.

The community campaigns in Galloway, the Borders and elsewhere show that there is real demand and a real appetite to grow the number of national parks in Scotland. That is why Labour believes that the Scottish Government's ambition should not be limited to just one new national park in this parliamentary session. Indeed, I remind the minister of her own party's manifesto, which commits the Scottish Greens to at least two new national parks and one new regional park. Will the minister say in closing whether the spending plans that were published last week provide sufficient resources to deliver more than one new national park in this parliamentary session?

Given how far Scotland has fallen behind, there is no reason to stop the Scottish Government favouring, for example, two parks in southern Scotland. That could potentially reduce costs through the sharing of services, build on the close and growing links between the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, and ensure that every borderlands rural local authority has a national park in its area.

Paving the way for a new era of national parks would not only boost the economic recovery of many areas; it would contribute to Scotland's climate and biodiversity recovery. It is two years since the Scottish Government gave a commitment to increase our protected areas for nature to at least 30 per cent of Scotland's terrestrial area by 2030, in line with the campaign of the international Campaign for Nature. However, with the clock ticking, the figure currently sits at less than a quarter. Across the UK, that target is being met by designating new national parks. Scotland is in danger of falling further behind.

I know that some people may, understandably, ask at a time of public spending pressures whether we can afford to spend money on new national parks. Given that national parks bring in between £10 and £17 of investment to an area for every pound that is spent, the question is whether we can afford not to do that if we want to deliver the economic and environmental recovery that we need, particularly in communities that have been left behind for far too long.

**Fergus Ewing:** There are benefits from being within a national park, but does Colin Smyth recognise that many people who live in Cairngorms national park feel that there has been a lack of sufficient permits for new affordable and mid-rent housing over the past nearly two decades, and that that is acting as a big constraint on the sustainable growth of the economy?

**Colin Smyth:** There is absolutely no doubt that Fergus Ewing has raised an important point about the lack of housing in many of our rural communities. That is why I have constantly urged the Government to look again at its current target of around 10 per cent of new housing being for rural areas. If we are going to regenerate our rural communities, we need to raise our ambition when it comes to developing new housing in those areas.

I pay tribute to the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, which have led the 12-year-long campaign for more national parks, and to the community-led campaigns by the Galloway National Park Association, the campaign for a Scottish Borders national park, and campaigns elsewhere. Time after time, I have taken part in debates in the chamber in which SNP ministers have said no to new national parks, but those groups have refused to take no for an answer. They have redoubled their efforts and kept fighting, and the only reason why we are in a position in which any new national parks could be created in the next few years is the perseverance of those groups and community-led proposals for Galloway and Borders national parks.

New national parks are not a panacea, but they offer a rare chance to make a difference and at long last build on the achievements of the previous Labour-led Government. I am therefore pleased to move my amendment, and I hope that Parliament will unite today by committing to completing the unfinished business of Scotland's national parks.

I move amendment S6M-04799.2, to insert at end:

“; notes that there are over 3,500 national parks across the world; regrets that there have been just two national parks created in Scotland, the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, in 2002, and the Cairngorms National Park, in 2003, since the Parliament passed the National Parks (Scotland) Act in 2000; praises the work of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, which identified at least seven further potential sites in 2013, as well as community groups in Galloway and the Borders, and elsewhere, which continue to demonstrate clear demand for new national parks; recognises that, in addition to the designation of new national parks, it is vital that the national scenic areas and regional parks are reinvigorated to help tackle the climate, nature and biodiversity emergencies, and believes that the Scottish Government must pave the way for the opening of a number of new national parks across Scotland.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Beatrice Wishart, who joins us remotely.

15:28

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I convey my apologies, as I must leave the debate early in order to meet my travel commitments later

this afternoon. I have permission from the Presiding Officer to do so.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will support new national parks and the motion. During the pandemic, as the restrictions in local areas lifted, I saw for myself how people—many of whom had lived in Shetland all their lives—discovered parts of our islands that they had never ventured to before and found that the spectacular sights in the natural world around us improved their wellbeing during that tough time.

I will begin with a few words about the next generation and the climate; I will then speak about the benefits of new national parks and including communities in the decision-making process for them.

Our party has long believed that the stewardship of our planet should be taken more seriously and considered more closely. I believe that there is great hope of that as we look to the next generation. We have much to learn from young climate activists such as Greta Thunberg. Young people have had an incredible impact on the conversation around the climate emergency so far. The school strikes in 2019 made a huge difference, and we saw young people marching down the Royal Mile and knocking on Parliament's door. Governments around the world, including in Scotland, were forced to declare a climate emergency.

That had a real impact on decision makers in the Scottish Parliament, and it helped Scottish Liberal Democrats to win the argument for stronger targets for 2030 during the passage of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019—with support from others, we amended the law.

Creating new national parks is an effective shorter-term action that we can take to help to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises. Those reasons alone should be sufficient to create new national parks, but there are greater benefits, as other members have already mentioned.

In 1982, the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries created a term that translates as “forest bathing”, or absorbing the forest atmosphere, to encourage people to spend time in nature. We know that outdoor spaces help people's mental and physical health and wellbeing. Creating new national parks has the potential to encourage new visitors to enjoy an area that they may never have considered before. Rural employment can also be boosted as new jobs are created to help to maintain the land further.

However, we must also consider local infrastructure. If we anticipate that more tourists will visit an area, we have to consider upgrades to

local roads and trails, plans for conservation of land and all that can be damaged by tourism. We must work together to ensure that communities get the most out of new national parks.

Scottish Liberal Democrats welcome the start of stakeholder engagement for new national parks. No two places in nature are identical. Each community has something unique in its green local spaces to protect and promote. We must be sensitive to that and listen to the voices of people who live in and near any proposed new national park. They would be the first to be impacted by any issue, they know their areas best and they stand to benefit the most from a new national park.

We should also be mindful of what we could be asking of residents by embracing greater tourism. There can be tension between residents and tourism, and we need to be mindful of that from the start of the process. We must work out solutions that involve listening to local concerns and engaging in meaningful consultations.

The Scottish Liberal Democrat 2021 manifesto committed us to supporting the development of a new national strategy to designate more national parks as part of a wider network of protected landscape. We are willing to work with others to establish such a network. Our manifesto also committed us to developing the position of an outdoor recreation champion in Government to help everyone in Scotland to maximise the benefit of new national parks.

We recognise the important role that local communities and stakeholders will play during consultations about new national parks, and we encourage them to voice their opinions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

15:33

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate about the creation of at least one new national park in Scotland. I will focus on the campaign for a national park in Dumfries and Galloway, the governance and structure of any proposed national park, and the exciting opportunity to create the right national park model.

Currently, there are limited statutory criteria in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 for the selection of national parks. I note that the launch of the consultation to gain ideas on what Scotland's new national park could encompass has received 102 submissions so far. I encourage members to take a look, as some of the responses and comments are very interesting.

In the designation of a new national park, there is an opportunity to look at what has worked well

in relation to the two national parks that we already have. Lessons could be learned to enable us to design a better governance and regulatory system for a new national park in Scotland.

In Galloway, a new national park could provide an opportunity to promote and conserve some of Scotland's magnificent landscapes, which we are fortunate to have across our bonnie Galloway. A park could attract visitors and allow the south-west's fragile rural economy to rebuild from the pandemic and thrive, while helping Scotland to tackle the biodiversity and climate emergency challenges.

However—I have been consistently clear about this—any new national park must not be created simply for the sake of it. The process must be done in co-operation with the communities that it is intended to serve, and it must not create further bureaucratic or restrictive approaches to issues such as planning, new development or the many new ideas that will support addressing biodiversity and climate issues.

The Galloway National Park Association has had conversations with almost 2,000 people at more than 100 meetings and events across Galloway. The findings from those conversations, along with the consultative work, are interesting.

Galloway needs to be on a par with the rest of Scotland in economic terms, and many respondents to the GNPA engagement felt that a national park had the potential to bring economic benefit to the region through increased tourism—that would definitely happen—job creation and international recognition.

Respondents felt that Galloway's dispersed rural population presented additional challenges, but some, including hotel, bed and breakfast accommodation and outdoor activity providers, saw recognition as a national park as a potential catalyst for business development and expansion. Some also felt that a national park might be vital in providing opportunities for our region's young people to consider taking up employment opportunities on their doorstep, instead of, as Colin Smyth has mentioned, leaving the region to pursue employment, as many currently do.

However, as Colin Smyth has said—the point is worth reiterating—there are already fantastic resources available across Galloway, such as the UNESCO Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, 7stanes mountain biking, water sports at the Galloway Activity Centre at Loch Ken, the Galloway forest park, the dark sky park, and the many distilleries, breweries, museums and artistic venues.

Those resources allow people to explore the outdoors. The biosphere—for which I hope to host a reception here in Parliament in September—

which is backed up by £1.9 million of Scottish Government funding, is already enhancing our natural environment and educating people on nature and the climate emergency. I have had direct feedback that those resources need to be built on, expanded and funded for the future.

I have been engaging with the NFU Scotland locally and nationally and with constituents who are not necessarily in favour of the proposal for a national park in Galloway or the Borders. One of the key reasons for that is that many are concerned that national park status in the area might create barriers to development in terms of planning and regenerative farming, and that it might present barriers to agricultural diversification or to the development of new income streams.

Through my engagement with the GNPA, I have expressed my concern over the potential bureaucracy that a national park could create when it comes to planning issues, board members' monetary compensation, local democracy and decision making. For example, I am aware that there has been significant conflict in national parks, where planning decisions are subject to the national park board and not the local authority.

I also know of the challenges that renewable energy investors experience when they seek to bring development to national park areas—investment that could bring much-needed community benefit.

**Finlay Carson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** I will, if Mr Carson is quick.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly, Mr Carson.

**Finlay Carson:** The member mentioned renewables. Are there too many wind farms in Dumfries and Galloway?

**Emma Harper:** I know that Mr Carson has raised that issue in the chamber previously. That is one of the issues that there are concerns about. At the moment, planning remains with the local authority, which means that the community is widely consulted when such decisions are made.

I ask the minister, as some of the respondents to the consultation have done, to ensure that the Scottish Government remains open minded about the structure of any proposed national park. The Government will need to focus on protecting and enhancing the natural environment, while tackling the twin crises of the climate and biodiversity emergencies, and not on determining planning applications or becoming restrictive to local development.

Of course I agree that national parks can bring huge benefit, and wherever a national park is

created, it must have the right model, and it must involve and gain the support of the local community.

15:39

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to farming, crofting and land management.

I greatly welcome the opportunity to debate this issue, given the importance of our existing national parks and the pressing need to add to them. As other members have noted, there are some 3,500 national parks worldwide, but we have only two here in Scotland and 15 across the whole of the United Kingdom. Given that the United Nations has set a target that 30 per cent of the planet's surface must be protected by 2030, it is clearly imperative that we do more to help to realise that global ambition. As such, we welcome the Scottish Government's broad policy to create new national parks, although it is regrettable that the Scottish National Party needed to be pushed into that position by the Scottish Greens.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I am lucky enough to have one of Scotland's national parks in my region. The Cairngorms national park stretches from the centre of the Highlands and Islands region into Aberdeenshire, Moray and Perthshire, and it is the largest park in the UK. In fact, to give members some context, I note that it is larger than the whole of Luxembourg. It is home to nine natural nature reserves, 60 lochs and three rivers. Not only does it boast an array of spectacular nature, it is economically beneficial to the communities within and around it. As well as talking about housing, Fergus Ewing was quite right to stress that national parks do not exist in isolation from residents and their communities, so their needs, lives and livelihoods must be recognised, too.

The Cairngorms national park attracts 1.92 million visitors each year, and, as of a few years ago, it employed about 8,100 people, with 60 per cent of those roles being full time.

Like many parks, it was heavily impacted during the Covid pandemic. Its economic value fell by 14.8 per cent, whereas the economic value of Scotland as a whole fell by 9.4 per cent. That is a reminder of the fragility of rural Scotland, particularly when faced with major economic shocks.

That said, the area's status as a national park has helped to preserve and grow its wide abundance of flora and fauna. According to the park authority, 70 per cent of its rivers are

"considered to be in good ecological status",



and it has

“nationally important populations of ... salmon and three species of lampreys, as well as the globally endangered freshwater pearl mussel.”

About 79 per cent of the park’s woodlands are comprised of native tree species, and two of the park’s major wetlands are globally recognised Ramsar sites.

Given the clear benefits that the Cairngorms get from having national park status, it seems right that such status should be applied elsewhere. The Scottish Campaign for National Parks mentioned some other potential areas in the Highlands and Islands: Glen Affric; Ben Nevis, Glen Coe and Black Mount; Wester Ross; and Harris. It also mentioned the coastal and marine potential on the western seaboard of Argyll.

As Brian Whittle noted, the Scottish Conservatives support the establishment of a national park in Galloway, which has the support of local communities, businesses and farmers in the area. Having seen the immeasurable social and economic benefits that the Cairngorms national park has brought to the Highlands and Islands, I think that it is surely high time to develop that model in places such as Galloway.

**Emma Harper:** Donald Cameron has said that farmers would welcome a national park, but does he agree that there has been a bit of a back-and-forward, as some members of NFU Scotland in Dumfries and Galloway are a wee bit sceptical until they get more information?

**Donald Cameron:** I am not aware of the precise discourse among the farming community in Dumfries and Galloway, but I am sure that Finlay Carson will go into that in much more thorough detail than I could. However, I accept that there is a tension between potentially expanding national parks and taking into account existing interests such as those of farmers and crofters.

I take this opportunity to praise Finlay Carson, the local MSP for Galloway, for his passion in pushing the case for a national park there. Ever since we were elected in 2016, he has been relentless in his advocacy of a national park in Galloway, and I pay tribute to his hard work and dogged persistence on that important issue, which is so critical for his constituents.

However, it is clear that the establishment of that park could have happened some time ago. The Scottish Government’s lack of enthusiasm for creating more national parks seems to have hampered Galloway’s case and the case for other areas to receive such status. Indeed, in 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham, said:

“The creation of new national parks requires considerable planning and ... it carries cost implications”.— [Official Report, 8 September 2016; c 4.]

However, as the facts show with the Cairngorms national park, the economic and ecological advantages certainly seem to outweigh the constraints.

That said, it is right that local communities, businesses and land managers are fully consulted when considering such plans. As the British Association for Shooting and Conservation Scotland has rightly said,

“the uniqueness of National Parks is the result of generations of communities managing the land, and if Government wants to future-proof these landscapes then local communities and rural workers should be central to the government’s proposals.”

When considering the designation of new national parks, it is also important that we think about how that will help Scotland to meet its environmental targets. Just before the debate, we had a statement on emissions. We recognise that the Government has a poor record in that regard, as it has missed its own legal emissions targets for the past three years and has failed to slow the decline in biodiversity.

The Scottish Conservatives fully support proposals to create new national parks where they receive the support of local communities, businesses and land managers. As the Cairngorms national park has shown, national parks can deliver not only positive environmental outcomes but strong economic outcomes. Although we agree that robust consultation is required, it is clear that there is a very strong impetus to do that sooner rather than later so that we can deliver new national parks rather than unnecessarily drag out the process further.

15:46

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** I begin by paying tribute to Dave Fallows, who sadly passed away recently. Dave served for 10 years as a councillor in the Highland Council, and he had many and wide interests. As an artist, he and his wife, Lena, ran the Newtonmore craft centre and gallery for, I think, 17 years. He was an enthusiast for shinty, photography and music, and he took to poetry in his later years. He will be sadly missed. He was a man of wide interests and deep thoughts, as the *Strathspey and Badenoch Herald*, which is known as the *Strathy*, had to say.

Dave and I shared a great love for the Cairngorms mountains—the massif. As I think you may know, Presiding Officer, I have climbed most of the Cairngorms or, at least, a younger, slimmer version of me did that many years ago. Now, I am confined to the glens, having come off the bens

through necessity, and I enjoy the huge array of attractions that the area has to offer. There is the folk museum in Newtonmore and the Highland wildlife park, which of course is home to red pandas, and very popular they are, too. There is Loch an Eilein, which is Britain's most popular picnic spot, as well as the Rothiemurchus ranger service, Glenmore forest park, the funicular railway, the Landmark attraction, various distilleries and the Cairngorm brewery—I could go on. I should finish by mentioning the Cairngorm hotel in Aviemore, which, sadly, after the recent football match in which Scotland exited the world cup, will once again be the unofficial headquarters of the tartan army—every cloud has a silver lining.

Shortly before Dave Fallows died, he wrote a letter to me to express his profound concern about the direction of the Cairngorms national park, and to suggest a solution. His concerns are shared by many in the national park, not all of whom will necessarily wish to speak out, not least because the park authority has planning decision-making powers. There is widespread concern that there are insufficient homes, that not enough permissions are granted for homes and that those that have been granted take far too long. An excellent development at Boat of Garten—I have lived for 15 years in the vicinity—took well over a decade to come to fruition, and it should have been far larger, with no detriment to the environment. In addition, because the permissions that are granted are often subject to such onerous conditions, that adds to the cost or makes the whole exercise unfeasible.

Many of us believe that the problem is not that there are too many second homes; it is that there are simply not enough first homes. That has become an acute concern post-Covid and post-Brexit. Every single successful business that I engage with—I engage with a lot—does not have enough staff. That is particularly the case for businesses in the hospitality and care sectors. All those businesses say that one reason for the situation is that there are simply not enough houses for people to live in. People might come for a while, but they cannot find a house and therefore have to leave, rather than stay and become part of the community.

**Finlay Carson:** On the lack of housing in rural areas, would the member not be better putting the emphasis on failures of the SNP Government to bring forward appropriate policies, rather than blaming it all on national parks?

**Fergus Ewing:** I do not want to get into the blame game. I do not think that the argument stands up. I point out that there were two visions for new towns in the Highlands. One is Tornagrain, which has gone ahead with the blessing of the Scottish Government. It is an excellent example of

a new town that fits well in the landscape and Moray Estates is to be congratulated for that.

The other was An Camas Mòr. It was going to be a new town just across the Spey from Aviemore. It had massive local support, but I am afraid that it just did not enjoy the full-throated support of the national park authority. Indeed, many people thought that the park authority did not want it to succeed at all. That is a tragedy for my constituency. It is a failure that I hope can—I certainly think that it should—be corrected.

In addition to that, the Cairngorms national park has a population of nearly 19,000. Yosemite, one of the famous parks in the USA, which I have visited, has a population of just over 1,000. Yosemite is a fifth larger than the Cairngorms. Our national parks are living places where people have to live and work, and I can tell you, representing the area, as I have done for two decades or more, and having lived in the park for approximately the past 15 years, that there is widespread concern. A recent comment from the Grampian Moorland Group, in response to the Cairngorms National Park Authority's plans for massive deer cull, said:

"We don't feel the park is working for the people ... any more."

What do we do about that? Dave Fallows came up with a solution in one of his last communications in his life. The solution is not to scrap the park but to reform the park and the legislation, to create a directly elected park authority on which 15 of the 19 members are directly elected by the people. Leonard Cohen talked about bringing democracy to the USA; surely it is not too radical for the Scottish Government to bring democracy to the Cairngorms national park.

15:52

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I very much welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, not least because it will be a walk down memory lane, but I also get to be shamelessly parochial. I am extremely proud to represent part of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park. It is undoubtedly a beautiful part of Scotland and it has, dare I say it, the most stunning scenery in the country as a whole.

Now for a little history lesson. The first ever members' business debate in the Parliament was on the creation of a national park at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. It was brought to the chamber on 8 June 1999 by my colleague Sylvia Jackson, who represented Stirling constituency. Aside from me, the only other people who are still here who participated in that debate are, of course, Fergus Ewing and Sarah Boyack. Sarah was the minister who took the legislation through Parliament. One

of the first substantive pieces of legislation passed by the Parliament, in July 2000, the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 led to the creation of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park in 2002 and the Cairngorms in 2003.

However, it all started many years before that. The Friends of Loch Lomond had campaigned for national parks for many years, assisted by my former colleague John McFall, who is now Lord Speaker in the House of Lords. Their persistence and determination led to a commitment in the manifesto of the 1997 Labour Government to create national parks in Scotland that was then realised by Labour in the Scottish Parliament.

The framework that was established all those years ago was clearly sound, as the two national parks have flourished since. They have managed to balance protection and conservation of significant national assets, while safeguarding our natural heritage for future generations alongside sustainable economic development.

Many businesses have thrived in the national park: Cruise Loch Lomond, Sweeney's Cruise Company, Loch Lomond Seaplanes, the Duck Bay hotel, the Lodge on Loch Lomond and many more tourism businesses besides. I acknowledge the contribution that Fergus Ewing made as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism in helping those businesses to get through the pandemic.

Those tourism businesses welcome 4 million visitors every year, which helps the local economy, but it is also a challenge. On sunny days, which we do have in Scotland, some communities in Loch Lomond have been overwhelmed by a combination of day trippers, visitors from across the UK and overseas visitors. Everything from litter, antisocial behaviour, wild camping and cars gridlocking narrow streets have challenged the park to constantly improve its visitor management. Work by the likes of Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and Argyll and Bute Council means that there are now improved litter facilities, additional wardens and toilets where once there were none.

By-laws were put in place in 2007, reviewed in 2012 and added to over the years. They cover everything from wild camping to speed limits on the loch and the registration of power craft. A further review of them is coming up this year.

In that context and with the minister in the chamber, I want to talk about jet skis. The number of jet-ski registrations on Loch Lomond has increased. Although there has been a gradual increase year on year since Lake Windermere banned jet skis in 2005, the number rose exponentially during the two years of the pandemic. Lots of people have holidayed at

home—we have all had staycations—and some of those people have brought jet skis with them on holiday. Many of the jet skis on Loch Lomond are not registered. They are launched at different points in the loch and the behaviour of some users is incredibly dangerous. Driving while drunk or while using drugs, buzzing swimmers close to the shoreline and travelling at dangerous speeds are becoming all too common. Enforcement is clearly challenging. When I asked the Scottish Government how many people had been charged in that regard by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service from 1999 to August 2021, I heard that the number was precisely three. That is not good enough.

The debate now is whether to allow jet skis at all or to confine them to parts of the loch. Given the problems with enforcement, I am increasingly of the view that they should not be allowed at all. I visited Lake Windermere last year. It was busy but peaceful. The annoying buzz of jet skis was wholly absent. Wild swimmers could proceed in relative safety. In this case, the conservation and protection of our natural environment should perhaps be the priority. I will leave the minister to reflect on that.

I want to mention a forthcoming planning application that was lodged by Lomond Banks, which is otherwise known as Flamingo Land. The application was withdrawn three years ago because the national park recommended rejection. It is now back with some changes. The plan would no longer destroy all the ancient woodland, which is welcome. Buildings have been reduced in height, but the density of holiday accommodation remains largely the same. There are issues with traffic and infrastructure, and it is true that the community is divided. One of the key considerations for local people is whether the benefit from jobs will outweigh the potential disadvantages.

I will not ask the minister for her opinion on the application; that would not be appropriate. However, questions have been raised with me about her potential involvement. Given that she is responsible for national parks, will she have any influence on the decision, particularly given that her Green colleague, Ross Greer, is campaigning against the development? Clarity on that would be helpful for the local community to understand.

Like other members, I am disappointed that the SNP has not designated any other national parks while it has been in charge during the past 15 years. However, I am delighted that that is now changing—more power to the minister's elbow.

15:59

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North)**

**(SNP):** We are truly lucky to live in a country of such breathtaking natural beauty. There is majestic scenery and wild beauty in many corners of Scotland but, despite it forming nearly a third of the UK's land mass, only two of the 15 national parks are situated here: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms. Scotland is more than thrice the size of Wales, yet the principality has three national parks compared with our two.

I am therefore pleased that, in its programme for government, the Scottish Government said that it will designate at least one new national park by the end of the current session of the Parliament. That will further support progressive development, address the climate emergency through the way that we use our land, and improve public and community wellbeing.

There is no doubt that national parks are the globally recognised premier designation for scenery and habitats. Yellowstone, Kruger and Serengeti are only some of the names that spring to mind, each of them attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

Tourism already makes an important contribution to the Scottish economy. National parks are a brand that attracts visitors and their spending. Having at least one further recognised area—and hopefully more—would be a boost to the economy and to the rural coastal areas that might be included.

In 2010, a report commissioned by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise found that, in the first seven years following its establishment, the Cairngorms national park enjoyed a 13 per cent increase in the number of businesses operating in the area and a decrease in local unemployment. The study also found that the park had a growing economy worth £398 million a year, with an increasing number of 18 to 25-year-olds being attracted to the area. It was not only local tourism that benefited: the food and drink, housing and forest products clusters all saw strong growth post 2003.

As well as the economic benefits, national parks also provide positive land and wildlife management. That includes additional resources to safeguard and enhance the special qualities of those areas in the long term and particularly how they help to promote sustainable land use, protect and restore nature and tackle climate change.

Scottish national park authorities are required to pursue the aims set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 in a collective and co-ordinated way, and they have a wide range of powers to achieve that.

There are many areas of outstanding beauty across Scotland. I believe that Clyde Muirshiel regional park, which makes up much of my constituency, should be considered as a new national park. Clyde Muirshiel is an area of 280km<sup>2</sup>, making it Scotland's largest regional park, and every year it welcomes more than 700,000 visitors, who enjoy walking, running, cycling and other outdoor activities.

The wonderful scenery includes: the heather hills of Misty Law; the Hill of Stake and Brisbane Glen; stunning views such as Fairlie moor; the sandy beaches of Lunderston Bay; beautiful lochs such as Loch Thom and Kilbirnie Loch; woodlands such as Locherwood; and industrial heritage sites including the now disused Muirshiel barytes mine. Clyde Muirshiel also provides important havens for wildlife. Its heather moors are home to one of Britain's rarest birds of prey, the hen harrier.

Back in 1946, the Clyde valley regional plan described the Clyde coast from Greenock to West Kilbride thus:

"this section of the coast with the hill country behind it is another area of great popularity, apart from its holiday significance. It has a number of glens roaming down to the sea, an area of considerable importance to the rambler and natural historian, and its outlook to the Firth of Clyde and the grape-blue jagged peaks of Arran is of the highest order of scenic value ..."

I am sure you will agree that that is very poetic. However, it was not until December 1990 that Clyde Muirshiel regional park was formally designated as covering and protecting land stretching across Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and North Ayrshire.

I thank the Friends of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, who have worked with local authorities and private landowners to bring areas of disused land in the park back into community use and to make it more accessible to the general public.

Not only is Clyde Muirshiel regional park a leader in integrated countryside management, the area also frequently demonstrates business excellence through the green tourism business scheme and Chamber of Commerce awards.

Scotland's local authorities currently manage regional parks with support from NatureScot and in partnership with recreation and land management interests. The fact that North Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire straddle Clyde Muirshiel encourages those local authorities to work together to manage it and to co-operate in other areas.

National park status would not only enhance the public perception of Clyde Muirshiel park, it would provide the positive management and extra resources required to protect and restore its outstanding biodiversity and landscapes, providing

for the public to enjoy and value the area's natural and cultural heritage in the long term. It would also certainly lead to job creation in one of the less prosperous parts of Scotland.

I welcome the Scottish Government's public consultation, which seeks to gather views on the creation of Scotland's first new national parks in almost 20 years and I believe that Clyde Muirshiel regional park is a strong contender for consideration for national park status. Anyone who has ever visited its hills, moors and lochs knows that it is an area of outstanding beauty with good infrastructure and with many visitor centres already in place. Designating Clyde Muirshiel as a national park would increase environmental protection and would lead to a greater understanding of, and boost the relationship with, the many adjacent post-industrial communities.

16:04

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** The debate opens the next chapter in the story of Scotland's national parks—a story that started with the spirit of John Muir, saw the cry for countryside access after the war, and continued with the birth of the first Scottish national parks in the devolution era under the landmark legislation that was introduced by Ms Boyack. Given the climate and nature emergencies, there has never been a better time to grow and develop our parks and I am delighted that, with Greens in Government, we are able to play our role in helping to write the next chapter.

As a resident of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, I know that communities are at the very heart of our parks and that listening to their voices will be critical in managing our existing parks better and establishing new ones. That is why the national conversation that the minister has announced is so important.

There is a need for parks to do a lot more, including restoring native woodlands at a vast landscape scale and tackling many of the housing issues that have been spoken about already. However, the national parks agenda must also run alongside a more radical land reform agenda that empowers communities directly. I look forward to the forthcoming land reform bill and I hope that in her closing speech the minister, Màiri McAllan, will comment on where the bill is heading.

There are warnings from our national parks story about the need to engage communities meaningfully. For example, with the initial sloppy drawing of the Cairngorms national park boundary, communities in highland Perthshire were ignored. Despite the advice from Scottish Natural Heritage, as it was at the time, the then Scottish Executive

pushed ahead in 2003 and excluded Perthshire from the national park.

The community campaign that followed, which was led by the irrepressible Bill Wright, culminated in the infamous twin peaks launch of the Cairngorms national park. On the top of Cairngorm stood Labour minister Allan Wilson at the official park launch, while on the top of Carn Liath stood an unholy alliance of John Swinney, Murdo Fraser, Dennis Canavan, Robin Harper and even me, declaring the right of highland Perthshire to be included in the national park. It took a member's bill from Mr Swinney, with our cross-party backing, to finally redraw the park boundary. That is a lesson to all ministers from all parties to work closely with communities at the outset.

The pause button on the national parks has been on for two decades now, so it felt like an historic move that, as part of the Bute house agreement negotiations last year, I and my colleagues were able to put new national parks back on the table again. I am delighted that our new minister, Lorna Slater, is now responsible for the delivery.

The community campaigns for new parks have never stopped, and the work of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks has been critical in keeping that flame alive. Its 2013 report on options is a great starting point, although it is not exhaustive. I recently ran a very unscientific poll on Twitter to gauge support for its initial seven options. I found that Galloway, Ben Nevis/Glen Coe/Black Mount and a potential marine and coastal park are very popular options. Given the success of the Jurassic coast national park in Dorset, I am really attracted to the idea of a marine and coastal park for Argyll and Mull. However, I certainly recognise the strong cross-party political support in this Parliament that is behind Galloway. It reinforces the point that national parks are strong economic drivers and that the position of Galloway, being easily accessible to northern England, could provide a really strong domestic tourism offering.

However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that national parks are there to conserve and enhance the natural world as much as they are there to enable our enjoyment. The Sandford principle—that, where there is unmanageable conflict between public use and conservation, the environment must come first—is as important today as it was when national parks were first conceived in the UK. That will continue to raise difficult decisions that, again, need the input of communities to get right.

For example, the introduction of camping management zones in the Trossachs sparked strong debate and, I think, a genuine concern that our fundamental rights to wild camp were being

eroded. In reality, however, the damage that we saw at first hand to the lochsides, for example at Loch Venachar, needed a strong response to stop the destruction, and from what I can see, it has worked without becoming a wider precedent.

Ultimately, better facilities for campers will help to manage impact. I certainly urge ministers to look in particular at how a visitor levy could help parks to fund facilities that will help people to keep coming back, including better toilet facilities, camping areas and extra rangers.

Of course, park authorities always need to strike a careful balance. As the Flamingo Land proposal for Loch Lomond rears its head again, decision makers need to go back to that Sandford principle and ask the fundamental question: "Does it get the conservation balance right?" To my mind, Flamingo Land does not, and must be thrown out again.

As my former colleague Robin Harper put it, in 2020:

"The setting up of National Parks twenty years ago must be the beginning of a process, not an end in itself. We need to see our countryside as a place where biodiversity and the environment are enhanced—our rural communities and their survival are essential to the conservation of wild Scotland."

That must be the theme of the next chapter in Scotland's national parks story, and I look forward very much to seeing new parks in Scotland.

16:10

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I am delighted to speak in the debate. I am a resident of Dunbar, which is the birthplace of John Muir, who was born there on 21 April 1838 and died on Christmas eve 1914. He was known as "John of the mountains" and "father of the national parks". He was a naturalist, author, environmentalist, botanist, zoologist and early advocate for the preservation of the wilderness in the USA. His letters, essays, and books describe his adventures in nature, especially in the Sierra Nevada, and have been read by millions. Every year, Dunbar has many US visitors to his birthplace.

His activism helped to preserve the Yosemite valley and Sequoia national park, and his example has served as an inspiration for the preservation of many other wilderness areas. The Sierra Club, which he co-founded, is a prominent American conservation organisation.

As part of the campaign to make Yosemite a national park, John Muir published two landmark articles on wilderness preservation in *The Century* magazine: "The Treasures of the Yosemite" and "Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park". That helped to support the push for the US Congress to pass a bill in 1890 to establish the

Yosemite national park. I had the good fortune to visit that park about 10 years ago.

John Muir is an inspiration to both Scots and Americans. His biographer, Steven J Holmes, said that Muir had become

"one of the patron saints of twentieth-century American environmental activity",

both political and recreational. On 21 April 2013, the first John Muir day was celebrated in Scotland, marking the 175th anniversary of his birth.

Society's underlying health and a sustainable environment need to be measured by more than just figures on a balance sheet. I chair the cross-party group on the wellbeing economy. Since I was elected, last May, I have heard many MSPs state that we have to move towards a wellbeing economy, but anyone who asks exactly what that means will get many different answers. I have been working closely with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, which urges societies to transform how economies operate. Katherine Trebeck of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance warns that, unless we rethink who wins and who loses out,

"we won't have a chance of delivering that goal: social justice on a healthy planet."

Integrating individual and ecological wellbeing is one of my major ambitions during this parliamentary session. We can explore some steps immediately: prioritising green jobs for economic development; protecting biodiversity so that wildlife can thrive; and having a sustainable landscape for everyone to enjoy.

As MSP for East Lothian, I will advocate for the Lammermuirs to join the Trossachs and the Cairngorms as Scotland's third national park, working with agribusiness, rural communities and environmental and other groups. As the natural border between the Lothians and the Borders, the Lammermuirs' stunning landscape and history would attract people to the countryside, enhance community wellbeing and boost the rural economy via ecotourism.

I give credit to the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, which, since 2010, have jointly led the campaign for more and better national parks, supported by other national organisations. In their 2013 report "Unfinished Business", they set out the case for more national parks and proposed that at least seven further areas would benefit from being so designated.

National parks constitute the top tier of Scotland's suite of protected landscapes. However, much more work is also required to reinvigorate national scenic areas and regional parks, so that they too can address the climate emergency and nature crisis and accommodate

visitors. In her summing up, perhaps the minister will say more about the plans for those.

National parks do a power of work to tackle the biodiversity and climate crises, manage facilities for visitors, promote responsible access and develop sustainable communities. It is almost 20 years since Scotland's first national parks were established in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and in the Cairngorms. They work closely with their communities, land managers, local businesses, the third sector and individuals, to ensure sustainable development.

The Scottish Government is already committed to tackling the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, and has a demonstrably strong track record of making significant funding commitments to protect and restore biodiversity, which include a commitment to invest at least £500 million in the natural economy over the course of this Parliament, and £250 million for peatland restoration over 10 years as part of our climate change plan. In July 2021, the Scottish Government launched the nature restoration fund, which provides £10 million for projects to tackle the causes of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Sustainable and responsible rural tourism is key in connecting people with nature, in urban and rural areas. It brings so many benefits in terms of health and wellbeing.

Working closely with communities will be key as we develop out the new national parks.

In their briefing, the SCNP and APRS talk about the importance of visitor management. The pandemic saw the rise of holidaying at home and a greater number of people recognising the benefits of being out in the outdoors.

In East Lothian and other areas, there is a challenge to improve access to busy visitor areas, in a sustainable way that does not erode their value. The SCNP and APRS discuss the potential for a national parks service with a broad strategic remit to improve Scotland's capability to develop and manage its key tourism industry and make the most of its outstanding landscape and environmental assets.

I opened my speech talking about John Muir and I close with one of his quotes:

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

16:16

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**  
I am glad that we are having this debate on

national parks, including a discussion of how important they are in bringing social and economic benefits across Scotland.

After years of stalling on the issue, it is good to see the Scottish Government finally joining us in our long-standing position, and supporting the creation of at least one new national park.

Members have noted the fascinating perspective that there are more 3,500 national parks in the world, but only two in Scotland, despite our world-renowned countryside and stunning scenery. That compares with three national parks in Wales, 10 in England and 13 in New Zealand.

Quality is more important than quantity, but we can and should do much more with the designation of national park status. As our amendment to the motion highlights, we also want the Scottish Government to explore other avenues to formally recognise and capitalise on Scotland's many outstanding areas of natural capital where national park status might not be appropriate.

As I represent Mid Scotland and Fife, I am lucky to represent part of the incredible Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, the virtues of which were expounded on by Jackie Baillie in her fascinating history lesson, with further historical context being provided by Mark Ruskell. I want to focus my remarks on the constructive lessons that can be gained from the experiences of that national park.

Community support and consultation are vital to the success of any national park—a point that has been made by many members in the debate. Twenty years ago, the creation of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park was not without controversy. Many people who lived and worked within its proposed boundary were extremely concerned about what the area's becoming a national park could mean for their communities.

It is therefore important that the views of all those who live and work in areas that are being considered as new national parks are taken into consideration, and that the consultation is a meaningful process. There should be consultation on how the new national park will be governed, what its remit will be and what powers it will have.

We have an opportunity to re-evaluate how our existing parks operate and are resourced, so that when we have newly created national parks, they all have the same capacity, powers and access to resources. It is now more than 20 years since the original national parks legislation was enacted. A full review of that legislation and how it has been implemented would ensure that all our national parks are properly supported to face the many challenges that lie ahead—not least of which is their role in delivering net zero targets. I would

therefore welcome a commitment from the minister that the remits, powers and governance for both existing national parks will be reviewed and updated as part of the process.

We need to enable and empower national parks to operate as autonomous bodies and to be able to effectively carry out their responsibilities, free from external pressures.

As we have heard during the debate, we are looking for national parks playing an important role in tackling biodiversity loss, achieving net zero targets and promoting environmental protection. Critically, that means that national park authorities must have adequate resources to deliver on those outcomes.

For example, the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority is undertaking a series of extensive peatland and woodland restoration projects—they are very exciting projects—as part of its net zero delivery plans. Such projects will require sustained long-term revenue, as well as capital support, for many years ahead. However, years of cuts to local government budgets make it increasingly difficult, and sometimes impossible, to finance such projects. That is something that the minister has to acknowledge in the debate.

Another challenge that we have seen in recent years, which has been mentioned today, concerns how national parks can best manage the increasing numbers of visitors during peak seasons. That issue came to light at particular times during the Covid-19 pandemic. The challenge in that regard has been highlighted by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland's Scottish national parks strategy project, which comments in its briefing paper that,

"The effort that Scotland has put into marketing its world class landscapes, has not been matched by provision for caring for them".

That is a very good point.

National parks can share best practice on how they can best cater for the increasing number of visitors during peak seasons, and how they can promote sustainable tourism. In response to some of the pressures, the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority has, over the past couple of years, introduced new seasonal by-laws and created camping management zones to deal with the excess number of visitors. Without using those extra powers, the national park and the ranger service would not have been able to properly manage heavily used sensitive locations and protect the communities that they serve.

The Scottish Government can play an important role in that area by reviewing the existing powers that are available to national park authorities and the penalties that are available, for example, for

littering, fly-tipping and other forms of unacceptable behaviour that have, unfortunately, increased over the past couple of years. Changes are also needed to give local police, local authorities and the ranger service additional powers that can help them to deal more effectively with such unacceptable behaviour.

I conclude by welcoming the creation of at least one new national park. I also welcome the opportunity that that presents for us to look at how we resource and empower existing parks, as well as new parks, and help them to deliver on net zero targets. I also urge the Scottish Government to address the inadequacy of the current powers that are available to national parks. That would benefit every rural location in Scotland, whether it is in a national park or not.

I support the amendment in Brian Whittle's name.

16:22

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It is a privilege to contribute to the debate on national parks and their importance not only in Scotland, but around the world. It is a pleasure to follow Dean Lockhart's contribution. It is right that our national parks should share best practice and learn from one another's experience, and that they should reach out to other national parks around the world in order to learn from their experiences.

Beatrice Wishart commented on forest bathing in Japan, which offers individuals the ability to enter a forest zone—a wild area—and just pause to enjoy the moment when nature reaches out to them. As individuals we are, to be frank, very stressed—especially given our recent history with Covid and the challenges that face our communities. In that moment of silence when we are in the wilderness, perhaps we can see a way to move forward to address the economic and health challenges that we face.

Paul McLennan was right to talk about the importance of John Muir—the father of our national parks. He was born in Dunbar, and at 11 years old he moved to the United States. He was very much self-taught. When I was a primary school teacher, I am not sure how many lessons I began with the great quote,

"I might have become a millionaire, but I chose to become a tramp."

He was a man who found pleasure tramping around the natural lands of the US. He took himself to science fairs with inventions and found his way into industry, but suffered an industrial accident in which he lost his sight for one month. In that time he chose not to look backwards to the place where he lived or to the industry from which he got his money, but to nature, finding in it a cure



and a way to express the importance of the interaction between human beings and that which rests around them.

In 1872, after four years of campaigning, Yellowstone national park in Wyoming was established under an act of March 1, 1872. Congress said that it would be

“a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people”.

That brings me to my one slight criticism of the Government’s motion: it does not expressly set out the importance of our national parks for the mental health and wellbeing of our people. It is correct that national parks can help us to fight the challenges of biodiversity and the climate crisis. However, they are also places where the people of Scotland can find mental wellbeing, peace and quiet, and a way to face whatever comes their way.

Before the advent of email, Zoom calls and the internet, John Muir, who is considered to be the father of national parks, achieved the creation of Yellowstone national park in the US within four years. It has now been more than 20 years since we established a national park here. Scottish Labour is, rightly, proud of having championed protection of Scotland’s natural environment. As has been mentioned, we sit in the chamber today with only one person who has created a national park—my colleague Sarah Boyack. What does that say about the ambition of the Government between then and now?

Despite the Scottish Campaign for National Parks having identified seven new potential sites for national parks since as far back as 2013, nearly 10 years later there has been no action from the SNP Government to introduce concrete plans to create new parks. Indeed, in the Scottish Green Party manifesto there was talk of creating two national parks, but now we are considering one. I say to the minister that I am concerned that we could have never-ending consultation before we see the creation of one new national park here, in Scotland—or, as I hope, two or more. I ask her to confirm what steps will be taken to prevent that. As Emma Harper rightly said, in national parks there is a natural conflict—a friction—with planning and new housing in particular, but also with applications for renewable energy provision. Such conflict brings the communities who live there against the economic entities in our national parks.

**Mark Ruskell:** Does Martin Whitfield acknowledge that new national parks need careful consideration and that we need to work with communities? I gave the example of a Labour minister not consulting the community, which resulted in a very embarrassing situation that had

to be resolved by the introduction of a member’s bill.

**Martin Whitfield:** Mark Ruskell is right: that demonstrates the shame of 20 years of non-discussion and non-review of the relevant act. There is a way through that, though. It is about genuine consultation of the communities and people in our national parks and the visitors who seek to use them. It is a shame that we have had such a waste of time; had we had three or four national parks as we entered the Covid pandemic, they would have been a great resource for Scotland during that period.

Because it has suffered from a bit of silence, I want to champion the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park, which has done so much work dating back to 2017, when its feasibility study was undertaken. It identified that, sadly, tourists tend not to stop in the Borders, but pass through there on their journey elsewhere, which is such a shame. When they stop there, as they have begun to do in increasing numbers, that has not resulted in the conflict in relation to local resources that has perhaps happened in other places.

Time has beaten me. I had much more to say. However, I am grateful for your patience, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Christine Grahame is the final speaker in the open debate. You have a fairly generous six minutes, Ms Grahame.

16:29

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Oh—that is lovely. I am pleased to speak in the debate, although it will be with a tinge of irony.

Before I press on, I advise Mr Whitfield that I will have plenty to say about the Scottish Borders.

Why do I say “a tinge of irony”? Some members who were here a couple of sessions back might recall my failed member’s bill to extend the Pentland hills regional park to cover the southern part of the Pentlands. The Scottish Government, Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberals opposed it, although I am pleased to acknowledge that the Greens gave me support. There was also resistance and opposition from the farming community and local authorities, which I understand—I will return to that.

Regional parks are just an administrative animal and far less intrusive than national parks, with the planning and other legal protections that they may bestow, so I am pleased to see the change of political heart across the chamber. From previous experience, I know some of the challenges ahead.

The debate is a bit of a bidding war between the various speakers, but I am up for a bidding war. I am confident that the Scottish Borders and Midlothian will be successful not least because of the groundwork by Mr Whitfield's campaign for a Scottish Borders national park, which has already commissioned and received an independent feasibility study, to which he referred and which confirmed that the proposal satisfies all the criteria for a national park. I thank Malcolm Dickson for his briefing to me on that.

In passing, I have sympathy for my old hunting ground, Galloway. To be frank, I see no reason for there not to be two national parks in the south of Scotland. I am sure that they would be ably supported by South of Scotland Enterprise. However, my priority is my own patch, not for selfish reasons—heaven forbid—but for the reasons that follow.

This is the sales pitch. The advantage of the Borders and Midlothian is plain to see. As the area is close to, and under pressure from, a growing city population and the surrounding towns, pressure to expand building further into our green heritage increases. That has been accelerated by Covid, which has led many people to seek literally greener fields. The area's landscape, history and culture are a valuable asset, but that asset needs the protection, as well as the economic advantages, of national park status.

The proposal ticks all the boxes for the aims of a national park under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. For example, the first aim is

“to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area”.

We have the Roman site at Trimontium, where 15,000 Romans were posted, and now the recently modernised museum, as well as Abbotsford at Melrose—Sir Walter Scott's pad.

**Finlay Carson:** Will Christine Grahame join me in calling on the chief executive and chairman of South of Scotland Enterprise to back the bids for national parks in the Scottish Borders and in Galloway?

**Christine Grahame:** I am going to shock Finlay Carson: I agree with him.

We also have the great tapestry of Scotland at Galashiels and the wonderful building for it. The town is also the home of “Coulter's Candy” or “Ally Bally Bee”, which was devised by Robert Colthart, a mischievous worker in Gala who got into lots of trouble. It is a wonderful story.

We also have the common ridings, which go right across the Borders and Midlothian, coal mining heritage at Newtongrange and Gorebridge and paper making in Penicuik. All that is from the past. There is the bonnie High Street of Peebles,

which harks back to our high streets of yore with many small independent shops.

On promoting

“sustainable use of the natural resources of the area”,

members should think of all the cycling and walking routes throughout the Borders and extended hill walking. I am thinking of the southern upland way, the source of the great River Tweed at Tweedsmuir and the Pentland hills, which are under extreme pressure. The area is alive with a vast diversity of animal and plant life. We even have resident golden eagles in a secret place.

I could write a book on the assets of the area and may well do so when it becomes a national park. There is my optimism, which is rooted in evidence.

It is also important that the area is accessible to major populations through rail, road and bus links. Being just a few miles south of Edinburgh makes it a democratic choice for a national park. Bordering with the north of England means that it will bring tourists and, I hope, accelerate the extension of the Borders railway.

There will be challenges and concerns, as I mentioned earlier in reference to my Pentland Hills Regional Park Boundary Bill, especially from the farming community. My goodness, I understand that community's concerns. Farmers are the front-line custodians of the landscape, but it is a working landscape, so they must be at the forefront of any consultation. However, I hope that they will see that they can benefit from the protections and economic opportunities to diversify that a national park would provide.

There you have it: biodiversity, blissful landscapes and accessibility.

I listened carefully to what my colleague Fergus Ewing said about the practicalities of a national park and the residents of the area, who deserve to be happy where they live. It is important that we learn from the current national parks and do not repeat mistakes.

However, I again say: cast your vote for the Borders and Midlothian, and if you have a second choice, pop in Galloway.

16:35

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I think that we all agree that this has been a good debate. There has been a lot of competition, a huge amount of pride for people's areas and a real sense that more is to be done. Making new national parks for Scotland is unfinished business.

The debate has been a very long time coming. Although I welcome the support from the first

speaker today, Lorna Slater, for another national park, I am keen to get more detail, and I would like to know that that support is not just for one national park and that we will have a strategy for national parks—plural—going forward.

A debate on this issue was the first debate that we had in the new Parliament, and I was proud at that time to announce our priorities and reassure MSPs that we would make swift progress on establishing our first two national parks. Listening to colleagues today has reminded me that there were a lot of different views at that time on what the nature of those parks could be, but we got on with it.

In particular, the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms national parks were long overdue, and I join others in thanking the APRS and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks for all the work that they did before then as well as for the work that they have done since—for more than a decade—to try and get successive SNP Governments to make progress. I am genuinely shocked that there have not been any new national parks, which is why I particularly welcome today's debate. This has to be the start.

As colleagues across the chamber have said, the benefits of national parks are clear: celebrating and enhancing our wild scenery, ensuring effective management and protection and enabling forward planning. They are good for tourism; they attract visitors to spend money and, by doing so, boost our local economies. As Colin Smyth and Emma Harper said, they are particularly important in creating new opportunities for our young people. As others have said, they support rural development and act as exemplars for land management and the sustainable use of resources. National parks are also part of our national identity, and they can demonstrate that the stewardship of our natural environment is something to be proud of.

**Fergus Ewing:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** Yes, of course, if it is brief.

**Fergus Ewing:** I well recall Sarah Boyack's stewardship of legislation through Parliament, which I commend her for. She will remember that, during stage 2, when I attended the committee, former MSP Mike Rumbles put forward a compromise that resulted in there being five directly elected board members of the Cairngorms National Park Authority out of a total of 19. I think that Mr Rumbles negotiated that compromise with Ms Boyack; does she feel that it is time to review whether that balance is right and whether there is a need for more democracy in our national parks?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Sarah Boyack, I can give you the time back.

**Sarah Boyack:** I will tell Fergus Ewing what that reminds me of: when you are in an arrangement, a coalition or whatever you like to call it, there will always be a tension between the two parties if both parties are doing the job. I have memories, but we will not go there today, because I want to look forward.

A point was made by Beatrice Wishart and Brian Whittle about the importance of people's health and wellbeing. As we come out of the pandemic, national parks are potentially part of the solution, as all our natural green spaces are.

I welcome Jackie Baillie's contribution today, as she has been a stalwart campaigner not just for establishing the Loch Lomond and Trossachs national park but for the investment to make it a success. When I look back at our first debate, I see that those issues were on the table for that discussion. It was not enough to declare national parks; they had to continue to be supported, which is a message that has come from across the chamber in the debate.

Colin Smyth was right to point out the economic benefits: £1 spent on a national park leads to £10 to £17 in the local economy of a national park. That is hugely important, and we are all missing out because we still have only two national parks.

When the APRS and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks produced "Unfinished Business—A National Parks Strategy for Scotland", they identified seven potential national parks. That was nearly a decade ago. Things were well summarised in *The Scots Magazine* in its great park debate. Ben Nevis was one of the "majestic mountains". Glen Affric was

"Secluded and sylvan—Scotland's finest glen."

The Cheviots and the Border hills were a

"Timeless landscape rich in history."

Galloway was

"Lush and wild—Scotland's pastoral gem."

Wester Ross was

"Majesty in stone—wild Scotland epitomised."

The coastal and marine park was

"The dramatic, magical west coast."

Harris was

"A world apart—dazzling beaches and amazing rockscapes."

We are spoiled for choice in Scotland. There are other national parks that we can make in addition to the first two, and it is clear that local communities are organising and running campaigns in the Cheviots, the Borders and Galloway.

Given that we have this debate today, the key issue is what is next. I would like to hear from the minister in her summing-up speech about the number of national parks and the strategy not just to manage people's expectations but to lift our aspirations. I think that we all expected that, 20 years on, we would have seen more national parks.

As Martin Whitfield highlighted, our amendment says that we regret the lack of progress. We need more ambitious plans, and we also need to ensure that we do not forget our national scenic areas and regional parks, because they are also critical in tackling our climate, nature and biodiversity emergencies.

Much more work needs to be done. We need to add momentum to the work of those who have been relentlessly and persuasively campaigning over the past decade in particular. I hope that the minister will give us more clarity in her summing-up speech.

In her opening speech, Lorna Slater made the case for more national parks, in the plural. She did not restrict herself to one national park. Let us get a strategy that is underpinned by political commitment not just to celebrate our beautiful landscapes but to make them easier to explore.

In some ways, I have an easy job, because I am not asking for a particular national park in a particular area; I want more national parks so that my constituents can explore and go on holiday in Scotland and add to our local environments and our local economies, and so that their children can learn from our beautiful country.

Excellent cases have been made across the chamber. Colin Smyth restricted himself to two national parks. If Rhoda Grant had been here, she would have gone for at least three in her constituency. Across the chamber, members are proud of the areas that they represent.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to wind up, please, Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** As we build recovery from Covid and tackle the cost of living crisis and our nature, climate and biodiversity crisis, now is the time for action, a strategy and more national parks, so let us get on with it.

16:42

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** It is an honour to close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

Many members will no doubt be aware that the subject is very close to my heart. I have brought the matter up on numerous occasions in committee, as Mark Ruskell will recall, as well as

in the chamber, and I have hosted campaigners in the Parliament over the years. Indeed, the creation of a Galloway national park was one of my six pledges when I first stood for election in 2016 and I was delighted that lobbying specifically for the creation of a Galloway national park resulted in that being included in the Scottish Conservative manifesto for the previous election.

**Christine Grahame:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Finlay Carson:** I have just started. The member should let me make some progress.

It is clear that the creation of new national parks in Scotland is supported by MSPs across parties. I join Colin Smyth and Beatrice Wishart in raising concerns about the baffling situation of having only two national parks, particularly in light of the climate and biodiversity crisis. The debate should serve as a hurry-up for the Government to do what it should have done years ago and accelerate the process to trigger legislation to designate new national parks in Scotland, which is the birthplace of the father of national parks: John of the Mountains, or John Muir, as mentioned by Paul of Dunbar McLennan. John Muir's activism helped to preserve the world-famous Yosemite Valley, which has been visited by me, Paul McLennan and Fergus Ewing—not all at the same time, I should add—and his example has served as an inspiration for the preservation of many other wilderness areas. It is a shame that his example has not inspired the SNP Government to take action before now.

Donald Cameron mentioned that, in 2016, the former cabinet secretary Roseanna Cunningham said:

“The creation of new national parks requires considerable planning ... and it carries cost implications.”—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2016; c 4.]

In 2019, Derek Mackay implied that national parks would “stymie economic opportunity”,

“sterilising a whole part of the south of Scotland”.—[*Official Report*, 28 March 2019; c 49.]

Those statements are quite bizarre, given that while the Scottish Government invests around £13 million in the two current national parks, the return on that investment is between £10 and £17 for every £1 spent. That is not even to speak of the significant environmental benefits.

The two current national parks were created 20 years ago and it is fair to say that mistakes were made along the way—as mentioned by Fergus Ewing and Mark Ruskell—particularly with regard to the ambitions of the host communities. We must learn from that. Dean Lockhart touched on the controversy around the original consultations all

those years ago and how such consultation must be improved.

In the words of the Scottish Government,

“Both national parks serve as models of sustainable development and with that are central to rural economic development and recreation, sustainability, and conservation efforts.”

That statement can become a reality only if each national park has carefully crafted aims, policies and objectives to ensure that it addresses the unique characteristics of its location.

Emma Harper mentioned the importance of having the right model. We need the right model in the right place. The Cairngorms model seems to focus primarily on environmental protection, while it could be argued that the Loch Lomond and Trossachs model focuses on managing visitor numbers. Management and enforcement were some of the issues raised by Jackie Baillie.

Sir Alex Fergusson often referred to the creation of a national park lite—ensuring the remit and outcomes of legislation match the desires and wishes of local communities. It could be a real springboard to address the special needs of Galloway’s unique mix of extensively land-use shaped land and natural landscapes.

**Christine Grahame:** Will the member take an intervention now?

**Finlay Carson:** I will.

**Christine Grahame:** It is very gracious of you, Mr Carson. As I am going to write, with you and others, to Professor Russel Griggs of South of Scotland Enterprise, could you put it on the record that your second choice for a national park would be the Borders and Midlothian? I understand your first choice, but can you state your plan B?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There were too many yours in that intervention.

**Finlay Carson:** The *Official Report* can record that the Borders application would be my second preference.

It is an exciting and unique opportunity to introduce greater flexibility into the overall design of national parks. I hope that calls by Fergus Ewing and others will bring about on-going adaptability and flexibility of the legislation and policies to match communities’ expectations now and in the future.

Galloway has been a national park in waiting since 1945, when the Ramsay report described it as being “eminently suitable” for such status. Nothing has changed since then. It has formidable backing, thanks to the work of the Galloway National Park Association, which has garnered public support and tremendous enthusiasm across a variety of stakeholders: all three councils and the

local MSPs support the proposal; more than 100 meetings have been held online, showing 80 per cent in favour; the campaign has more than 1,000 members, business champions and young supporters; and more than 400 young people have signed a peer-led petition in support.

All that said, I believe that it is critical that, after the initial consultation, a full and broad economic impact assessment and feasibility study are carried out, to include any positive or negative impacts on existing businesses, particularly our agricultural businesses, whose priority it remains to feed the nation.

There are good reasons for championing Galloway national park, not least because it already meets all the national park tests. As we heard from Colin Smyth, it has the potential to boost the economy in the south-west corner of Scotland, which has struggled to find employment opportunities for its young people. Fergus Ewing mentioned the lack of housing. However, much of that is down to the failures of other policies and should not be seen as a barrier to creating a new national park and the benefits that that could bring.

Donald Cameron rightly highlighted the notable national park credentials of his region, but creating a national park in Galloway ticks all the right boxes, especially as the area already has several designations: three national scenic areas, the UK’s largest local nature reserve in Wigtown bay, the Galloway and southern Ayrshire biosphere and Europe’s first dark sky park. However, none of those cut it like the national park designation would.

Galloway has a longstanding problem with its economy and retaining its population. National park designation, with both a conservation and a sustainable development objective, could really bring transformational change to the area. Galloway has a coherent identity and the quality of its natural and cultural heritage is outstanding. However, national park status must not create a museum or playground for visitors—it must be forward looking. For many, the national park will be where they live and work. The social and economic needs of all communities—in settlements and dispersed across the countryside—must remain paramount.

Along with the Galloway National Park Association, I thank the Scottish Campaign for National Parks for all its work over the years. My much-missed predecessor, the late Sir Alex Fergusson, the former Presiding Officer, was also president of SCNP. Like me, he campaigned tirelessly on behalf of Galloway. He said:

“Scotland has two national parks ... It’s time they had some children!”

It would be wonderful for us to finish the business and be part of delivering new national parks on his behalf.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much, indeed, Mr Carson. I now call Màiri McAllan to wind up the debate. You have around nine minutes, minister.

16:50

**The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

First, I thank all the members who have participated in today's debate. We have covered a lot of ground—no pun intended—in considering our existing national parks and their contribution to addressing the great existential challenges of our time, namely the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. We have also considered what national parks mean to communities living in and around them, and how visiting them is managed. Furthermore, we have discussed in depth how stakeholders and the public are to be involved in shaping the criteria that my colleague Lorna Slater will use to identify the next area for national park status.

Before moving to consider some of members' reflections, I again stress how central our natural environment is to the dual challenges of avoiding climatic and ecological breakdown.

Scotland has what are still regarded as some of—if not the—most ambitious emissions reduction targets in the world. Prior to my coming into the chamber today, my colleague Michael Matheson was able to confirm to Parliament that Scotland has met its 2020 target in that regard. Although that is reflective of a period of unique national and international difficulty, which no one would want to celebrate or see repeated, it shows progress.

As my colleague Lorna Slater mentioned, we will complement those emissions reduction targets this session with targets for nature restoration. That includes a commitment to protect 30 per cent of our land and seas by 2030.

I have said in the chamber a number of times that we are so fortunate in Scotland. One of the reasons that we can be that ambitious on those great challenges is because of the ample opportunity in our natural environment to sequester carbon, to support biodiversity, to support inclusive and sustainable economic development, and, as Brian Whittle and Martin Whitfield rightly pointed out, to support and improve public health. In my area of environment, that could be through woodland creation, of which we are currently attending to 80 per cent of all

activity in the UK, or through peatland restoration where, through a quarter of a billion pound investment, we will see 250,000 hectares restored by 2030.

Be it through clean energy generation, blue carbon management, good soil management or other methods, the centrality of our natural world to meeting the great challenges of our day cannot be overplayed. That, of course, poses a real opportunity for Scotland to be first movers and to lead the way. In doing that, we must ensure that our people and communities are poised to benefit.

As the minister with responsibility for nature-based solutions and land reform, I am keenly interested in that balance. I make it clear to and reassure all members—from all parties—who have rightly raised the importance of community interests in the process, that that is very important to me and that I am keeping a keen watch on it.

On that note, I confirm to Mark Ruskell that I will launch a consultation on a new and ambitious land reform bill over the summer. Community ownership and progressive land use will be central to that.

I will bring us back to today's topic. It is clear that national parks—existing ones and those to come—can play a really important role in that regard.

**Finlay Carson:** Will the minister confirm that she believes the current legislation on national parks to be fit for purpose? Will she also confirm whether some of the issues that have been raised today, including around consultation and membership of boards, will be addressed, or will amendments need to be made in the future?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am happy to confirm that I think that the legislation is fit for purpose. As Lorna Slater made clear in her opening remarks, and in the progress that she has made so far in developing the policy, consultation is absolutely key. We will be watching closely what comes out of that with regard to the design of parks and governance measures.

Both our existing national parks are demonstrating how, by building strong partnerships, natural areas can be restored at different scales, from the vast great Trossachs forest to smaller, community-led initiatives such as the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project, which has been mentioned. The parks are also keenly involved in action to address climate change through woodland expansion and peatland restoration. Such practices that are taking place in our national parks can and should provide examples of how land can be used in the rest of Scotland, because we know that the climate and nature emergencies demand that land stewardship and land use be put on a sustainable footing.

National parks are doing a great deal in that regard, but they could undoubtedly do more by being test beds and developing best practice for sustainable land management and nature restoration at scale.

Before I move on to other substantive issues that have been raised in the debate, I will take a moment to thank members for taking their opportunity in the chamber to give their reasons why their constituency or region would be the best place and a great candidate for the new national park. They will have to temper their enthusiasm for just a little longer while we work with stakeholders over the summer to establish the evaluation framework. As we have heard, the framework will be key to ensuring the open and transparent nomination process that everyone is right to expect.

Much support was expressed for Galloway by Brian Whittle, Colin Smyth, Emma Harper, Finlay Carson and others. Before I was elected, when I was still working as a lawyer, I attended a discussion in the beautiful GG's yard in Gatehouse of Fleet, with which other south of Scotland members will be familiar. I heard campaign groups and people who had been involved in the establishment of the other parks take part in a robust discussion. The tensions that I heard about that night were articulated well by my colleague Emma Harper, and it is clear that she has a strong understanding of the differing views in Galloway, particularly on progressive land use.

Kenny Gibson described in detail the beauty of the Clyde Muirshiel park and its success as a regional park, Paul McLennan spoke about the Lammermuirs, and the potential of the Borders was detailed by Martin Whitfield and Christine Grahame with great vigour.

I thank members who spoke of their experience of living in and around national parks. Fergus Ewing spoke about his experience in the Cairngorms, and Jackie Baillie spoke about her experience in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. She raised issues with jet skis, for example, and I know that she will continue to discuss those matters with my colleague Lorna Slater.

In my remaining time, I will address some of the other key issues that have been raised in the debate. I will start with an issue that is very close to my heart, which is access. Many members reflected on the role that our national parks play in encouraging and facilitating responsible access to the countryside, which benefits people's mental and physical health. We should be clear that Scotland's access rights are to be celebrated; it is great that they are among the most robust and progressive in the world.

**Brian Whittle:** Does the minister agree that having only two national parks in Scotland prevents many people from accessing them, which is one of the main reasons why we need to expand the number in Scotland?

**Màiri McAllan:** Providing the opportunity for more people to benefit from being in a national park is one of the reasons why the Government is now pursuing that policy. I agree with the member.

It is no wonder that people wish to spend time in our stunning natural environment, and our access rights are rightly robust and progressive. We all have rights in relation to our land, but, of course, with rights come responsibilities.

The Scottish Government has been at the forefront in seeking to support our parks with visitor management. In 2018, we launched the rural tourism infrastructure fund, four rounds of which have now supported 66 projects across 15 local authorities. In 2020, at the height of the pandemic pressures, my colleague Fergus Ewing, in his role as the then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, established a visitor management group, which led to a visitor management strategy. That strategy was recently backed by £3.9 million, which is principally being used to recruit more than 200 rangers.

The question of funding has of course arisen. There is no doubt that we are in challenging fiscal circumstances—our resource spending review demonstrated that clearly—but I sense consensus throughout the chamber that resourcing the creation of a new national park is a sound investment and that the benefits for the economy, the environment and society represent very good value for money.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am afraid that I am in my last 20 seconds, but I will be glad to pick up Sarah Boyack's point with her after the debate.

I want to round off the debate by again thanking all members for their active participation in the discussion. The minister for biodiversity and I very much value all the points that have been made, and we look forward to working with members across the chamber to deliver the right new national park for Scotland to sit alongside the existing ones. Together, they will continue to be at the forefront of Scotland's response to the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

## UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 (Statement of Policy)

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-04702, in the name of Donald Cameron, on a statement of policy.

17:01

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The motion states that the Parliament resolves that

“the statement laid by ... Ministers ... under Section 7(1) of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 should not be approved.”

The opposition of members on the Conservative benches to the statement that ministers have laid is based on two points—first, a broad general one and, secondly, more technical arguments about Government transparency to Parliament.

In relation to the first and broader point, we, on the Conservative benches, firmly disagree with the stated policy of aligning with European Union law. The ramifications of Brexit have divided opinion sharply in Scotland and the wider United Kingdom, but the plain fact is that the UK has left the European Union and now has a trade agreement with the EU. However much the Scottish National Party resents that, the fact remains that we are outside the decision-making processes of the EU, we have no democratic input into the EU's institutions, and we have very little—if any—influence on the legislative choices that the EU makes. However, the SNP insists on having the power to keep pace and align with EU law. That is, of course, predicated on the SNP's desire to break up the UK and rejoin the EU at the earliest opportunity.

Further, it is notable that, according to a report dated 10 May 2022, not once has the Scottish Government used the keeping pace power—not once. Despite the warnings of the cabinet secretary's predecessor in the previous session of Parliament, who kept saying that the keeping pace power was crucial and necessary, it has not been used at all. Perhaps more strikingly, there are no plans to use it in the future, as the Scottish Government's report says in black and white.

Given that background, we are entitled to ask why the power has not been used, why there are no plans to use it and, more generally, what the point is of continuing alignment with EU law. For those very broad reasons, we ask Parliament to support my motion.

The second limb of our opposition is more technical but equally important and picks up on some of the points that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee made in a letter to the cabinet secretary dated 26 May this year, in relation to transparency to Parliament around the alignment process. The committee's view was that

“we do not have that transparency at the moment.”

In particular, we, on the Conservative benches, are concerned that the revised statement of policy does not make clear how the Government will make decisions about which EU laws to align with and which not to align with. We are concerned that there is no commitment to set out which EU laws the Scottish Government has decided not to align with so far. Lastly, we are worried that the Government's decision not to provide details of consultations that include consideration of whether or not to align is disproportionate and contrary to the transparency that Parliament deserves.

For all those reasons, I ask Parliament to support my motion.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the statement laid by the Scottish Ministers on 10 May 2022 under Section 7(1) of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 should not be approved.

17:04

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I start by making it absolutely clear that Scottish Labour supports alignment with the European Union, which is why we supported the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021. For us, the debate is about transparency and the Parliament's ability to scrutinise ministers' decisions and the Scottish Government's actions.

I have to say that there is a bit of an irony when Donald Cameron suggests that parliamentary transparency is a technical issue, because it is fundamental to how we operate. The cabinet secretary's reply to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, following its consideration of the statement, did not go far enough, although we acknowledge that he made a couple of commitments to us.

The statement that is being considered does not give Parliament adequate scrutiny of the decisions taken by ministers on where to align with the EU and where not to. It will focus only on the areas where the Scottish Government decides to align with the EU, but members of the Scottish Parliament, parliamentary committees and wider stakeholders must have the ability to scrutinise not only where the Scottish Government decides to align, but where it decides not to align. An up-to-date website would have been a very useful and



easily accessible tool for MSPs, businesses, the wider public and environmental campaigners.

Secondly, there is an issue about reporting on consultations. We want clarity, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will give us more of that. We mentioned at the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee that we need a list of relevant consultations and we need to see what everybody says, but we did not get clarity on that.

Thirdly, we do not think that there is a strong enough commitment from the cabinet secretary to secure a memorandum of understanding between the Scottish Government and the Parliament on scrutiny of these matters. Simply welcoming our suggestion does not go far enough. There is no milestone for completing the discussions and no clear commitment to definitively have a memorandum of understanding. We need that.

This debate is about transparency. It is vital that we can do our job as democratically elected members. The Scottish Government must be transparent and give us a clear commitment that it will be transparent, not just on EU legislation where it seeks to maintain alignment but where it does not seek alignment, because people might not agree with that judgment and might want the Scottish Government to align.

There is an irony in that the Tory UK Government has been completely inadequate in delivering parliamentary scrutiny on trade deals and other Brexit-related matters, whereas the SNP has stood up for parliamentary scrutiny. I hope that we will get a commitment from the Government to change the statement, because we cannot support it as it currently stands. We will vote against it today, but, if the cabinet secretary takes on our points, we will support a revised statement that enables greater transparency and scrutiny so that we can do our job, make sure that we can see where alignment is needed, take the debate into the Parliament and have proper scrutiny of the cabinet secretary and his colleagues.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Angus Robertson to respond on behalf of the Scottish Government.

17:07

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** The continuity act was introduced in response to Brexit, to ensure that Scottish ministers are able to protect the world-class standards that Scotland has enjoyed as a member of the European Union. It bears underscoring yet again that Scotland was removed from the European Union against its will and that, as we see daily, there are no benefits of Brexit.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Angus Robertson:** No.

The Scottish Government is clear that we must remain close to the EU and continue to protect the high standards that benefit our country. The people of Scotland have spoken in a referendum and they voted overwhelmingly for pro-EU parties in last year's election. Their will is clear. That is why we will continue to align with the European Union where it is possible for Scotland to do so under the devolution settlement. We will not stand by while the UK Government is intent on a race to the bottom.

The policy statement that we are considering is largely about the "how". Our intention is to align where possible by subject-specific powers, or by primary legislation where necessary. For example, in June, we used regulations under powers in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to ban single-use plastics—a move that was proposed and scrutinised by the Scottish Parliament, as members would expect. Where powers are not available or would not allow us to align effectively, we will consider the use of the continuity act power.

The transparency of decision making by Scottish ministers is of the utmost importance. We will report annually where the continuity act power has been used, where its use has been considered and where its use is planned. Our policy statement reflects that, as well as setting out how we will meet other considerations that are required by the act. How we will decide on the power's use is described, reaffirming our commitment to engage with relevant stakeholders just as we do on other legislation. We take transparency very seriously and our approach goes further than is required for other legislation, as we will lay statements specific to the measure in question so that Parliament can scrutinise exactly why we believe that we need to use the power.

Following representations from the CEEAC and RAINE committees, we have been happy to offer additional information to support transparency. We will provide an annual forward look that will reflect on the European Commission's legislative programme, setting out where the Scottish Government expects to prioritise alignment and where that might not be possible. We have offered to append information to all relevant legislative policy notes and consultations. That goes beyond the requirements of the continuity act and the information that is required for other legislation, and it will allow the Parliament to fulfil its duty of meaningful, effective scrutiny of the Executive.

The Opposition motion is simply an attempt to distract from that party's calamitous Brexit and its on-going efforts to undermine Scotland's retained EU law, as well as from the devolution settlement. Our commitment to Europe remains steadfast, as is our commitment to transparency to the Parliament. I advise the Opposition to reflect on that in considering the motion.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

## Business Motion

17:10

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-04833, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to this week's business.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Thursday 9 June 2022—

delete

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Rural Affairs and Islands

and insert

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Rural Affairs and Islands

and after

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Scotland's  
Census 2022

insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Scottish COVID-  
19 Inquiry—[George Adam.]

**The Presiding Officer:** I invite Stephen Kerr to speak to and move amendment S6M-04833.1.

17:11

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):**

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives requested that this Thursday's statement on the census be extended to one hour, due to the vital importance of the subject and the extraordinary interest from members to ask questions on the census and its shambolic handling by the Scottish Government. It is worth bearing in mind that, in a 30-minute statement, we would have only 20 minutes to ask the cabinet secretary questions.

Later that day, the Minister for Parliamentary Business appeared to agree with our request, when he shared with the Parliamentary Bureau his Government's business programme for the next few weeks, which included a one-hour slot for the statement. "Finally," I thought, "the Scottish Government is moving towards welcoming transparency and scrutiny." More fool me. It turns out that the one-hour slot was, in fact, a typo by George Adam and that he intends to keep the statement to only 30 minutes.

There is no escaping the fact that the political decisions of the Scottish Government on the handling of the census could have far-reaching,

damaging consequences for Scotland. My amendment would extend the day's business, allowing the statement to run for one hour to accommodate as many members of the Scottish Parliament who wished to ask questions on that serious issue.

I genuinely hope that Scottish National Party members will support my amendment. If not, I hope that George Adam will, at the very least, apologise to members of my party, and possibly others, who were informed that they might have an opportunity to ask questions on behalf of their constituents, but who may not now be afforded the chance to do so.

I move amendment S6M-04833.1, to leave out from "delete" to "and after" and insert:

"after".

**The Presiding Officer:** I invite George Adam to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:13

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, earlier today, we discussed the statement at the Parliamentary Bureau. I stand by the discussion that we had then.

Presiding Officer, I have moved my motion on a revision to business, which was agreed to at today's bureau meeting.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment S6M-04833.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04833, in the name of George Adam, on changes to the business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:14

*Meeting suspended.*

17:17

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the division on amendment S6M-04833.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr. Members should cast their votes now.

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
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)  
Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr 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)  
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

|   |                    |  |
|---|--------------------|--|
| Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)               | 2.00 pm            | Parliamentary Bureau Motions                         |
| FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)                             |                    |  |
| Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)                      | 2.00 pm            | Portfolio Questions:<br>Rural Affairs and Islands    |
| Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)                             |                    |  |
| Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)                        | and insert         |  |
| Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)                         |                    |  |
| Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP) | 2.30 pm            | Parliamentary Bureau Motions                         |
| Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)                                   | 2.30 pm            | Portfolio Questions:<br>Rural Affairs and Islands    |
| Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)                                   |                    |  |
| Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)                                     | and after          |  |
| Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)                                     |                    |  |
| Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)                        | <i>followed by</i> | Ministerial Statement: Scotland's<br>Census 2022     |
| Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)                                      |                    |  |
| Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)                                 | insert             |  |
| Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)                                       |                    |  |
| MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)                         | <i>followed by</i> | Ministerial Statement: Scottish COVID-<br>19 Inquiry |
| MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)                     |                    |  |
| Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)                            |                    |  |
| 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)                                |                    |  |
| McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)                                     |                    |  |
| McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)                                    |                    |  |
| McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)         |                    |  |
| McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)                                   |                    |  |
| McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)                      |                    |  |
| McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)                         |                    |  |
| Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)                                  |                    |  |
| Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)            |                    |  |
| Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)                                  |                    |  |
| Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)                            |                    |  |
| Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)                               |                    |  |
| Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)                           |                    |  |
| Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)                         |                    |  |
| Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)                                       |                    |  |
| Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)                          |                    |  |
| Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)                             |                    |  |
| Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)                                |                    |  |
| Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)                               |                    |  |
| Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)                                |                    |  |
| Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)                                |                    |  |
| Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)                    |                    |  |
| Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)                                     |                    |  |
| Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  |                    |  |
| Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)               |                    |  |

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-04833.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr, is: For 52, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that business motion S6M-04833, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Thursday 9 June 2022—

delete

## Decision Time

17:20

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-04799.1, in the name of Brian Whittle, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04799, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scotland's national parks, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr 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)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 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)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 50, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-04799.2, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04799, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scotland's national parks, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-04799, in the name of Lorna Slater, on Scotland's national parks, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

That the Parliament recognises the key role that national parks are playing in tackling the twin biodiversity and climate crises, and the important cultural, social and economic benefits that they bring to Scotland; welcomes the announcement by the Scottish Government that at least one new national park will be designated during the current parliamentary session; understands the need for an open and transparent evaluation process to identify the areas to be progressed to national park designation; welcomes the start of stakeholder engagement to set the criteria for identifying the areas to be designated as new national parks; notes that there are over 3,500 national parks across the world; regrets that there have been just two national parks created in Scotland, the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, in 2002, and the Cairngorms National Park, in 2003, since the Parliament passed the National Parks (Scotland) Act in 2000; praises the work of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, which identified at least seven further potential sites in 2013, as well as community groups in Galloway and the Borders, and elsewhere, which continue to demonstrate clear demand for new national parks; recognises that, in addition to the designation of new national parks, it is vital that the national scenic areas and regional parks are reinvigorated to help tackle the climate, nature and biodiversity emergencies, and believes that the Scottish Government must pave the way for the opening of a number of new national parks across Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-04702, in the name of Donald Cameron, on a statement of policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app is not working. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Johnson. We will ensure that that is recorded.

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)

Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
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)  
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr 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)  
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 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)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-04702, in the name of Donald Cameron, is: For 52, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

*Motion disagreed to.*

## Medical Charities' Research (Economic Value)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-04013, in the name of Sue Webber, on the economic value of medical charity research in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the publication of two reports by the Fraser of Allander Institute and British Heart Foundation Scotland about the role of medical research charities in Scotland's medical research environment; welcomes the findings regarding the economic impact of medical research charity funding in Scotland, which, it understands, supported 7,475 jobs, £470 million in output and £320 million in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2019; understands that funding from medical research charities is amongst the most effective of all sectors, reportedly supporting £1.33 million in GVA and 31 jobs for every £1 million invested; notes what it sees as the significant impact COVID-19 had on the ability of medical research charities to fund research, putting, it understands from the research, 575 jobs, £36 million in output and £25 million in GVA at risk in 2020 alone; understands that the British Heart Foundation currently invests almost £33 million on research in the Lothian region, and notes the call from British Heart Foundation Scotland for continued support for clinical research infrastructure and research careers to ensure the long-term health of the medical research environment and to amplify what it sees as the benefit of investment into medical research to the economy.

17:27

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** I am pleased to have brought to the chamber my first members' business debate, which is on such an important topic for Scotland. Cardiovascular health has always interested me, and it becomes more relevant when it relates to us personally.

In my pre-parliamentary career, I worked closely with medical and surgical professionals in university teaching hospitals across the United Kingdom. One of the first surgeries that I observed was open-heart surgery in the Western infirmary in Glasgow. The surgeon was Mr Alan Kirk—he was young and dynamic and was looking to adapt his practice to do beating-heart surgery rather than on-pump bypasses, with their associated risks.

Much has changed surgically since then—not least the closure of the Western infirmary and the establishment of the West of Scotland regional heart and lung centre at the Golden Jubilee hospital. Perhaps the canny among members in the chamber might recognise the surgeon's name, as Mr Kirk was in Parliament last week. He is now, with his colleague John Butler, a pioneer of robotic thoracic surgery. We need clinicians such as them to adopt new and innovative techniques that benefit patients and improve outcomes.

My dad is one of those who benefited from innovation. When he was told that he needed cardiac surgery, I know that the look on my face told my mum and dad how serious things were. I silently wanted to know that he would get an off-pump bypass; I did not want his heart to stop beating. He did get an off-pump coronary artery bypass graft, which was successful. Nearly 10 years on, he has not looked back, so I thank the team at NHS Lothian.

Before all such work comes years of research and investment and the blood, sweat and tears of those who carry out the research. Funding for clinical research in Scotland through the chief scientist office has remained stagnant for several years. When investment in clinical research is compared between the UK and Scotland, investment in Scotland equates to £12.79 per capita, as opposed to the £20.55 per capita spend in England.

The British Heart Foundation believes that the Scottish Government should increase funding to the chief scientist office in line with the per capita funding of the National Institute for Health and Care Research by the UK Government. If the Scottish Government were to utilise Barnett consequential and its own budget to match per capita the planned NIHR funding increase to £2 billion, it could transform clinical research in Scotland by securing Scotland again as a world leader in medical research and bringing new and improved treatments and care to Scotland first.

Research could generate as much as £257 million for the economy every year and support 6,000 jobs across Scotland. There are also indirect and direct benefits for the national health service. For example, troponin tests are used on an individual's admission to accident and emergency to test whether they have had a heart attack. The high-sensitivity troponin in the evaluation of patients with acute coronary syndrome trial—led by Professor Nicholas Mills, who is a British Heart Foundation professor of cardiology at the centre for cardiovascular science at the University of Edinburgh—looked at the use of a higher-sensitivity troponin test than was previously used. The reduction in time in hospital and the 50 per cent increase in discharges as a result of the new sensitive test could create huge cost savings for the NHS and reduce bed demand at a time when the NHS is under significant pressure.

Undertaking such clinical studies in Scotland is crucial to improving patient care and reducing inequalities in care. Investment in such research has the potential to support the Scottish budget through reducing overall costs in the NHS.

Other charities are raising similar concerns, as well as pointing out the benefits of increased

investment. Stroke is Scotland's leading cause of disability. About 10,000 people every year have a stroke, and 128,000 people in Scotland are living with the effects of a stroke. The Stroke Association is the only funder in Scotland of exclusively stroke research, with a current portfolio of £3.5 million. Investing in stroke research can generate savings for health and social care, as well as improving quality of life for stroke survivors and their families. In the UK, research investment per stroke patient is only £48 per year, in comparison with £241 per cancer patient and £118 per dementia patient. Given that stroke generates such a sizeable economic burden in Scotland, it requires greater priority in research funding and support.

Cancer Research UK is the largest independent funder of cancer research in the world. In 2020-21, it spent £421 million on new and on-going research in the UK into prevention, diagnosis and treatment. It has supported research into more than 200 types of cancer, with long-term investment to help to create a thriving network of research in 90 laboratories and institutions across the UK and to support the work of more than 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. Cancer Research UK has spent more than £188 million on research funding in Scotland over the past five years across seven universities, and it currently funds 100 PhD students, among other things.

It is not just direct health benefits that come from medical research; there are also benefits to the Scottish economy and to every individual who is impacted by the research. Not every project will result in a miracle cure, a wonder drug or a new approach, but I think that we can all agree that research saves lives.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Paul McLennan, who has up to four minutes.

17:33

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I mention that I have to chair a cross-party group meeting at half past 6, so I may have to leave before the minister sums up.

I thank Sue Webber for bringing forward the debate. She and I, along with others, visited the British Heart Foundation research centre near Edinburgh royal infirmary a few months ago. We were shown around the facility and shown the research that goes on, which she touched on. In the institution, we spoke to medical students and doctors who benefit from the funding. It was absolutely fascinating and made us all aware of the amazing unseen work that is carried out by the British Heart Foundation and other charities day in, day out.



In East Lothian, about 11,000 people are living with heart and circulatory diseases, about 12,000 people have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, about 27 per cent of adults have obesity and 16 per cent of adults smoke. In Scotland, 30 babies a month are diagnosed with a congenital heart defect and about 700,000 people are living with heart and circulatory diseases. The most frightening statistic is that, every 50 minutes in Scotland, someone is admitted to hospital because of a heart attack, so we can see the benefits of the research. Heart and circulatory diseases kill three in 10 people in Scotland.

When I recently visited the British Heart Foundation shop in North Berwick, I was warmly welcomed and was impressed by the set-up. The BHF is the largest charity retailer in Scotland and the UK. It is an important contributor to the circular economy and to a sustainable Scotland. It has the support of 1,400 volunteers, who allow its 75 shops across Scotland to raise money for life-saving research.

The BHF supports the Scottish Government's proposal to ban the destruction of unsold goods. It believes in reducing waste as much as possible by recycling the donations that it cannot sell, and it is working towards a goal of zero avoidable waste by 2030. It sells an average of 1,500 tonnes of what it calls pre-loved clothes across its 75 charity shops and it resells 18,000 sofas every year. It funds £60 million of life-saving research in Scotland, and that is largely from the sale of donated goods.

That research funding creates additional benefits for the economy in Scotland. Research by the Fraser of Allander Institute at the University of Strathclyde on the value of medical charity research funding in Scotland has suggested that funding from the British Heart Foundation creates £80 million in gross value added and supports 1,860 jobs across the country. In February, the institute published analysis on the contribution of medical research funding by charities to the Scottish economy. Its modelling found that research funding by charities in 2019 supported 7,500 jobs, £470 million in output and £320 million in gross value added in Scotland. Charity retailers also provide more than 25,500 jobs in the UK, alongside 233,000 volunteering opportunities.

The British Heart Foundation has welcomed the increase in NIHR funding from the Scottish Government to £78.4 million. In the 2021 autumn statement, the UK Government committed to increasing the NIHR budget to £2 billion by 2024-25. The BHF is asking the Scottish Government to commit to ring fencing any consequential funding to Scotland from the UK Government's NIHR funding uplift to £2 billion by 2024-25.

Government funding of medical research follows similar patterns to that of medical research

charities; much of the funding supports work in universities and the NHS, which we have talked about. Such funding supports the creation of highly skilled professionals who are significant economic contributors in their region. If the Scottish Government were to make the commitment on the NIHR funding uplift, that could generate £56.4 million for the Scottish economy every year and support more than 1,100 jobs.

With continuing investment, Scotland can attract more talented researchers and create greater stability for those who seek to build a clinical research career in Scotland. The pandemic reduced funding from charities and other funders that have traditionally supported clinical research careers. Career funding is crucial in allowing healthcare professionals to develop the skills to undertake research in the NHS. We can attract such highly skilled professionals to Scotland, who can bring their research skills and increase NHS Scotland's clinical capacity.

17:38

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** As volunteers week 2022 comes to an end, I would like to thank my colleague Sue Webber for securing the time for this afternoon's debate. The value of medical charity research is an important topic, and the debate is a fitting tribute to the fundraising efforts of thousands of volunteers in the north-east and across Scotland who help to raise money for potentially life-saving medical research.

The funding contribution that charities make to medical research is startling. The Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that, without it, the Government would need to increase direct funding by 73 per cent to cover the shortfall. The work of such organisations and others like them has brought hope to thousands of people who face life-limiting conditions and illnesses.

Cancer Research UK supports pioneering research into more than 200 types of cancer. Its contribution to the medical research base should not be underestimated. Over the past 40 years, cancer survival has doubled in the UK. Meanwhile, the British Heart Foundation has invested £50 million in more than 100 projects in Scotland to research heart and circulatory disease.

In my region, the BHF funds two PhD studentships and 10 other research staff at the University of Aberdeen. Led by Professor Dana Dawson, researchers in the granite city are carrying out the first national study into broken heart syndrome, a potentially fatal heart condition that is experienced by thousands of people the length and breadth of the UK. At the University of Dundee, where the BHF supports seven research

staff, researchers have been running a treatment trial into high blood pressure.

However, the reality is that those organisations, like so many others, have been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. At the height of the pandemic, medical research expenditure by charities fell by around 44 per cent as retail trading came to a halt and household budgets faced significant uncertainty. While the UK has largely returned to business as usual as Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted, concerns remain about future investments in medical research. There has already been a significant reduction in research spend from the Association of Medical Research Charities for 2021-22, amounting to around £150 million. The BHF reports that it will take three or more years before charity research spend returns to pre-pandemic levels.

That has implications not just for Scotland's health research and development but for our economy. As well as helping to improve health outcomes for the population, third sector medical research contributes to job creation, technological innovation and national infrastructure, and it helps to develop Scotland's skills pipeline. Moreover, the Fraser of Allander Institute found that a pound spent on medical research funding by charities has a significantly larger impact than the average pound spent in Scotland.

As the Scottish Government looks at the levers that it can pull to build a strong economy, I urge it to think holistically about the value that third sector medical research can add to the Scottish economy and society.

17:42

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the debate and thank Sue Webber for bringing it to the chamber. I also thank the British Heart Foundation for commissioning the research from the Fraser of Allander Institute.

The conclusions of that research on the economic impact of medical research in Scotland—in particular, that which is funded by charities—have been partly rehearsed already. Indeed, they been rehearsed over many years in Scotland in a variety of publications. That research stresses how important the medical and broader scientific research that is done in our universities and institutes is to our communities and to our country's future. No picture that is drawn of a successful future Scotland does not have research excellence right at its centre.

The conclusions of the report that we are discussing tonight only add to the wealth of data and policy documents dating back to the start of devolution that come to the same conclusion. The importance of university research and innovation

to my home city of Dundee cannot be overstated. I note that the performance of the University of Dundee school of life sciences is of truly global significance. In the research excellence framework that was published only in the past few weeks, Dundee came out as the top university in the whole of the UK for biological sciences, bar none.

I wish that I could say that the debate was timely. It makes calls on the Government that perhaps would have been better heard prior to the recent resource spending review, which, it turns out, was neither a real spending review, nor—as we have heard continuously—a budget. The result seems to me to be little more than an appetiser for Andrew Wilson's growth commission austerity.

If the resource spending review is anything, it is an expression of priorities, and I am afraid that education and the research that we are talking about tonight are not among them. That is confusing for some of us, because education used to be the sacred cause. It was once the defining mission and, only a matter of weeks ago, it was central to the supposed economic transformation strategy. Instead, we have real-terms cuts of 8 per cent for higher education and a globally competitive sector that has to work to attract talent, external investment, partnerships and student recruitment, which is suffering badly as a result of a lack of leadership and prioritisation by the Scottish Government.

Specifically in relation to research, we have an outstanding set of REF results in Scotland, in which improved performance against the previous comparator seven years ago has been rewarded by cuts to budgets. The University of Aberdeen in my region has had a £2 million cut in the research excellence grant. That is a 10 per cent cut—the absolute cap on what was permitted—and more cuts are expected to come in 2023-24. That is not investing for the future—it is punishing the successes of the past.

The motion before us makes a request to Government to step in when the unexpected happens. When the pandemic hit, the resource from charity shops and donations dried up, as other members have highlighted. That is what Government should do: it should be there when the rain falls; it should help to bridge an unexpected gap.

What is unforgivable is when Government not only sees the trends but actually creates them. There is no doubt that our research leadership in the UK is slipping—that has been happening for years and years. Just a few weeks ago, the REF results that I mentioned showed that eight of our top 10 performers improved at a slower rate than comparator universities in the rest of the UK.

On the same day that the Scottish Government published its resource spending review, UK Research and Innovation, which is the UK-wide research council, published figures on multiyear research funding for universities in England. Research funding for English universities will go up by 31.7 per cent over the three-year period from 2022-23 to 2024-25. That is the direct local competition that our universities must meet. Scottish and English universities use their core funding to compete for research grants. The playing field is deeply uneven, and we can only predict that Scotland's share of competitively won research funding from UKRI will continue to slide. A few years ago, it was at 15.4 per cent, now it is at 12.9 per cent and it will go down further in the years to come.

The question that we face is one of leadership and choices—the choices that leaders make. The British Heart Foundation is right to highlight what our strengths are, while reminding us how precarious that position is if Government chooses to ignore the realities that I have outlined.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Marra. I now call Stephanie Callaghan, who will be the last speaker before the minister responds to the debate.

17:46

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I, too, thank Sue Webber for bringing this topical debate to the chamber.

The pandemic has certainly brought the importance of medical research for our health and wellbeing to our attention. In Scotland, the life sciences community mobilised and responded rapidly to the challenges that arose from Covid-19. From research, drug discovery and manufacturing to clinical trials for our vaccines, Scotland is considered a world leader in medical research and we must maintain this proud legacy across the private, public and charity sectors. The health benefits are clear. Medical research continues to develop and make life-changing differences to patients. Importantly, for so many people who are living with long-term conditions, research provides hope for the future that there will be less pain, that they will get better treatments and that they will have a little bit more control over their lives.

The focus of today's motion is research charities, which are in a unique position to leverage the power of grass-roots movements. Generous public donations and specialist expertise from the industry can be complementary, and drawing on the lived experience of patients and families is key to that.

Paul McLennan talked about how the British Heart Foundation has raised so much in funds through its stores. It brought to mind a wee meeting that I had with a young man called Mohamad, who won an award for his volunteering. He came to this country as a refugee and decided to volunteer at the British Heart Foundation, and he was hoping to become a doctor in the future. That was a couple of years ago now. He had so much warmth and dedication, and volunteering helped him to learn the language. There are lots of little ripples that come out from these charities. They make a real difference to our communities.

The economic value of medical charity research in Scotland is clear, but it is not without its challenges. As the motion highlights, medical charity research in Scotland supports a lot of local jobs and generates wider investment, with direct employment at universities and in medical industries but also that spillover effect that supports a wide variety of jobs right across Scotland, too. Many of those jobs are highly skilled and well-paid positions within world-leading institutions. The medical research sector is one of the most effective in Scotland in driving economic growth and employment and it has attracted talent from all over the globe.

However, research charities face quite serious issues in 2022. The pandemic has put enormous financial pressure on individuals and organisations; that is not going away any time soon given that the current cost of living crisis looks set to worsen. Medical research funding by charities is estimated at around 46 per cent of all third sector and public funding, making this income integral to Scotland's medical research industry. The long-term consequences of charity funding reductions in Scotland are likely to include shortages of highly skilled medical researchers and stagnation in treatment development. It also has the potential to negatively impact on Scotland's reputation as a world leader in research.

In response, some charities have called on the Scottish Government to increase investment in third-sector medical research by a further £37 million. However, Scotland does not have the same borrowing powers as Westminster. Making a comparison between the UK Government's spending per head of population of England with that of Scotland seems to be a wee bit unfair, given that the Scottish Government's hands are tied, fiscally speaking.

Where would that additional investment come from? The Scottish Government is already doing so much to mitigate some of the damaging policies, including the bedroom tax, that have come out of Westminster, and is looking to increase child support. While we do not have the

freedom to borrow and make long-term investments in our people's health and wellbeing, our economic options remain limited.

We need to listen to charities to understand the challenges that they are facing and make sure that we are doing everything that we can to support their ambitious work, thereby ensuring that Scotland remains a world leader in research and development. Within its budget, the Scottish Government has already demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that researchers have access to the infrastructure, training and career development opportunities that they need to succeed and to work with partners. The work to create an attractive environment for students to carry out their research is on-going. I agree that we must, moving forward, work collaboratively with the medical research charity sector.

In reality, only with the power of independence will Scotland be able to properly address the challenges ahead. We need that to happen in order to enhance our economy and improve our nation's health.

17:51

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** I congratulate Sue Webber on having secured this members' debate and I thank members who contributed to discussion of this very important topic.

The Scottish Government recognises the important impact that the medical research charity sector has on the wider economy, particularly across the life sciences sector. By investing in growing our own company base and attracting new companies, we are building a community. We want Scotland to grow as a place for true innovation and for the research that is undertaken here to make a real difference to our own and global health challenges.

Scotland has a thriving life sciences community that is recognised for the distinctive capabilities of its business base and research institutions, its international reputation and its potential for significant growth and creation of high-value jobs. In 2019, turnover in the sector stood at £7.4 billion, with gross value added at £3.1 billion, and the sector employs nearly 42,000 people in over 700 enterprises and higher education institutions. The health and life sciences sector in Scotland is supported by a highly skilled workforce operating in a diverse range of functions, including research and development roles in a range of research operations. We continue to invest in our future workforce, recognising the critical role of the development of scientific and commercial skills in sustaining our economic recovery and contributing to future growth.

In terms of boosting innovation, we will be updating the Scottish Government's innovation strategy this year. That will provide an opportunity to build on the national strategy for economic transformation and other recent work, such as the Muscatelli report, the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board report on innovation and the UK Government's innovation strategy.

The Scottish health and industry partnership is working in collaboration with AstraZeneca, Roche and the Digital Health and Care Innovation Centre to develop a heart failure service, drawing on the Opera research study. This aims to create a streamlined digital service that can effectively address diagnosis backlogs and reduce waiting times for echocardiograms in the Glasgow area, while demonstrating the use of new artificial intelligence technology in the heart failure diagnosis pathway. Heart failure accounts for 1 to 2 per cent of healthcare spending in developed countries and 52 per cent of patients die within five years of diagnosis. Heart failure prevalence is predicted to rise by 46 per cent over the next eight years.

Scotland's world-class university research and its key outputs of new knowledge and insights are fundamental to economic recovery and growth. The baseline grant for university research and innovation from the Scottish Government via the Scottish Funding Council was increased by £4.7 million to almost £200 million in 2022-23 in order to maintain and strengthen Scotland's excellent research base. The impact of research outputs from Scotland's universities is being maximised through increasing linkages to the wider innovation ecosystem, including partnerships with businesses, charities and NHS Scotland.

**Michael Marra:** Does the minister not recognise that the allocation from the Scottish Funding Council is resulting in cash cuts to the amount of funding for universities, many of which have improved their performance over the last seven years? Successes are being rewarded with cuts from the Scottish Government. Is the 31.7 per cent increase in UK research that is done in England not a wake-up call to the Scottish Government about what it must do to make our sector competitive?

**Ivan McKee:** The sector in Scotland is hugely competitive. We attract far more than our share of research spending across our universities. Even our charity spending is significantly higher than spending across the rest of the UK. The Scottish Government continues to recognise that and to support the research base and the sector.

As well as addressing national challenges and creating a highly educated society, our investment in research is helping us to reach the economic, societal and environmental aims of Scotland's

national performance framework and the sustainable development goals. Over the past two years, health research has been in the news like never before, so I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those who have contributed to Scotland's research response to Covid-19, including colleagues from the third sector, universities and the NHS.

I would also like to thank the people of Scotland for their extraordinary level of involvement. In 2021, over 20,000 people were recruited into Covid-19 clinical studies in Scotland. The studies include the SARS-CoV-2 immunity and reinfection evaluation study—SIREN—that provided key early data on whether prior infection with Covid-19 protected against future infection, and the genetics of susceptibility and mortality in critical care study that is generating data on the genes that influence people's susceptibility to particular infections. Scotland has also been fully involved in clinical trials of Covid-19 vaccines—globally, the first patient in the Janssen vaccine trial was recruited in Dundee.

As part of the research response to the pandemic, we also launched two Covid-19 research funding calls through the chief scientist office. The rapid research in Covid-19 programme saw 56 individual projects funded, with a total investment of £5 million. As awareness of the longer-term effects of Covid-19 infection began to emerge, a second call was launched for research on key aspects of long Covid and nine projects were funded from that call.

The research funded through those calls has continued to inform the clinically relevant knowledge base around Covid-19. An example is the cardiac imaging in SARS coronavirus disease—CISCO-19—study led by Professor Colin Berry from the University of Glasgow and funded as part of the rapid research in Covid-19 programme. That study follows patients in real time after hospitalisation with Covid-19, and uses a number of medical assessments to understand more about patients' health, including scans of the heart, kidneys and lungs, blood tests to measure inflammation and blood clotting over the short and medium terms, and a series of questionnaires on quality of life. The first round of results from the study were published recently in the prestigious journal, *Nature Medicine*.

The CSO recently announced the outcome of its precision medicine alliance Scotland funding call. This sees almost £10 million invested in four NHS-led research projects that will accelerate the development and delivery of precision medicine-based approaches to tackling health conditions of major importance in Scotland, including diseases that disproportionately impact people who are at risk of socioeconomic disadvantage. That

investment adds to the strong precision medicine ecosystem in Scotland that includes the Precision Medicine Scotland Innovation Centre and the Glasgow precision medicine living laboratory.

To finish, I would like to congratulate both the British Heart Foundation Scotland and the Fraser of Allander Institute on the publication of their respective reports. The Scottish Government looks forward to continuing to work with third sector organisations, including the British Heart Foundation Scotland, to build on our strong research and innovation base for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister. That concludes the debate and I close this meeting of Parliament.

*Meeting closed at 17:58.*



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