



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 18 May 2023

Session 6



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 18 May 2023

*[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]*

## General Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good morning. Our first item of business is general question time. As ever, short and succinct questions and responses would be appreciated.

### Monklands Hospital (Replacement)

**1. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what the timescale is for the completion of the Monklands replacement project. (S6O-02252)

**The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson):** The outline business case for the Monklands replacement project estimates that construction will complete in 2031.

**Richard Leonard:** The site for the replacement Monklands hospital was first identified and approved more than two years ago. In May 2021, the Scottish National Party manifesto said that it would invest the “capital required to build” a new hospital. The outline business case was presented nearly six months ago but, at the same time, a delay of three years was announced for the hospital’s scheduled opening.

Despite the dedication of national health service staff, the current Monklands hospital building is in poor health. People in Lanarkshire are beginning to ask me whether the new hospital will be built at all. Will the cabinet secretary give a commitment today that there will be no reduction in capacity or in the range of services that are provided, that there will be no downgrading in build quality, that he will stick to the plans as outlined in the business case and that there will be no further delays to the hospital’s opening?

**Michael Matheson:** Richard Leonard will recognise that we have made a strong commitment to deliver a new Monklands hospital. I know that the issue is also close to the heart of the local constituency member, Neil Gray. As a Government, we are determined to ensure that the hospital is delivered.

The outline business case is being considered through the normal capital projects project review process, which we are going through now. We have had to look at the process as a result of United Kingdom Government cuts to capital expenditure that have a direct impact on capital

projects in Scotland. We have to consider the matter in the round, which is why we are going through the process of identifying our key priorities, of which Monklands hospital is one. I assure Richard Leonard that we will look at how we will take that forward to a full business case.

Richard Leonard made specific reference to aspects of the services that will be delivered in the hospital. That is clearly a matter for the health board to take forward, and it will be part of the final business case that will be produced. We will certainly support the health board to take an approach that is consistent with the way in which hospital projects have been delivered in the past.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary answer the original question that was posed to him by Richard Leonard? Will there be any further delays?

**Michael Matheson:** It always feels a bit ironic when Conservative members come into the chamber demanding that capital investment projects be taken forward, when the very people who have been cutting capital expenditure to the Scottish Government are the Conservatives at Westminster—Mr Simpson’s colleagues. I am surprised that he does not have coach loads of constituents queuing up at his surgeries to complain about the impact that his party is having on capital investment projects in Scotland, including vital projects such as Monklands hospital, which this Government is determined to deliver.

### Volunteering Action Plan

**2. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the implementation of the volunteering action plan. (S6O-02253)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government appreciates the contribution that volunteers make to society. Our 10-year volunteering action plan, which was published in June 2022, was co-produced with partners in the third sector, and its aim is to support people to volunteer throughout their lives.

Volunteer Scotland is raising awareness of volunteering and its benefits for all who are involved. New groups have been established, including a cost of living volunteering task group and a policy champions network, to ensure that the power of volunteering is recognised as policies are developed.

**Stephanie Callaghan:** I welcome the plan’s aim of creating an environment in which everyone can volunteer more often and throughout their lives, and the plan’s focus on tackling inequality for

people who have traditionally faced barriers to volunteering.

What specific steps is the Scottish Government taking to increase public awareness of volunteering and to tackle the stereotypes that exist around what volunteering is and who the people who volunteer are?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Stephanie Callaghan has raised an important point about the need to encourage diversity in our volunteers. The Scottish Government funds Volunteer Scotland as the national advice centre for volunteering, which helps to increase participation in volunteering as well as widening access to volunteering. For example, Volunteer Scotland has a search facility to ensure visibility of the volunteering options that are available to people.

Stephanie Callaghan is right to point to the need to ensure that volunteers come from diverse backgrounds. We all have an obligation to encourage that. The Government, in conjunction with Volunteer Scotland, is determined to tackle the barriers that might be preventing people from coming forward.

#### **Fife Council Housing Services (Discussions)**

3. **Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met the head of housing services at Fife Council and what was discussed. (S6O-02254)

**The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan):** The head of housing services at Fife Council last met the Scottish Government in September of last year. Matters concerning the supply of affordable housing are high on the Scottish Government's agenda and on the agendas of our local authority partners, and the discussion in question considered those matters and related issues relevant to Fife Council.

I plan to meet Fife Council in the near future to continue those discussions.

**Annabelle Ewing:** There are some 126 council house properties in my Cowdenbeath constituency that have been recorded on Fife Council's mould and dampness survey. Although Fife Council initially told me that remedial action would be taken by May of this year, sadly that timetable has slipped, with no date at all having been set for completion of the remedial works. Does the minister consider that to be a satisfactory position for my constituents, who continue to live in unacceptable conditions? What can he do to quicken the necessary action?

**Paul McLennan:** I am sorry to hear of the issues that Annabelle Ewing's constituents face. Damp and mould in housing is a serious issue, so it is vital that landlords be proactive in identifying

such issues and in taking action to treat the root causes.

Although it is welcome to hear that Fife Council has committed to taking remedial action, it is of concern that the timeframe for it has slipped. I hope that the council has kept tenants up to date and that it is communicating its plans for resolving the issues effectively and in a timely manner. I will take up the matter with Fife Council and will provide Annabelle Ewing with an update.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The minister knows that I am keen for action to be taken to halt the huge growth in short-term lets in my constituency. Although I did not support the licensing scheme, I think that the control areas could make a significant difference. I think that Fife Council is dragging its feet and that the time that it has set in that regard is far too late. Therefore, when the minister speaks to Fife Council, will he have a discussion about the timescale for implementing the control areas?

**Paul McLennan:** I was glad to meet Mr Rennie during the week to discuss housing issues in Fife.

The Scottish Government gave powers to local authorities in relation to short-term let control areas, so it is up to them to discuss any such decisions. I think that the council will get back to Mr Rennie on that.

#### **Vaping Products (Restriction of Marketing and Advertising)**

4. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to lay regulations to restrict the marketing and advertising of vaping products, following the publication of the responses to its consultation, "Tightening rules on advertising and promoting vaping products", on 27 September 2022. (S6O-02255)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** I thank Emma Harper for raising an important issue. Our 2022 consultation proposed restrictions on vaping products that strike a balance between protecting all non-smokers from the potential harms of vaping and providing existing adult smokers with the information that they need to make an informed choice on cessation.

As part of our active consideration of those restrictions, further evidence has been developed on the harms that are associated with vaping products. It was published on 10 May 2023, and we will publish our refreshed tobacco action plan in the autumn.

**Emma Harper:** I am co-convener of the cross-party group on lung health, which has explored the issue of e-cigarettes and vaping. We were

presented with clear evidence that young people are targeted directly through marketing strategies that include the use of attractive bright packaging and attractive flavours, including candyfloss, pink lemonade and bubble gum.

Emerging evidence shows that vaping is a future lung health ticking time bomb. Will the minister commit to bringing forward the regulations as soon as possible, to ensure that we protect young people from the health harms of vaping?

**Jenni Minto:** I recognise the concerns that Emma Harper raises. When I visited a school in my constituency a couple of months ago, a teacher showed me vapes that she had taken from her pupils.

As a priority, I am considering a range of steps to deal with vaping, including use of regulation, and those will form part of our refreshed tobacco action plan in the autumn. Any action that we take will build on the regulations that are already in place to restrict the marketing, promotion and sale of vaping products to under-18s.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** A 16-year-old constituent recently contacted me because they are struggling to quit vaping. When they asked their general practitioner and pharmacy for support, they were told that nothing is available. What support can the Scottish Government provide to help young people to quit vaping?

**Jenni Minto:** I recognise that issue, which the World Health Organization has described as a “major concern”. I have asked Public Health Scotland to look into that and will be working on the issue along with my colleague Elena Whitham.

### Dental Charges

**5. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its commitment to abolish national health service dental charges by the end of the current parliamentary session. (S6O-02256)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto):** The Scottish Government remains committed to the removal of all dental charges during the lifetime of this Parliament. We have made initial progress towards that commitment with the extension of free national health service dental care to young people aged 18 to 25. The new policy prospectus provides a commitment to sustained, improved and equitable national access to NHS dentistry.

**Pam Gosal:** My inbox has been flooded with emails from constituents and dental practitioners. One dentist wrote:

“Many dedicated NHS colleagues can no longer see their futures working in a dysfunctional and underfunded

system. It is our patients—and your constituents—who will end up paying the price.”

The Scottish Government pledged to make NHS dentistry free at the point of use by 2026, but that will not be the case if the Scottish National Party continues presiding over the collapse of NHS dental surgeries. Last week, the minister was unable to provide assurance that there would be no further delay to the reform process.

We have the opportunity to build a service that is fit for the 21st century, with prevention at its heart. What assurance can the minister give that the reforms will not be delayed and that they will actually be effective?

**Jenni Minto:** As I said last week, the single most important reform that we can put in place is payment reform and we are working on that with dentists and their organisations as I speak. We have brought in 10 per cent bridging payments for dentists, which will be in place until 31 October, and we intend to bring in a new payment structure, which we hope will be agreed by dentists, on 1 November this year.

### Scottish Social Security Benefits (Uptake Maximisation)

**6. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to maximise the uptake of Scottish social security benefits. (S6O-02257)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Our second benefit take-up strategy, published in 2021, sets out our approach to ensuring that people are able and encouraged to access the benefits that they are entitled to. We remain focused on the removal of social barriers to people accessing Scottish benefits; addressing complex or costly access; and improving access to information.

We are delivering a number of take-up initiatives, such as our local delivery service, which takes our services to the locations that are most accessible to people, and we run targeted marketing campaigns.

We will publish our next annual update on benefit take-up rates in autumn 2023.

**Marie McNair:** I welcome the efforts that have been made to maximise the take-up of social security benefits in Scotland, which is vital, given the impact that the Westminster-imposed cost of living crisis is having on many people.

A recent report by Policy in Practice estimated that £7.5 billion-worth of universal credit is not claimed. Universal credit is one of the passport benefits allowing access to the vital Scottish child payment. Is the cabinet secretary concerned that the lack of a benefit take-up strategy by the United

Kingdom Government, to encourage the take-up of universal credit, might deny some families access to the Scottish child payment?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The member raises an important point about benefit take-up strategies and I encourage the Department for Work and Pensions to do as the Scottish Government has done.

However, we need more than a benefits strategy; we need an entirely changed approach. For example, when we compare the Scottish Government's human rights approach to social security, which encourages people to apply for what they are entitled to, with the UK Government's degrading system, where there is still far too much stigma and there are still far too many barriers in the way, we can see exactly why it takes much more than a benefits strategy to improve the situation.

### Second Strategic Transport Projects Review (Delivery Plan)

**7. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to announce the delivery plan for the second strategic transport projects review. (S6O-02258)

**The Minister for Transport (Kevin Stewart):** This Government is taking significant action to develop, deliver and invest in Scotland's strategic transport infrastructure for the long term. Work is already under way to deliver 38 of the 45 recommendations in STPR2, with consideration on-going on how best to mobilise the remaining seven.

**Finlay Carson:** I thank the minister for that response, but it is hugely disappointing that, despite the commitment that Michael Matheson made in January this year to release details surrounding the delivery plan for STPR2, those have still not been forthcoming. That shows once again the utter contempt that this Scottish Government displays, particularly towards the people of the south-west of Scotland. Despite the promises that have been made year after year, the spend on infrastructure projects in the south has been less than 0.5 per cent of the national infrastructure spend.

Thanks to the Sir Peter Hendy review, which highlighted the desperate need for serious investment in the A75, including a bypass at Crocketford and Springholm, we can now see that those improvements are vital. I am aware that a business plan for the A75 has now been submitted—

**The Presiding Officer:** Can I have a question, please, Mr Carson?

**Finlay Carson:** —seeking funding from the Government. When will the minister do likewise and do the right thing, fulfilling once and for all his commitment to provide finance towards these projects?

**Kevin Stewart:** I met Mr Carson and other colleagues from the south of Scotland last week and I outlined some of the work that we are doing. As Mr Carson is well aware, I have met United Kingdom ministers round about the A75 to try to access funding from the union connectivity fund. A draft business case for the A75 has been submitted to the Department for Transport, and it includes a proposal to fund further design and development of options for the realignment of the A75, including around the villages of Springholm and Crocketford, which I know that Mr Carson has an interest in. I hope that the UK Government will respond positively and will hand over the resources that are required in order to get these works going.

### Recruitment (Assistance for Businesses)

**8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to assist any businesses that are struggling to recruit skilled workers. (S6O-02259)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray):** The action that we are taking to work with employers includes on-going investment to deliver 25,500 new modern apprenticeship starts in 2023-24, support for developing the young workforce to enable young people to prepare for work, and on-going investment in short courses across tertiary education that are aimed at upskilling and reskilling.

Furthermore, through the establishment of a talent attraction and migration service, our wider programme of work and the work of our enterprise agencies, we will help employers in key sectors to recruit workers from outside Scotland.

**Murdo Fraser:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. Contrary to the claims that are often made in this chamber that Brexit has dried up the supply of migrant workers, the latest figures show that net legal migration to the United Kingdom has doubled since Brexit. It is now at record levels and it is projected to grow still further. The problem is that too few of those legal migrants to the UK come to Scotland. We lag behind every part of England with the exception of the north-east when it comes to attracting—  
[*Interruption.*]

Members on the SNP benches do not want to hear the facts on this, Presiding Officer, because it does not suit their narrative, but the fact is that Scotland does very badly compared with other



parts of the UK in attracting legal migrants to come here and fill the vacancies that our businesses have. What more is the Scottish Government going to do to try to make Scotland a more attractive place for the migrant workers that we need to come and work here?

**Neil Gray:** I have already spoken about the implementation of the talent attraction and migration service, to mitigate the difficulties that our employers have faced post-Brexit. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**Neil Gray:** Murdo Fraser must have been living in a cupboard if he has not had the level of representation from employers in his area that I have had in my area and from across Scotland about the impact that Brexit has had through cutting freedom of movement.

We continue to call on the UK Government to ensure that it has an immigration system that is more suitable to the needs of people in Scotland. I progressed that work in my previous role, alongside Mairi Gougeon—for instance, with a rural visa pilot, which many on the Conservative benches would support, despite the fact that the Secretary of State for Scotland is currently holding it up.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes general question time.

Before we move to First Minister's question time, I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery the Rt Hon Catherine Gotani Hara MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Malawi. *[Applause.]*

I also invite members to join me in welcoming Dr Husam Zomlot, head of the Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom. *[Applause.]*

## First Minister's Question Time

12:01

### Ministerial Code

**1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The *Daily Mail* has today reported that Scottish National Party minister Jenny Gilruth, who is sat just behind the First Minister, might have broken the ministerial code. The former Minister for Transport, whom Humza Yousaf promoted to be Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, changed plans that had been agreed for 18 months, with just weeks to go. The original plans would have involved a small closure to rail services around her constituency for a few days just after Christmas last year, to allow essential upgrades to happen. Jenny Gilruth appears to have forced a change in order to give preferential treatment to her constituents, at a higher cost to taxpayers and far more disruption to passengers. Does the First Minister think it acceptable for a minister to make a political decision for her own benefit instead of acting in the interests of all of Scotland?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Douglas Ross is making a very serious accusation. Of course, if there are any accusations that the ministerial code is being broken, they will be appropriately investigated so, if Douglas Ross is making such an accusation, we will appropriately investigate it. However, I do not believe that the way in which Douglas Ross has characterised the situation is at all correct.

On Sunday 21 May, ScotRail's new timetable will come into effect. That is another important step, as Scotland's railways continue to recover.

**Douglas Ross:** What does that have to do with the question?

**The First Minister:** Such timetable changes happen regularly. When Jenny Gilruth was Minister for Transport, they happened for the correct reasons, according to the investigation that I did this morning, when the story that Douglas Ross talked about came into the public's consciousness.

We have invested heavily and significantly in railway services. We are proud to have taken ScotRail back into public ownership, and every decision that we make—every decision that any transport minister under this Government has made—is for the benefit of the entire railway network, including passengers up and down the country. I do not believe that the way in which Douglas Ross has characterised the situation is what took place, but I will, of course, investigate the issue further.

**Douglas Ross:** Let us just clear up some of the things that the First Minister said. He said that he is going to investigate, but he also said that he investigated this morning and sees no fault in what Jenny Gilruth did.

He also questions my characterisation of what happened, so let us go through some of the pages and pages of the freedom of information emails that we have seen. A freedom of information response makes it clear that, instead of a few days of closures after Christmas, Jenny Gilruth pushed for changes that would lead to six weeks of disruption, including four full weekends. *[Interruption.]*

Jenny Gilruth is very keen to intervene, but I am just reading out what we have received—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Mr Ross, give me a moment.

I am absolutely sure that I do not need to remind members of the rules regarding behaviour in the chamber. I would be grateful if we could adhere to those rules.

**Douglas Ross:** Jenny Gilruth seems to have a lot to say about this. It would be interesting to hear what she has told the First Minister, because ScotRail advises in these emails that the plans that Jenny Gilruth put forward would mean that 9,000 more customers every day would be disrupted. ScotRail reviewed the decision and concluded that there would be

“greater costs with more customers disrupted or inconvenienced with a revised access plan”.

Jenny Gilruth’s decision to scrap those changes appears to have cost the taxpayer at least £1 million.

Scottish Rail Holdings board papers, also released under FOI, state:

“The Board is asked to note that Network Rail and ScotRail chose to do the work at this time precisely to minimise the number of passengers impacted, and Transport Scotland were fully aware of and endorsed this approach”.

How can Humza Yousaf defend Jenny Gilruth when she went against the advice of Network Rail, ScotRail and Transport Scotland?

**The First Minister:** First and foremost—as I remember well from my time as transport minister—whenever such decisions are made it is crucial that we engage with communities. *[Interruption.]* It is so crucial that we engage with communities to understand from them what the impact of any potential closure will be. *[Interruption.]* I can hear groans from the parties at the sides of the chamber at the mention of engaging with communities, but we always

engage with our communities when it comes to any potential disruption to our transport network.

The proposed decarbonisation works on the vital rail line would have caused significant disruption right across the whole east coast of Scotland, including for passengers travelling across—yes—Fife, but also to Dundee, Perth and Aberdeen. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**The First Minister:** The former transport minister has stated that she was not content that everything was being done to minimise inconvenience over a busy festive period when people were rightly travelling up and down the country to see their loved ones, particularly in the context of disruption that was taking place due to industrial action at the time. Therefore, and rightly in my view, she asked Network Rail to postpone the works—which it agreed to do—in order to give time to engage with the communities that would be impacted by the closure.

For me, whoever the transport minister is—whether it is Jenny Gilruth, as was previously the case, or the current transport minister—it is vital that the needs of passengers are always front and centre when such decisions are made. That was clearly the case when Jenny Gilruth made that decision.

**Douglas Ross:** This is getting worse for the First Minister. He is now saying that Jenny Gilruth was right to do this. He also said that Jenny Gilruth, as the former transport minister, thought that there were problems with the matter. Well, we come to another email from 19 October 2022, which states:

“Ms Gilruth understands why they are doing it but it is not going to land well.”

She agreed with the proposal, but was worried about how it was going to land with her constituents. She should not even have been involved in the decision. She should have recused herself because of the clear potential for a conflict of interests.

Concerns were raised about the minister’s actions. One civil servant, whose name is redacted in this FOI response, said:

“It might be wise to be clear why this is appropriate for Fife in particular, because other areas might expect similar”.

The political interference might even have forced a senior executive to resign. *[Interruption.]* Chris Gibb worked in the rail industry for more than 40 years. He chaired ScotRail in 2022. He resigned just a few weeks after Jenny Gilruth’s decision—after he advised against the change. In board papers that we have seen, he raised concerns about political interference and

“micromanagement by Scottish Ministers, advisors and officials.”

First Minister, did Chris Gibb resign because of Jenny Gilruth’s inappropriate actions?

**The First Minister:** Douglas Ross is once again making really serious accusations without, I am afraid, any evidence. *[Interruption.]* He is hoping, because he is undoubtedly desperate, to throw as much mud as possible—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**The First Minister:** He will throw as much mud as possible and hope that some of it sticks. I say to Douglas Ross that conflicts of interests and the Conservative Party are definitely not a combination that he should look to raise. *[Interruption.]*

In response to Douglas Ross reading out the emails, I say that he is being selective in what he reads out. He forgets to mention that the disruption that would undoubtedly have been caused because of the works would have affected passengers travelling across not just Fife but to Dundee, Perth, Aberdeen and other parts of the network, too. As is absolutely right, I would expect my transport minister and any member of the Government to ensure that they take account of all those who might be impacted and affected.

I say to Douglas Ross that he should look at the facts, not just throw around mud hoping that some of it will stick. Speculation, to be frank, does not help anyone in the chamber and certainly does not help passengers for whom we are committed to improving the rail network.

**Douglas Ross:** What did not help passengers was the former Minister for Transport’s decision. She was emailed on 7 November 2022 at 17:40 and told by ScotRail that there would be greater costs and that more customers would be disrupted and inconvenienced with the revised plans. There will be at least £1 million extra in associated costs and 9,000 additional passengers every day will be affected because of the decision that she took, so the First Minister can cut out all that rubbish about standing up for passengers when it is clear that the decision that Jenny Gilruth took led to a poorer service.

It looks like there has been a clear breach of the ministerial code. Jenny Gilruth is smirking at that; well she might, because the First Minister already seems to believe that she is innocent. However, the ministerial code states that a minister “must keep separate” the role of a minister and their role as a constituency MSP.

This case looks not just like preferential treatment in the constituency but a truly awful decision that will cost taxpayers millions and lead to greater disruption. Five months on, the essential

works that Jenny Gilruth delayed have still not happened. It looks like a clear-cut sackable offence. At the very least, it needs more than the First Minister looking at it over breakfast: it needs an urgent investigation now. Will the First Minister confirm to Parliament right now that he will launch an investigation into his minister today?

**The First Minister:** To my understanding, this is not the first time that the issue has been raised. I think that it was raised months previously, as well. Of course, I was not First Minister at the time. As I said in response to Douglas Ross’s first question, I will look at the accusations that are being made.

I say to Douglas Ross that Jenny Gilruth was not and is not also the MSP for Dundee, Perth or Aberdeen. The decisions were taken because the works would affect railway passengers right across the network, particularly in the north-east of Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**The First Minister:** From the information that I have in front of me, it seems to be pretty clear that Jenny Gilruth made those decisions so that disruption would not affect more passengers right across the network. I would have expected her to do that at the time and would expect the current Minister for Transport to do it. When vital works, particularly on decarbonisation, have to take place, we have to ask how we do them in a way that minimises disruption, particularly during the busy festive period.

I say to the Conservatives that we take the ministerial code extremely seriously, which is not something that could be said about them in any way, shape or form.

## NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

**2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Next month, it will be three years since the Scottish hospitals inquiry was announced. These are the facts that we already know: first, two children died because of infections that they contracted at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital; secondly, there were serious failings by the board of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which resulted in the board being put into special measures; and, thirdly, Louise Slorance, whose husband Andrew died after contracting aspergillus, was kept in the dark by a cover-up. Despite all that, the chair and chief executive of the health board still have their jobs and no one has been held responsible.

This week, the health board, under the same leadership, has shamefully refused to accept many of the oversight board’s conclusions and has even called into question the basis of the independent review that exposed fatal infections in clinically vulnerable children. Why should people

who refuse to accept even the most basic facts be trusted to run Scotland's largest health board?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Anas Sarwar has—rightly—raised those issues on many occasions. As he said in his question, a public inquiry has been taking place in relation to a number of the issues that he has raised. It is important that we do not prejudice an inquiry that is taking place and that we wait for the full outcome of that inquiry. Appropriate action will, of course, be taken on those issues. We have made it clear that it is important that we do not wait for that inquiry to finish if we can take remedial action to improve the situation.

Anas Sarwar is right to raise a number of those issues in the chamber. My understanding is that not only have many of the oversight board's recommendations been accepted but work on them is well under way.

It is important that members across the chamber raise such issues here. My thoughts are with all the families that have been affected by the challenges that the health board has undoubtedly faced. The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care and I will continue to engage with the board of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to ensure that the oversight board's recommendations are taken forward.

**Anas Sarwar:** The First Minister misses the point, which is that we are going backwards. The health board's leadership has said that it does not accept many of the findings of the oversight board and that it now does not accept the findings of the independent case-note review that highlighted the infections. That is the point that the First Minister is missing.

As Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, Jeane Freeman understood that grieving families needed justice. She listened to the voices of families and campaigners, put the health board into special measures and established the inquiry. When Humza Yousaf took over from her, he was too weak and easily led—he lifted the board out of special measures and empowered the people who had failed. Less than a year later, the leadership of the board is trying to rubbish the independent review and is questioning the accepted facts.

Kimberly Darroch, whose daughter Milly Main died, has said that the board is making the families' lives hell. Louise Slorance said:

"Enough is enough, patients have been harmed, others lost their lives. Families lied to and bullied. For what? To protect the reputation of Scotland's flagship hospital and that of the Scottish Government."

Will the First Minister allow the leadership of the health board to rewrite the facts and continue to prolong the agony for those families?

**The First Minister:** We will absolutely hold the health board's leadership to account in relation to the recommendations that the oversight board has made. The reason why NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde was de-escalated from special measures was that the majority of the oversight board's recommendations had been accepted, work was under way and many of the recommendations had been completed. That is why decisions to de-escalate were made.

In relation to patients and people who have suffered—Anas Sarwar raised the cases of Milly Main and Andrew Slorance—the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care and I will be happy to meet the families who are involved. We have brought forward a number of measures to improve transparency and to ensure that families get answers. Unfortunately, in rare cases, things go wrong. In April 2018, we introduced an organisational duty of candour, which places a legal duty on all health and social care organisations to be open and honest when something goes wrong.

We also introduced the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Bill in response to Baroness Cumberlege's important report. When I was the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, I made it clear that whistleblowing is an integral and important tool that staff should use in order to raise concerns when they feel that it is necessary and appropriate to do so. In my time as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, I met every single whistleblowing champion from health boards up and down the country, including the whistleblowing champion at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

We will do everything in our power and will absolutely hold the health board to account. In my conversations with the leadership of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, it certainly understood the seriousness of the issues.

In the rare times when things go wrong—the vast majority of people get a good service from our health service—the Government will ensure, on behalf of the people of Scotland, that families get the answers that they deserve.

**Anas Sarwar:** The First Minister has not held the people responsible to account; he has empowered the people who have failed those families. Frankly, staff at the hospital, patients who have been failed and families will listen to that answer from the First Minister with rage and think that he is completely out of touch with the reality that they face every single day.

We are six years into the scandal and the established facts are being denied by a health board leadership who are prepared to do anything to protect their own jobs. Of course, that is what

we have come to expect from the Scottish National Party Government. No one ever takes responsibility, and failure is rewarded with promotion. The chair of the health board is still in his job; the chief executive has been given an excellence in leadership award; the health secretary when the hospital was opened and Milly Main died is now the Deputy First Minister; and the health secretary who took the failing board out of special measures is now the First Minister. Under the SNP, failure is rewarded, incompetence is excused and the Scottish people are left suffering the consequences.

If the First Minister is too weak to stand up for those grieving families fighting for justice, how can the people of Scotland trust him to stand up for them when it really matters?

**The First Minister:** This is the point: Anas Sarwar can spin in any way he wishes, but the people of Scotland have continued to trust the SNP with the health service time and again. Why have they done that? They have done that because we have invested record amounts in our health service, because we steered this country through the biggest shock that the NHS has faced in its 74-year existence and, of course, because our NHS staff are the best paid anywhere in the United Kingdom.

We value our staff. I remember quite well that, following a health debate in the chamber that I took part in, Anas Sarwar, who had led for Labour, was criticised by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde—doctors and nurses—for his politicisation of the health service in Scotland.

The decision to de-escalate NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde was made because of the evidence that we had in front of us. I am happy for Anas Sarwar to see that evidence and the details of that once again.

We will continue to make sure that, on the rare occasions when things go wrong, we do everything in our power to make sure that there is absolute transparency and that families get the answers that they want. As First Minister, I am more than happy to meet the families that Anas Sarwar mentioned, who have undoubtedly been affected by situations in which that failure has happened.

### **Sewage Discharges (Monitoring)**

**3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the First Minister for what reason only 4 per cent of Scotland's sewage discharge points are monitored, compared with 91 per cent in England. (S6F-02135)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Our approach to assessing sewage discharges is more effective than that in England. Scottish Water has

completed a more extensive environmental study programme to monitor and model the impacts of its facilities on water quality. Data from monitoring is also being used to determine any actions needed to improve Scotland's water environment. Scottish Water has already invested £686 million since 2010 in improvements, and has committed a further £500 million during 2021 to 2027. That has contributed to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's most recent classification, which shows that 66 per cent of Scotland's water bodies are in good ecological condition, which compares with just 16 per cent in England. That is in line with aims to achieve 81 per cent by 2027.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** The problem for the First Minister in relation to the money that he has identified for those extra monitors is that 70 per cent of all dumping point pipes will still go unobserved whereas, in England, every pipe is due to be monitored by the end of this year. When on earth will we catch up?

Look at what we have discovered in the last few weeks: human waste dumped around Scotland's best loved beaches, wetlands of international importance and special protection areas from Shetland to the Clyde. The First Minister should take particular interest in the most-used sewage dumping outlet in Scotland, which recorded 127 releases last year—enough to run 100 million baths. He will know that site well, because it is on the bank of the Clyde in his Glasgow Pollok constituency—perhaps that is why he moved to Broughty Ferry.

Will the First minister commit today to the introduction of legally binding targets to tackle sewage dumping in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** I moved to Broughty Ferry so that my step-daughter could see her father more often. That is the reason why I moved there, and that is not a state secret by any stretch of the imagination.

On the serious issue that Alex Cole-Hamilton raised, we know that combined sewer overflows are a serious issue, and he was right to raise them in his question. However, they are also integral to ensuring that sewers do not, during periods of heavy rainfall, back up and end up flooding homes, businesses and streets throughout our country.

Our monitoring is more comprehensive, and I would be happy to provide Alex Cole-Hamilton with more detail on that. I have the detail of the monitoring that Scottish Water has done, and I can send it to him. That was done over a number of years, and it allows us to comprehensively monitor where the spill overflows are happening. Scottish Water is not just sitting on its hands or resting on its laurels. It has published "Improving Urban

Waters—Route Map”, which outlines how we intend to invest in the Scottish water environment. A number of projects are currently under way to monitor and ensure that we make improvements to our sewer network. We take the issue extremely seriously.

I will end on the point that I started on, in response to Alex Cole-Hamilton’s first question. Notwithstanding the very serious issues that he has raised, our water quality in Scotland is very good. SEPA’s most recent classification shows that 66 per cent of Scotland’s water bodies are in good ecological condition compared with 16 per cent in England. We aim to improve that to 81 per cent by 2027.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Scotland’s natural environment is not just the envy of the world; it is vital to our health. Therefore, it is no surprise that reports of more than 14,000 sewage spills have prompted protests across the country, including one this Saturday in Stonehaven, which is in my region. In December 2021, Scottish Water vowed to increase the number of storm drain monitors to more than 1,000 by the end of 2024. However, according to a freedom of information response obtained by the *i* newspaper, as of 1 March this year, not a single new device had been installed. Can the First Minister tell us exactly how many of those 1,000 storm drain monitors he expects to be installed by the end of this year?

**The First Minister:** Of course, it was always the plan that the installation programme would take place over the course of summer 2023 and into 2024. We are still confident, and Scottish Water remains confident, that we will have those 1,000 spill monitors in place by the end of 2024. I would be happy to provide Mercedes Villalba with further detail on that if she wishes.

I go back to the point that there has been comprehensive monitoring. Scottish Water did studies between 2015 and 2021. We have extensive computer models that can allow Scottish Water to understand when the combined sewer overflows will spill—under what rainfall conditions, for example—and what impact those spills will have on the natural environment. There is a whole host of data, because of the excellent and extensive work that Scottish Water has done.

To answer Ms Villalba’s question directly, we are still confident that 1,000 spill monitors will be installed by the end of 2024.

### Residential Properties (Cladding)

**4. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister whether he will provide an update on the work of the Scottish Government

to address potentially dangerous cladding on residential properties. (S6F-02113)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** The safety of residents is, of course, an absolute priority for the Government. We are acting decisively to protect lives through a programme of cladding assessment and remediation. The current programme includes 105 buildings that will each go through a comprehensive technical assessment. Although we expect that the majority will be safe, if the assessment identifies an immediate fire risk, we will act without delay, as we have already done.

As assessments are completed, we will agree plans and take action to deliver full remediation. That means that I also expect developers to take responsibility to remediate their buildings where the public purse is not needed to do so. I urge them to do so voluntarily, but we will use all the levers at our disposal, including legislation if necessary, to remediate buildings and protect residents.

**Kaukab Stewart:** The First Minister will understand that people’s lives have been put on hold and that some people are at the end of their tether. Local authorities are asking for building warrants for remediation work and developers are putting safety measures in place that are severely imposing on the lives of people who live in those buildings, but many residents and constituents of mine feel that remediation is not moving quickly enough.

My constituents just want their lives back. What further measures can the Scottish Government take to further encourage local authorities and developers to work co-operatively to remove unsafe cladding from these buildings more quickly?

**The First Minister:** Kaukab Stewart is right to make a couple of key points. One is about the frustration of her constituents—and, perhaps, constituents in other parts of the country—because things do not seem to be moving as quickly on the ground as they would like. I understand that frustration.

Kaukab Stewart is also right to mention that we are trying to take a collaborative approach with developers, local authorities and others in relation to this particular situation. I can understand how worrying it is for those living in buildings with unsafe cladding. That is why we put the safety and wellbeing of residents at the very heart of the cladding remediation programme. Developers must do the same—they must step up and fix their buildings.

Our preference has always been to have that voluntary agreement with developers through the Scottish safer buildings accord, but let me be clear

that we are putting the safety of residents first and foremost and we will use all the powers that we have. I reiterate what I said in my first answer to Kaukab Stewart that, if necessary, we will also use legislation to ensure that developers do the right thing, so that we can get on with remediating buildings in line with Scottish building standards.

### Income Tax

**5. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to a recent poll that found that more than a third of people in Scotland would consider relocating if income taxes were increased further. (S6F-02130)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** The Scottish Government is proud to have the fairest and most progressive tax system in the United Kingdom. Consideration of behavioural changes is a vital part of our tax policy decisions. Our evaluation of the move to a more progressive tax system in 2018-19 found no evidence of significant behavioural change, including in relation to cross-border migration.

That should come as no surprise, because our social contract with every citizen goes significantly beyond the provisions in the rest of the UK. It includes free prescriptions, free higher education and support for more than 400,000 children who are eligible for the Scottish child payment. We will continue on that path of progressive taxation and there will be robust analysis behind any changes that we make to the tax system.

**Liz Smith:** Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Chartered Institute of Taxation, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Archangel Investors Ltd and D J Alexander Ltd are just some of those who are warning of the dangers of widening the tax differential with the rest of the UK. Sandy Begbie, of Scottish Financial Enterprise, is warning of the resulting effects on Scottish productivity and economic growth.

Will the First Minister give a categorical assurance that he both accepts and understands the widespread and serious concerns among the business community and that the future tax policy of the Scottish Government should be fully focused on making Scotland the most competitive part of the UK rather than the most highly taxed part of the UK?

**The First Minister:** What is fascinating is that, in that question from Liz Smith, she did not mention a single anti-poverty campaigner in the list that she gave. Why would she not do that? Of course, if we want to invest money in tackling poverty, we have to have the money to be able to do so. That is why progressive taxation, which

allows us to increase revenue to spend on tackling poverty, is so crucial.

However, I would say to Liz Smith that of course we will listen to those organisations that she listed—I have met many of them already—and we will continue to listen to them where we possibly can. We will have robust analysis behind any decision that we make about taxation.

I do not see and have never seen a conflict between growing the economy—something that is front and centre of the prospectus that I published in the first couple of weeks of being First Minister—and ensuring that we have a progressive tax system so that we can invest in anti-poverty measures.

We will continue to make those careful balanced decisions in relation to taxation and we will make sure that we are informed by robust analysis and evidence from many of the organisations that Liz Smith mentions, as well as from the Scottish Fiscal Commission. However, if we had listened to Liz Smith and the Conservatives and given tax cuts to the wealthiest, we would have much less money to spend on things such as free prescription charges, ensuring that higher education is free and, of course, that game-changing Scottish child payment.

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** Data shows that, regardless of tax rate changes, Scotland continues to attract more working-age people from the rest of the UK than move in the other direction—about 20 per cent more annually. Although I know that the Government will do the due diligence and sensitivity analysis for any proposed tax changes, I make the point that a modest increase in inward migration from the rest of the UK to Scotland could significantly increase tax revenues by hundreds of millions of pounds to spend on public services in Scotland and support Scottish businesses with skills to tackle the challenges that they face. What is the Scottish Government doing to proactively attract more workers from the rest of the UK to live and work in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** Ivan McKee makes an excellent point. [Laughter.] I am not sure why the Conservatives are laughing—

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, members!

**The First Minister:** They do not like to listen to the facts. The facts that Ivan McKee has presented are absolutely right. We have seen a modest increase in inward migration from the rest of the UK, which is an important point. Scotland's record on inward migration from the rest of the UK dispels much of the hysteria from the Conservative Party on the impact of our tax policy.

However, it is important to recognise what more we can do, which is why we are committed to establishing a talent attraction programme and a migration service for Scotland. That will help us to build on the success that we have already had in this space. The talent attraction and migration service will improve Scotland's ability to attract and recruit workers from outside Scotland with the skills that our economy needs. It will support international workers in the migration and relocation process and will ensure, where we have the levers over pay and terms and conditions, that we are embedding fair pay and ensuring that our staff are some of the best paid in the UK. We are doing that in the national health service, where our staff are the best paid anywhere in the UK. I hope that that helps to attract them to Scotland. We will put progressive taxation and fair pay at the heart of everything that we do in the Scottish Government, in stark contrast to the approach that has been taken by the Conservatives in England.

### **Social Care Workers (Sick Pay Provision)**

**6. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a member of the GMB trade union.

To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will reintroduce the social care staff support fund, or take other action to improve sick pay provision for social care workers, in the light of reports of a survey by GMB Scotland stating that 80 per cent of social care workers in the private sector have considered quitting, and wider warnings that the care sector is on the brink of collapse. (S6F-02119)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** I recognise that Monica Lennon, rightly, often raises incredibly important issues to do with adult social care. We all know that Covid-19 created an enormous challenge for the social care sector throughout the United Kingdom and in Scotland. That is why we introduced the social care staff support fund in order to support the workforce and protect our most vulnerable people. I thank the social care workforce for all the vital work that they did during the height of the pandemic and the work that they are currently doing under significant pressure and extreme challenge. Our fund continued for longer than funds in any other UK nation, but it was always a temporary measure, particularly when self-isolation rules were in place.

Fair work is central to improving recruitment, retention and staff wellbeing in the sector, so we will continue our work to promote those practices and improve pay, conditions and the workers' voice. To that end, we have guaranteed an additional £100 million to uplift pay to £10.90 per hour, which took effect from April this year. We

have made a commitment to reaching £12 an hour for adult social care workers who are delivering direct care.

**Monica Lennon:** Carers who are in the gallery, their colleagues and the people they care for deserve much better than that. The fund was time limited, but the crisis in social care is getting worse by the day. As was highlighted in the *Sunday Post*, carers are urging the Government to reinstate the fund because they cannot afford to get sick. Removing that financial safety net now without an alternative solution will accelerate the collapse of social care and push the NHS further into crisis.

To her credit, Jeane Freeman listened to the workers and worked with Scottish Labour to introduce the fund in the first place. Will Humza Yousaf's Government listen, meet the workers and our unions, and do the right thing?

**The First Minister:** We will be happy to meet trade unions, which we do regularly. The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care will do that, and I am happy to continue my engagement with trade unions.

We are taking action to address pay, which is why we funded a further pay increase to the tune of £100 million this financial year. It is also why the work that is being done to introduce legislation on a national care service and get the service up and running is vital. At the heart of that service are fair work principles, such as sectoral bargaining.

We will not wait for the national care service to be in place—work is already going on through the fair work in social care group, which has developed a set of minimum standards for terms and conditions that reflect fair work principles. Those standards include sick pay and maternity and paternity pay to assist with recruitment in the sector. We want to continue to make progress with the national care service exactly because the adult social care landscape, which involves private providers, in-house local authority providers and third sector providers, is fragmented. How much better it would be to have national consistency across the country, which we can only really achieve with the national care service.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to general and constituency supplementary questions. I ask for brief questions and responses.

### **Puberty Blockers**

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Scotland's social care watchdog has said that children as young as 12 are allowed to consent to the use of puberty blockers. That guidance fails to acknowledge the interim Cass review of gender identity services in England, which identified several failings in the Tavistock centre's management and a lack of evidence to support the



use of puberty blockers. More and more brave young people are coming forward to talk openly about detransitioning, about their harrowing stories of surgery and about the lack of mental health and emotional support that they received. Does the First Minister support prescribing of puberty blockers for 12-year-olds?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** I support such decisions being made by clinicians—by the people who have clinical knowledge. That is what we should do. We should trust those who have clinical expertise, as opposed to standing here in the chamber—we do not have such expertise—making judgments about what is best for young people who need gender identity services.

The Cass review has produced an interim report. It is well understood that health services in England differ quite significantly from those in Scotland. We have taken account of the interim report and we will look at the final report when it is ready. To go back to my initial point, I note that it is so important to trust clinicians, who have the medical expertise and knowledge, on such important decisions.

#### **Renfrewshire Council (Dargavel School Provision)**

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Renfrewshire Council's education and children's services policy board will meet today to discuss school provision for children in Dargavel following the council's catastrophic school roll miscalculation. When I previously raised the issue, the expected cost to fix the mess was £20 million; it is now an incredible £75 million.

Parents are looking for the Scottish Government to help to resolve the situation. Does the First Minister agree that no child in Renfrewshire should have to pay for the council's incompetence and lose out because of the resulting shortfall in school budgets? If so, what will the Scottish Government do to ensure accountability for this failure and ensure that the appropriate primary and secondary provision is urgently put in place?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** I will ask the current Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to have discussions with Renfrewshire Council when they can. I know that the previous education secretary was involved in discussions. It is a local authority matter. Neil Bibby has asked me to take money out of the school building programme and redistribute it to another project. He must say what school we would take that money from, because every single penny is accounted for in the current budget.

We will continue to have discussions with Renfrewshire Council, as we have done. I will ask the education secretary to touch base again with

the council, because I agree with Neil Bibby's premise that no child should feel that their education or their educational attainment has suffered as a result of any decision that has been made in national or local government.

#### **Mental Health Awareness Week**

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** The First Minister is aware that this week marks mental health awareness week, which this year has a particular focus on anxiety. As the cost of living crisis deepens and household bills soar, what action has his Government taken to mark that important period?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** We know that poverty is a key driver of poor mental health and we are prioritising work to support the people who are most at risk. As part of mental health awareness week, the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport met money advice and mental health organisations just yesterday to hear at first hand the impact that the cost of living crisis is having on mental health in Scotland.

We have developed advice for front-line advisers, we have created resources for the general population on the "Mind to Mind" wellbeing web pages and we will continue to work with money advice and mental health partners on what more can be done. We continue to do everything that we can do to urge the United Kingdom Government to use all the powers at its disposal to tackle the cost of living crisis, because of the serious impact that it is having on the mental health of the population.

#### **Child Protection (Independent Inquiry)**

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Whistleblowers and campaigners have called on the First Minister to support an independent inquiry into the mishandling of complaints relating to child protection in Edinburgh, East Lothian, the Borders and Aberdeenshire. Campaigners believe that a wider independent inquiry is now needed in order to investigate safeguarding concerns and how reports from parents, guardians, carers, professionals and the public have been mishandled in relation to on-going unresolved child abuse and child protection concerns. The current on-going Scottish child abuse inquiry remit is narrow and focuses only on historical abuse, specifically with regard to children who live in care.

First, will the First Minister agree to meet me and the campaigners to discuss their concerns? Secondly, will the Scottish Government now take forward an independent inquiry into those concerns?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** I will ensure that the appropriate minister meets Miles

Briggs and, of course, I am more than happy to consider the request for a meeting from Miles Briggs, on behalf of the families. I pay credit to Miles Briggs, who has raised the issue on a number of occasions in the chamber on behalf of the families who have been affected.

This Government takes child protection absolutely seriously. In reference to the issues that Miles Briggs has raised I will, as I have said, ensure that the appropriate minister meets him as soon as possible, and I will consider the invitation to meet Miles Briggs and the families who are involved.

### **St Andrews University (Student Halls Rent Increases)**

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** In the middle of the cost of living crisis, the University of St Andrews is increasing rents in its student halls by 8 per cent. Students are at risk of being plunged into poverty as the university lines its pockets. Does the First Minister agree that a rent increase of that scale is completely unacceptable? Will he join me in calling on the university to reverse that decision?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** That is a decision for the university to make, but I completely understand why Mark Ruskell raises that important issue. As he knows only too well, we have introduced legislation for ensuring fair rents where appropriate, but there might be areas where we can go further, so we are exploring that quite actively. I agree with Mark Ruskell that everybody in our fantastic educational institutes—in this case, higher education, but it applies also to further education—should absolutely be aware of the responsibilities that they have for students who are, undoubtedly, suffering from a Westminster cost of living crisis that is impacting everybody—in particular, of course, our students.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes First Minister's questions. There will be a short suspension before the next item of business.

12:48

*Meeting suspended.*

12:50

*On resuming—*

## **Fostering Friendly Employers Scheme**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-08721, in the name of Rona Mackay, on supporting foster carers in the workplace through the fostering friendly employers scheme. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament recognises Foster Care Fortnight, taking place from 15 to 28 May 2023; notes the view that more flexible and supportive workplaces are needed, to assist foster carers in employment, and, in turn, encourage more working people to foster; understands that research carried out by the Fostering Network found that 41% of foster carers combine their role with other employment in Scotland, while 60% of foster carers said that a fostering-friendly HR policy would help them to work while fostering; believes that workplaces becoming Fostering Friendly Employers (FFE) helps to provide foster carers with additional support and raises awareness of the extra demands placed on them to nurture what it sees as some of the most vulnerable people in society; understands that there are presently 4,623 children in foster care in Scotland; is grateful for the 3,716 fostering families in this country and commends their hard work and the unconditional love that they give to the children in their care; understands that 500 more fostering families are needed; further understands that being part of the Fostering Network's FFE scheme ensures that foster carers have the opportunity for paid leave for training, respite, meetings and other requirements to fulfil what it sees as their vital role; acknowledges that the theme during Foster Care Fortnight 2023 is Fostering Communities, and believes that being an FFE is a great example of how the wider fostering community can provide support, understanding and respect, which is entirely in line with The Promise.

12:50

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Nothing is more important than giving a child the best start in life and a loving, stable home, and nothing is more important than ensuring that the thousands of children who, through no fault of their own, are fostered get that best start.

The Scottish Government is passionate about fulfilling the Promise and ensuring that care-experienced children are protected and loved, and I am very proud of our continuing commitment to them.

The theme of today's debate, which takes place during foster care fortnight, which runs from now until 28 May, is fostering communities. Delivered by the leading fostering charity, the Fostering Network, it focuses on how employers can support

employees who are going through the fostering process. The fostering friendly employers scheme would ensure that foster carers have the opportunity for paid leave for training, respite meetings and other requirements to fulfil their vital role.

I hope that the theme will help to boost awareness of the need for more foster carers and make employers think about how they could help employees to fulfil their wish to help children.

Thousands of new foster families are needed every year to care for children, with the greatest need being for foster carers for older children, sibling groups, disabled children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There are currently 4,623 children in foster care in Scotland and 3,716 fostering families. We need to thank them for their hard work and for the love that they give to the children in their care. However, 500 more fostering families are needed, and I will outline how employers can support them at no cost to their business other than giving them time.

The Fostering Network set up the fostering friendly employers scheme in 2014 in response to the finding that foster carers need more flexibility and understanding from their employers in order to work alongside fostering. There are more than 120 fostering friendly employers in the United Kingdom, and the number is growing. Collectively, they employ more than half a million staff. The recent news that John Lewis has joined the scheme is great, and I expect other large companies to follow.

The Fostering Network found that 41 per cent of foster carers in Scotland combined their role with other employment, while 60 per cent of foster carers said that a fostering friendly human resources policy would help them to work while fostering. Flexibility is the key to helping employees through the fostering process.

I can speak from personal experience as an employer—my head of office, Paul, has adopted siblings and went through a thorough and detailed process that began with fostering. Obviously, it involves getting time for meetings, phone calls and social work appointments. Now, when I see his happy thriving children, I know that every absence from the office was worth it. Nothing could be more important than the selfless act of offering one's home to children and, in the case of Paul and his husband Mark, nurturing them for life.

I am proud to say that I am the first MSP to sign up to the Fostering Network's fostering friendly employers scheme. I have no doubt that many more colleagues from across the chamber will follow suit.

A foster carer who works for a fostering friendly employer said:

"Being employed, being a mum and foster carer is hard to get to grips with at first. You have your own commitments, but I've had fantastic managers. I was honest with them at the beginning and said, 'Look, this is what we're going through'. When emergency placements came up, I sent my manager a text in the middle of the night to say, 'We've just taken a placement so I'm going to be late in the morning'. He would reply, 'It's not a problem. Don't worry about it'."

One business said:

"the impact for us as a company is relatively small, but the impact for any potential child being fostered could be significant."

In February, I was privileged to host a reception in the Parliament for the Fostering Network. It was a wonderful evening, hearing inspirational stories from foster parents and meeting some of their happy children, who were an absolute delight.

What does being a fostering friendly employer entail, and how does an employer become one? The Fostering Network has a template for a fostering-friendly HR policy, which is available by inquiry, and its scheme is free to join. Signing up to the scheme means supporting staff by providing five days' paid leave a year for fostering related activity. The policy applies to staff who have three months or more employment service with a company, and they are eligible if they are applying to become a foster carer, if they are an approved foster carer and have a child in placement or if they are an approved kinship carer.

Such employers are committed to supporting any staff member who is a foster carer or an approved kinship carer by creating a fostering friendly office that offers flexible working arrangements that respond to the needs of all staff who are foster carers or approved kinship carers. Those needs could include time for assessment and training prior to approval as a foster carer, attendance at a panel for approval, child review meetings, annual foster care review meetings or training. In short, the scheme allows people to prepare to become foster carers and to take time off work without losing holidays or money, but it has very little impact on a business.

Together, we could transform, support and recognise foster carers in the workplace, which would, in turn, encourage more people to foster. Employers can play a critical part in creating fostering communities by supporting foster carers to give children a loving home. That is surely the greatest gift of all.

12:56

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** I thank Rona Mackay for securing the debate on supporting foster carers in the workplace. I recognise and applaud her personal commitment in that regard.

Foster carers provide care in a family setting for children who cannot live with their own families. There are many reasons why children come into care. Foster care can last weeks, months or for the rest of a childhood, depending on the child's circumstances.

Foster care fortnight is happening right now—15 May until 28 May—and, in my area, the council's families for children team is keen to attract new carers. To support that, it is hosting an information event from 10 till 3 on Monday 5 June in Irvine's volunteer rooms for people who are interested in becoming a foster carer. It will be a relaxed drop-in session that will provide information on fostering and adoption opportunities to people who would like to know more. Some of North Ayrshire's foster carers will be there on the day to share their experiences. I understand that the team is particularly keen to hear from people who feel that they could offer a home to children who have disabilities and those who could take a small family group so that siblings can remain together.

There is no such thing as a typical foster carer. They can be single, co-habiting or married. There are flexible options for foster care, with different arrangements possible. Those include providing short breaks, interim fostering or longer-term support for young people.

I was struck by the personal testimony of North Ayrshire foster carers who shared their experiences ahead of the event. I would like to share some of them with members now. Susanne has been a North Ayrshire foster carer for six years, mainly providing short breaks for young people. She said:

"I became a foster carer because one of my friends was a foster carer, and I witnessed how she had made such a difference to the wee boy she was looking after. She had made such a difference to his life, and I thought that would be something I would like to give to another child.

I enjoy seeing the progress that the children in my care are making. It's really good to see them thrive and be part of the community, and just see them progressing."

She said that she feels that there is a good network for carers at the council. There are training facilities, and carers meet up for training and socially for a coffee. She urged folk who are thinking of becoming a foster carer to pick up the phone and contact the health and social care partnership. She said that getting more information, speaking to carers and having an informal chat can be helpful.

Sonya is another experienced foster carer in North Ayrshire. She has been looking after children for almost 20 years and is currently caring for young people on a long-term, short-term and respite basis. She is also an adoptive parent. She shared this:

"At the moment, I have got three children and one young person on a continuing care basis, which is when you look after a child who reaches the age of 18, and they can stay with you for as long as you wish, and they go on to be supported by throughcare services, which offers support up to the age of 26."

Sonya decided to investigate fostering after seeing an advert in her local newspaper, and she initially cared for two young boys who came into her family when they were aged just two and 15 months. They have now moved on to live with a family member. She describes them as being the light of her life. She added:

"They came in and they made our whole family's life great—that's the only way to describe it. Now, they visit me every year.

The bond that me and the boys have got is second to none. It's like having your own birth child ... there is no difference there. For me, that's what fostering is about. If you can take a child on, they don't need to be your birth child to love them and give them the security they need."

According to figures from the Fostering Network's report, nearly 40 per cent of foster carers combine fostering with other work. Those who do so say that a supportive employer can make all the difference in enabling them to balance employment with looking after children.

I will be following Rona Mackay's lead in exploring how, as an employer, I can sign up to the scheme, and I encourage employers of all sizes in my constituency to have a look at the scheme. In providing an opportunity to make a difference for families and children in our local community and to provide improved support for employees, it represents a win for everyone.

13:01

**Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I, too, thank Rona Mackay for bringing the subject of the fostering friendly employers scheme to the chamber for debate and for her detailed explanation of the scheme. By now, it is well known among members that I relish the opportunity to speak on the topic of foster care. I hope that members will not mind me taking a slightly wider view.

I make no apologies for stating that we must do more for vulnerable people in our society. In most cases, we are talking about children and young people who have lived through multiple traumatic events, heightened uncertainties and delayed brain development. In many cases, those children are in their infancy. The shocking statistic that a quarter of child protection orders are for children under 20 days old highlights the urgency of the matter.

I appreciate the work that charity groups such as the WAVE Trust and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children do to

highlight the plight of vulnerable children, and I applaud their efforts in successfully drawing attention to Scotland's baby blind spot and initiatives such as the 70/30 campaign, which works towards achieving a 70 per cent reduction in the number of children who experience maltreatment by 2030. That is a target that we must meet.

Right now in Scotland, we have 3,716 families who have stepped forward to provide a sense of stability and safety for our most vulnerable children by fostering. Those fostering families are trying to repair the psychological effects of trauma and to ensure that a secure environment, including care and love, is provided for the 4,623 children who currently need to be fostered. Those 3,716 fostering families should be valued in more ways than by simply having words of support spoken about them within the walls of this chamber.

Foster parents and kinship carers in Scotland live in the only area of the United Kingdom not to have a minimum carers allowance. It would be remiss of me not to mention that again, as time keeps marching on and nothing seems to change on that count.

I am glad that we are taking the time to focus on the fostering friendly employers scheme. I fully back anything that will help foster carers and adoption families to support the child in their care. However, I must sound a cautionary note. It is imperative that businesses, regardless of their size, can buy into the scheme as easily as is stated.

Over the years, businesses have managed to adapt to changes in working practices. When I started working, which was not yesterday—in fact, it was so long ago that flexi time was still new—most people used flexi time to swing their working day an hour to either side. That might have involved starting an hour earlier and leaving at 4 or coming in slightly later and working until 6. That was excellent for working parents and easy for many large businesses to accommodate. However, smaller businesses could not accommodate it. It was necessary to have the economies of scale to make variable working work. Small independently owned businesses could not, and still do not, operate in that way.

We have come a long way from the days of 9-to-5 working in the office, and I am encouraged by the fact that working flexibility and working-from-home practices are now accepted, especially as we know that that helps working carers. However, small businesses still find it difficult to embrace such processes and to continue to work efficiently. That needs to be recognised, and it must be recognised in this case. To make the scheme work for fostering families, we must ensure that small businesses in all communities can buy into it.

I also draw members' attention to kinship carers and adoptive parents. We too often forget that the same issues apply to fosterers, adopters and kinship carers. All children who live with a family member or with an adoptive or foster family have experienced the same trauma and uncertainty in their early lives, so it goes without saying that all those families would benefit from more understanding workplaces. If we truly want to have a system that puts the welfare of children at its heart, we must ensure that the benefits are accessible, regardless of who the care provider is.

Those children are the most vulnerable in our society. It is time that we raised their profile and started to truly value the people who care for them.

13:05

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** It is a privilege to speak on behalf of Scottish Labour and I thank Rona Mackay for securing the debate. Foster care fortnight provides us with a welcome opportunity to reflect on the importance of fostering and to highlight that there is much more to do to support those who foster.

Currently, 41 per cent of foster carers in Scotland juggle their fostering duties with other employment, which demonstrates their remarkable commitment and dedication. We must do more to help them, by creating an environment in which foster carers can balance their fostering and professional roles. According to research carried out by the Fostering Network, 60 per cent of foster carers believe that a fostering friendly human resources policy would help them to do that. It is crucial that workplaces are both supportive and flexible in accommodating the unique demands placed on foster carers. As we have already heard, by becoming fostering friendly employers, workplaces not only provide additional support to foster carers but raise awareness of the invaluable role that those carers play.

There are currently 4,623 children in foster care in Scotland and I thank the 3,716 families who care for them. I pay tribute to one particular foster carer, Margaret Cowie of Rutherglen. She has dedicated more than 30 years to fostering, providing unwavering love and a stable and nurturing environment for the children in her care, and enabling them to grow and thrive. Her hard work and dedication, like that of the thousands of others who do the same across the country, are truly remarkable. I hope that members will indulge me in wishing Margaret a happy 60th birthday. I know that she is looking forward to celebrating with her foster children this weekend.

Although there are absolute gems like Margaret right across the country, there are simply not

enough foster carers. Scotland has a shortfall of around 500 fostering families and that shortage emphasises the urgency of creating an environment that attracts more people and families to become foster carers. Participation in the fostering friendly employer scheme means that foster carers can access crucial benefits such as paid leave for training or respite meetings and other essential requirements. Those provisions support foster carers to effectively fulfil their vital role.

As we have heard, this year's foster care fortnight focuses on the theme of fostering communities. Becoming a fostering friendly employer is a prime example of how the wider fostering community can come together to provide support, understanding and respite for foster carers. By embracing that initiative, we demonstrate our commitment to the Promise and reaffirm our dedication to nurturing looked-after children.

Fostering is not the responsibility of foster carers alone. There is a well-known saying that it takes a village to raise a child. We need entire communities to come together to support foster families in their selfless commitment to the children that they care for. It is our collective duty to create a network of support that extends beyond foster carers and their families to schools, employers, healthcare providers, social workers and local organisations, who must all work hand in hand to provide holistic support for foster carers. We must develop a culture of understanding, compassion and respect for the families who open their hearts and homes.

As we celebrate foster care fortnight 2023, let us recommit ourselves to the principles of the Promise, ensuring that every child in foster care receives the love, care and opportunities that they deserve. Together, let us build a future in which no child feels alone or neglected and in which every child knows the warmth of a nurturing family.

13:09

**The Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise (Natalie Don):** I thank Rona Mackay for initiating this debate and I thank members for their contributions. This is a really important issue and I am completely supportive of ensuring that workplaces are more flexible for foster carers.

This debate, which is my first as a member of the Government, has provided us collectively, as a Parliament, with an opportunity to recognise the Fostering Network's annual foster care fortnight. It is also an excellent opportunity for us all to recognise foster carers and acknowledge the vital

difference that they make to the lives of our children and young people.

Today, I published a letter to all foster carers thanking them for all that they do, but I would also like to put on the record my sincere and heartfelt thanks to all foster carers and practitioners who work in the sector. We absolutely recognise the key role that you play in providing secure, nurturing and supportive homes for children and young people across Scotland. What you do day in, day out positively transforms lives.

I also take this opportunity to add my thanks to the Fostering Network Scotland—members of which are here with us today, and whom I met before the debate—for all the work that it does in organising foster care fortnight and raising the profile and awareness of fostering more generally.

As Rona Mackay highlights in her motion and as others have mentioned in their speeches, there are challenges, including with the retention and recruitment of foster carers, but there are also opportunities for everyone across the chamber, local and national Government, the third sector, local communities and, importantly, employers in supporting our foster carers.

There is absolutely no doubt that the pressure within the foster care system is an area that we need to address collectively in order to fully deliver on the Promise, and I am absolutely clear that it is vital that the Scottish Government leads from the front if we are to ensure that all care-experienced children and young people are supported to grow up loved, safe and respected.

We set out our commitment to do that in the Promise implementation plan, which was published last year. In the plan, we outline our vision for delivering a good childhood to ensure that

“Every child lives in a safe and loving home where families are given support to overcome difficulties and stay together.”

We are also clear that investing in a programme of comprehensive, on-going support for care givers is key to ensure that they have the skills, knowledge and confidence to continue to nurture the children in their care and build stable and loving relationships.

Work has begun on delivering that vision. We have committed to an investment of £500 million over the current session of Parliament in our whole-family wellbeing programme of activity. That will transform services to ensure that families, including foster families, can access the support that they need where and when they need it. We also allocated £50 million in this year's budget, including £32 million that has been provided directly to children's services planning partnerships, to enable work at local level.

We provide funding to the third sector to support foster carers. That includes over £150,000 to the Fostering Network Scotland this year to support the Fosterline Scotland service, training for foster carers and encouraging the recruitment of new carers.

The Scottish Government is also working with a small group of partners including the Fostering Network, the Promise Scotland, local authorities and others to look at how we attract and retain foster carers and what action we can take collectively to make that happen. The group is expected to conclude its work over the coming months, but I know that it is considering a package of support for foster carers that includes both financial and practical elements so that care givers feel better valued and supported.

On the financial side, I reassure Parliament that it remains a priority of this Government to deliver a Scottish recommended allowance for foster and kinship carers to meet the needs of children in their care as soon as possible. It has taken far longer than was originally anticipated and I recognise the frustrations of care givers and stakeholders, but positive progress is being made with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and we are working at pace to make that happen.

Allowances are important, of course, but they are not the whole picture. Foster carers need to be supported so that they can, in turn, support children who have often had a very difficult start in life to grow and develop in a stable and nurturing family home. We have already committed in our Promise implementation plan to publishing what we will do to provide trauma training and support for adoptive parents and kinship and foster carers, and the group that I mentioned earlier is also considering wider learning and development, including peer support.

As Pam Duncan-Glancy highlighted, foster carers often juggle looking after children with other employment, and I am well aware of how hard that can be.

The group is actively considering how employers in the wider community can support foster carers. The fostering friendly employers scheme is a positive example of how supportive and flexible employers can help foster carers to combine employment with the vital role that they play in looking after some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

I am absolutely committed to ensuring that the voices of those with lived experience are at the heart of everything that we do, and I am committed to working with foster carers in Scotland, and stakeholders who represent fostering, as we develop any changes to policy and practice on our journey to keep the Promise.

That is why, today, in recognition of the positive benefits that the fostering friendly employers scheme brings, I commit the Scottish Government to considering how it can become a more flexible workplace for foster carers as well as to exploring take-up of the scheme in order to support and promote it further. I thank Rona Mackay for being the first MSP to sign her office up to the scheme, and I encourage others to do so.

I conclude by thanking Rona Mackay for the debate, as it has given us the opportunity to debate foster carers and everything that they do and to consider how they can be further supported.

Again, I thank Scotland's foster carers for their service and commitment. There is absolutely no doubt that you improve the lives of the children and young people in your care and make our collective vision for children in Scotland—to grow up safe and loved—a reality. Thank you.

13:16

*Meeting suspended.*

14:00

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Skills

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions. I remind members who wish to ask a supplementary question that they should press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question. We are focusing on education and skills. I make the usual plea for brevity in both questions and answers.

#### International Student Visas (Impact of Marking Delays)

**1. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government and universities regarding the potential impact on visas for international students at Scottish universities of any delays in marking assessments. (S6O-02244)

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey):** Although immigration arrangements are fully reserved, it is vital that Scotland attracts and retains talented people to study and work here without undue barriers. Although the Scottish Government welcomed the launch of the graduate visa, we continue to engage with the UK Government on ways to improve the system so that it reflects our specific economic, demographic and social needs.

On industrial action, I am of course concerned about any adverse impact on students, but I know that our universities are putting in place appropriate mitigations to minimise disruption to studies. I would expect that to include mitigations for international students, which are currently being worked up.

Although matters concerning pay and working conditions are for universities to determine on a UK-wide basis, I encourage Scottish university employers and trade unions to engage in constructive and meaningful dialogue in pursuit of a resolution.

**Maggie Chapman:** The minister will be aware that the current marking and assessment boycott is part of more than four years of industrial action, including strikes by University and College Union members, because their pay and conditions continue to degrade. They know that their actions will affect students, but staff employment conditions are students' learning conditions, and the deterioration of one is bad for the other.

Ensuring the quality and timely administration of degrees, including for international students, is the responsibility of universities' management.

Will the minister outline what, if any, further engagement is planned to ensure that management responds to staff concerns about making their lives liveable, whether he considers intimidation with financial penalties to be appropriate, and what more the Scottish Government can do to ensure that international students on visas are not adversely affected?

**Graeme Dey:** Presiding Officer, you will allow me a moment to answer that in some detail.

Universities are autonomous institutions and, as such, matters concerning pay and working conditions are for them to determine in consultation with trade unions. However, I have met university leaders and will meet the UCU in the coming weeks. I am encouraging all concerned to get back around the table, because industrial action benefits nobody, least of all the students.

Regarding the possibility of institutions imposing financial penalties on staff who are involved in the marking boycott, I would expect fair work principles to be applied. I was pleased to see Queen Margaret University step back from its initial stance in that regard.

In response to concerns about the impact on international students, the Scottish Funding Council and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education have indicated that there is scope for the marking boycott to affect aspects of international students' studies. I understand that there are circumstances in which students can apply to extend their study visa, but that there is a cost associated with that.

I know that universities are taking steps to mitigate the impact of a boycott, particularly on fourth-year students. However, clearly, all that would best be avoided. I therefore encourage both sides to resume discussions.

#### Online Pornography (Education on Dangers)

**2. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to help educate children and young people about any dangers of online pornography. (S6O-02245)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth):** Through the Scottish curriculum, curriculum for excellence, secondary school pupils learn about the damaging and exploitative aspects of pornography and how it can negatively affect mental health and healthy relationships. Pupils learn about that topic as part of their learning in relationships, sexual health and parenthood education.



**Pauline McNeill:** The cabinet secretary might be aware that, earlier this month, the Children's Commissioner for England published a second report on the impact of pornography on children. The report focuses on the harms that children face from accessing violent pornography and how that might influence their own harmful sexual behaviour. That is why regulation of online material is so critical to the protection of children and young people. I agree with the Children's Commissioner for England that no child should be able to access or watch pornography.

Worryingly, the report found that one victim said that their abuser made references to things that he had seen on porn. Two young girls said that they felt that they had been treated like porn stars by their abuser. I have mentioned the lack of data in Scotland in relation to the matter in the chamber previously. Does the cabinet secretary think that it is important to collect that type of data? Should the new Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland consider the collection of such data a priority?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Pauline McNeill raises a really important matter. I have not been sighted of the report from the Children's Commissioner for England that she mentioned. I will certainly be apprised of it following portfolio questions because it is hugely important that we have a granular understanding of the challenge in Scotland.

On the point that Pauline McNeill made about regulation, regulation of the internet is a reserved matter and falls to the United Kingdom Government. We have been engaging with the UK Government on the Online Safety Bill, which would introduce additional measures to protect vulnerable children online. Pauline McNeill has made a valid point.

I look forward to working with the new children's commissioner who will take up post later this year.

### **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Support for Teachers and Educators)**

3. **Stuart McMillan:** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to better support teachers and educators who work with learners with ADHD. (S6O-02246)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth):** We want all children and young people, including those who have ADHD, to get the support that is needed for them to reach their full potential. We work closely with partners, including Education Scotland, to ensure that teaching staff have access to a range of free professional learning and developmental resources. Those include free learning modules for practitioners on inclusive practice that are available via the Open University.

On 30 November last year, we published our updated additional support for learning action plan, which outlines further work that we will take on ASL to ensure that teaching staff continue to receive training to support all children with additional support needs, including those with ADHD.

**Stuart McMillan:** Although I recognise that Scotland's teaching staff are committed to providing all children and young people in their care with the support that they need to succeed, too many occasions have been brought to my attention on which, for a variety of reasons, that has not been done to the parents' satisfaction. Will the cabinet secretary indicate whether the Scottish Government will consider publishing updated guidance for teachers and educators on how best to support children and young people with ADHD, including those who do not have a diagnosis but present with ADHD symptoms?

**Jenny Gilruth:** As Stuart McMillan outlined, in our model of additional support for learning, support in school does not require a formal diagnosis of a particular condition. However, I recognise that a diagnosis can help families and our young people to understand how they can better deal with and respond to additional support needs. More broadly, other professionals who work in our education sector but are not teachers can help to provide specialism in that regard, too.

Through our additional support for learning action plan, we have committed to building on and developing the suite of resources that are already available to meet the needs of children and young people. As part of that work, the project board subgroup on training and resources will consider how to improve the support for neurodiverse learners, including those with ADHD.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a number of supplementaries and I want to get them all in. They will need to be reasonably brief, as will the responses.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I remind the chamber that I am the vice chair of the ADHD Foundation and have an ADHD diagnosis myself. With as many as one in five children in the classroom having a neurodevelopmental disorder, training in teaching children with neurodevelopmental disorders should be not optional but something that all teachers must have. Will the cabinet secretary confirm what conversations she has had with the General Teaching Council for Scotland about incorporating that in initial teacher education?

**Jenny Gilruth:** A number of teaching unions raised the issue with me directly over the weekend. I recognise some of the challenges in our classrooms. It is worth putting on record the

increase in the number of pupils with additional support needs in Scotland's schools. I think that, since 2010, there has been an increase of more than 30 per cent, which is quite substantial. In the past year alone, there has been an increase of more than 8,000 pupils being reported as having an additional support need.

It is crucial that our teaching staff have the professional support that Daniel Johnson spoke to. Of course, the GTCS has a crucial role to play in that regard. It has a requirement that 35 hours of professional development for teachers be completed within the year. What that development focuses on is at the teacher's discretion but I take the member's point on working with the GTCS on the issue, particularly noting the national increase in recent years in the number of additional support needs in our schools.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** In February, members of the Education, Children and Young People Committee were told that

"provision for young disabled people when they move on from school is a national disgrace."

and that for young people transitioning out of school,

"It is a messy and terrifying place out there at the moment, particularly given the lack of co-ordinated plans."—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 1 February 2023; c 18.]

With our college and university sectors strapped for cash, what action is the Scottish National Party Government taking to support individuals with ASN who attend university and college?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I will not answer on the specifics about universities and colleges because the initial question was focused on school education, although I would be happy to write to Pam Gosal on the transition period. I recognise that it is potentially a challenge for some young people.

In relation to school education, we have co-ordinated support plans—CSPs—that follow, or should follow, a young person as they transition, for example, from primary to secondary. It is really imperative that we in Government work with our partners in the university sector and in colleges to ensure that that co-ordinated support plan is followed through.

I would be more than happy to write to the member with some additional information in relation to the specific point on higher education.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** The questions today have mentioned ADHD and additional support needs. I go back to the original question about ADHD, which is a disability. Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, on which evidence is being taken

today, gives a right to "special care" in education for children with a disability.

Can the Scottish Government explain how it is meeting that requirement for special care in education with the support that is being given to ADHD sufferers?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Be as brief as possible, cabinet secretary.

**Jenny Gilruth:** A direct response to the member's question is that we currently have the highest record of support staff in our schools. In 2022, 307 additional pupil support assistants were recruited, which built on the increase of more than 1,000 from the previous year, bringing the total number of pupil support staff to 16,606. That increase is a direct result of continued investment from the Government.

However, I recognise the member's point that, more broadly, we will need to go further to ensure that the increase in additional support needs in our schools is adequately supported in our classrooms. I committed over the weekend to working with the teaching unions on that very issue and I have already committed to the member's colleagues that I will work directly with the GTCS on the professional requirements for teachers as they undergo teacher training.

#### Universal Free School Meals

4. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to roll out universal free school meals. (S6O-02247)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth):** We remain committed to the expansion of free school meals in primary and special schools as described in our programme for government. All primary school pupils in primaries 1 to 5, children in funded early learning and childcare and eligible pupils in primary 6 through to secondary 6 can benefit from free meals in Scotland—the most generous provision anywhere in the United Kingdom—which saves parents £400 per eligible child per year.

Our additional investment that was announced in December 2022 will continue to fund the expansion of free school meals to all primary 6 and 7 pupils who are in receipt of the Scottish child payment. That will be the next step in fulfilling our commitment to universal provision in primary schools.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Three weeks ago, the cabinet secretary said that the Scottish National Party was committed to piloting free school meals in secondary schools. However, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have suggested that a targeted approach would be better. Can the

cabinet secretary clear up that confusion and confirm whether the SNP Government is committed to piloting universal free school meals in secondary schools? If so, when will that start?

**Jenny Gilruth:** As the member said, the issue was raised in the chamber only three weeks ago. We are still very much committed to that secondary school pilot. It is important that we roll out that pilot so that we can learn how things might operate.

As I intimated in my initial response, we are also committed to universal provision in primary schools. That is being phased in through a process in which we are adhering to the Scottish child payment as a requirement for primary 6 and 7 pupils. However, we remain committed to universal roll-out in primary schools and to the secondary school pilot that the member mentioned.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** At the food for thought parliamentary reception last week, young people made it really clear that hunger does not end at the primary school gate, so the pilot scheme for secondary schools is important. What steps will the Government take to ensure that young people are involved in co-designing the pilot scheme and in the on-going roll-out of universal free school meals?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I was not in Parliament last Thursday, but I saw from social media that the event was well attended. I look forward to working with Monica Lennon on the issue, which we discussed at a previous portfolio question time. She makes a very valid point about co-design, and I would be more than happy to meet her to discuss that.

I have not yet met officials to talk about some of the proposals in relation to the secondary school pilot and how it might be administered in the future. I am more than happy to engage with the member on that really important issue for young people and with our young people directly on the roll-out.

### **Modern Apprenticeships (Motherwell and Wishaw)**

**5. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to promote modern apprenticeships to constituents in Motherwell and Wishaw. (S6O-02248)

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey):** Skills Development Scotland provides an all-age career service in every local authority to highlight the options that are available to people across Scotland, including modern apprenticeships. SDS undertakes further activity,

together with employers, to highlight the importance of modern apprenticeships, particularly through Scottish apprenticeship week.

Developing the Young Workforce facilitates engagement between employers and schools to highlight vocational pathways and support young people to transition into work. I met young people on work experience at a recent DYW Lanarkshire visit to Enevate Homes in Wishaw to observe that at first hand.

**Clare Adamson:** Today, I was delighted to attend the skills demonstration outside the Parliament that was hosted by the Scottish Traditional Building Forum, where I tried my hand at some slate cutting. I do not think that it is something that I see in my future, but seeing young people engaging in those endeavours was very exciting.

I understand that the initiative has not yet been rolled out across the country. Does the minister agree that supporting such heritage skills workshops through local schools is vital to promoting rewarding careers and delivering on the objectives of the developing the young workforce strategy?

**Graeme Dey:** I also tried the slate cutting, and I have to admit that the results are sitting in my office, not in public view.

The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee is right to highlight the importance of ensuring that we have the right traditional skills available to sustain our historic environment and progress our journey to net zero. Historic Environment Scotland continues to champion traditional skills and works with stakeholders to address traditional skill gaps to ensure that Scotland's historic buildings can thrive as part of the country's sustainable future. The role of colleges in all that will be essential, as will be the partnership working that I indicated.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Modern apprenticeships are essential to training and upskilling our workforce. Many constituents across my region will be concerned about the sector's future and viability. Last week, the Scottish Training Federation said:

"Scottish Government delays in setting its skills and employability budgets this year is having a devastating impact on training providers. Many have made staff redundant, and several are on the brink of closure."

If that comes to pass, it will have a devastating impact in my region, including in the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency. I say to the minister that this is a matter of urgency. When will the Scottish Government get its act together and support the industry? When will those budgets be confirmed?

**Graeme Dey:** That was a typically positive contribution from the Conservatives.

We have been focused on delivering the target of 25,000 modern apprenticeships. As part of that process, Skills Development Scotland has been redistributing some places that have not been taken up—it is doing that as we speak.

On the budget, that matter is being worked on just now, and we will provide further detail in due course.

**Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** Outside Parliament today, there is a construction and traditional skills demonstration, with young people from the industry delivering mini master classes to school pupils. I spoke with students who emphasised the importance of industry-based courses at colleges and universities across Scotland. They highlighted how important skills-based labour courses are to our heritage sector and how positively they can contribute to industry recruitment overall. Can the minister advise how the withdrawal of funding to universities and colleges is expected to impact on those essential industry-based courses?

**Graeme Dey:** I think that that betrays a lack of understanding of what the £46 million was for. It was transition funding. The actual teaching grant remained at the same level as it was last year. I recognise that that will still present challenges for some of our colleges and universities, but I know that they are committed to preserving some of these skills in partnership with the heritage agencies.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 was not lodged.

### Colleges and Universities (Funding)

7. **Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the withdrawal of £46 million of funding for colleges and universities has had on their ability to deliver courses. (S6O-02250)

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey):** The removal of the £46 million does not impact the core teaching fund that was allocated to colleges and universities for academic year 2023-24, which has been maintained at the same level as it was for academic year 2022-23, despite the very challenging financial environment. *[Interruption.]*

I hear Stephen Kerr chuntering from a sedentary position but, as he heard at yesterday's meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, the money was for transition purposes, some of which I identified at the committee.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Despite the minister's answer, the principal and chief executive officer of City of Glasgow College, Paul Little, has said that the loss of the £26 million from the college sector's budget has further compounded significant financial pressures and forced colleges to make compulsory redundancies.

Having visited the college, I have been impressed with it, but I am deeply troubled by the fact that budget cuts are leading to more than 100 staff losing their jobs. I have been flooded with letters, with one constituent saying:

"I urge you to intervene in this matter and to investigate why funding has not been made available to avoid this redundancy situation ... My colleagues deserve ... better treatment than this."

Will the minister offer some support and tell us what support the Scottish Government will provide to colleges that are being forced to consider redundancies?

**Graeme Dey:** I marvel at the brass neck of the Tories. Never mind imposing a damaging Brexit on the United Kingdom that will particularly harm the university sector or the impact of Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng trashing the UK economy—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, I ask you to resume your seat.

We have got through portfolio question time so far with the questions being asked and responded to without heckling. If members resist heckling, we will get through all the supplementary questions, too.

You may resume, minister.

**Graeme Dey:** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I was going to make the point that, just this lunch time, my friend Liz Smith was sitting on the Conservative benches calling on the Government to take a lower-tax approach, which would have meant the money available for our public services being reduced. We cannot have it both ways.

This is a serious matter. We are actively engaged with colleges, and we are working on flexibilities and other measures that would help to alleviate the challenges—there are challenges that they face—and improve the situation for them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A number of members have requested to ask a supplementary question. I suspect that I will not get through them all, but I will do my best. Willie Rennie should be brief.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The minister knows that there is incredulity and frustration in the college and university sectors that the first step that he took was to cut £46

million from their funding. That will not help colleges and universities to transition to the new future that the minister wants to see. If new funds become available, can he confirm that that will be his first and top priority for investment?

**Graeme Dey:** As I said at the Education, Children and Young People Committee meeting yesterday, from my perspective—we have already indicated that we will look to address this—if there was an improvement in the funding situation, by working with colleges and universities, that would, of course, be a priority for the education portfolio.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** The minister confirmed this week that the funding had been reallocated to account for the pay deal that was reached with school teachers. Does he accept that the reversal of promised funding, combined with more than 10 years of real-terms cuts to the sector, is limiting the ability to offer a fair pay deal to staff? Does he accept that teaching staff in all phases of education should be properly remunerated for their work?

**Graeme Dey:** I do believe that education staff should be properly remunerated for their work.

But here we go again. I have said this to the Conservatives and even more often to the Labour Party: the same money cannot be spent twice. If Labour wants to spend money on something else, that is fine, but it needs to tell us where the money is coming from.

I want to correct one small point. It is a point of fact that, since 2012-13, college resource budgets have increased by £168 million in cash terms.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Liam Kerr should be very brief.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** In North East Scotland College's latest accounts, the principal of the college warned that,

"if the College is required to reduce costs further then student experiences and outcomes will suffer, significantly."

Did the minister consider the impact on NESCol of withdrawing the £46 million? What does he predict the impact will be on its ability to deliver?

**Graeme Dey:** We were, of course, aware that there would be an adverse impact from the withdrawal of the funding because of the transition measures that it was going to fund. However, the decision was not taken lightly. In many ways, there was no decision—the money had to be found. I find that regrettable, and I am disappointed that we had to do that, but if Mr Kerr was aware of the conversations starting to happen with all colleges—including North East Scotland College—he would know that we are looking actively at what we can do to give them the sustainable future that they require.

### **After-school Clubs and Out-of-term Activities (Access)**

**8. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting local authorities to ensure that school children from disadvantaged communities have access to after-school clubs and other activities outside of the school term. (S6O-02251)

**The Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise (Natalie Don):** Since 2021, we have invested £25 million in summer holiday programmes that have provided activities, food and childcare. Our priority now is to take the next steps in building a system of school-age childcare to provide year-round childcare support for families on low incomes in order to support sustainable employment. To do that, we are targeting our £15 million investment this year at community-based projects that will deliver year-round childcare and activities. We are rightly focusing on delivering lasting change for families and communities that need support the most.

**Evelyn Tweed:** In my Stirling constituency, there are gaps in after-school club provision. Can the minister advise how support from the Scottish Government could assist local authorities in identifying those gaps and how they would go about applying for that support?

**Natalie Don:** The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 requires local authorities to consult parents about their out-of-school care and school-age childcare needs every two years and to plan and publish information on whether and how they will provide appropriate childcare, taking account of those responses. Local authorities should therefore have access to appropriate information that is relevant to their local communities.

The approach that we are taking, in building a system of school-age childcare, is person centred and place based. It involves engaging with local communities to support the design and delivery of services, initially in our early adopter areas. We will share those findings and identify new early adopter areas this year.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio question time. There will be a brief pause to allow front-bench teams to change positions.

## Non-domestic Rates

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a statement by Tom Arthur on delivery of the agreed recommendations of the Barclay review on non-domestic rates. The minister will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:26

**The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur):** I am pleased to provide a statement on the implementation of the independent Barclay review of non-domestic rates.

The Barclay review was commissioned in 2016 with a remit to explore how the rates system could better support business growth and long-term investment and reflect changing marketplaces. I thank Ken Barclay and his colleagues Professor Russel Griggs, David Henderson, Isobel d’Inverno and Nora Senior for their work on the review.

The report, which was published in August 2017, made 30 recommendations. The majority of those were accepted by the Scottish Government and I am pleased to report that all the agreed recommendations have now been implemented. To deliver that, we engaged, consulted and worked closely with local authorities, assessors and businesses. We introduced primary legislation—the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020—and a range of statutory instruments, as well as making administrative changes.

This afternoon, I would like to highlight a number of the key policy changes that stemmed from the Barclay review. Supporting business growth was core to the remit of the Barclay review and we have implemented recommendations to improve economic performance and to encourage investment.

The business growth accelerator relief is the only relief of its type in the United Kingdom aimed at supporting property growth and property improvements. We introduced the relief in 2018 and, this year alone, the relief is forecast to save ratepayers £15 million.

To better incentivise the reoccupation of empty properties and therefore support our town centres, we expanded fresh start relief to cover all property types. We further extended it this year, making it available to properties with a rateable value of up to £100,000.

For the renewable energy sector more specifically, we commissioned an independent review of small-scale hydro schemes—the Tretton review. Following publication of that report in 2020, we provided more certainty for investors by

guaranteeing 60 per cent relief for hydro generators until 2032.

Barclay considered both ends of the property scale, large and small. A reduction in the large business supplement was recommended and, in 2020, we introduced an intermediate property rate. In April, we raised the rateable value threshold at which the higher property rate applies. Over 95 per cent of properties in Scotland are now liable for a lower property rate than would apply anywhere else in the UK, and we remain committed to reducing the higher property rate when that is affordable.

We also commissioned an independent review of the small business bonus scheme—the SBBS—by the Fraser of Allander Institute. Its findings were reported in 2022 and we convened a short-life working group to consider its recommendation to collect new information to enable a more robust assessment of the impact of the SBBS.

We are committed to evidence-based evaluation and policy development to ensure that our support schemes are effective and deliver value for money. However, acknowledging the concerns that were raised by the working group about additional red tape and burdens on business, we are not currently planning to introduce any new reporting requirements for SBBS relief recipients. The SBBS remains the most generous scheme of its kind in the UK. We have introduced changes this year to make it more progressive and it continues to take 100,000 properties out of rates altogether.

This year saw the revaluation of all non-domestic properties following a six-year gap. The Barclay review recommended more frequent revaluations to reduce volatility and shorter tone dates to allow rateable values to more closely reflect market trends. The revaluation marks the introduction of the first three-year revaluation cycle, with valuations based on a one-year tone date. New rateable values for non-domestic properties across the UK came into effect on 1 April, but in Scotland they are based on market conditions as at 1 April 2022, compared with a year earlier, 1 April 2021, in England and Wales. That ensures that values in Scotland more accurately reflect up-to-date rental market data and, specifically for this revaluation, reduces the risks of the Covid-19 pandemic distorting rateable values.

Earlier today, a report on the impact of the 2023 revaluation was published. The report details changes in rateable values as a result of the revaluation, both by property class and by area, as well as resulting changes to gross bills—that is, after the application of general revaluation transitional relief, which we introduced to protect

those that were seeing large increases in rateable values due to revaluation.

The Barclay review also recommended a number of measures that are aimed at improving ratepayers' experience, including improving transparency and increasing efficiency. Assessors are now required to publish a draft valuation roll on 30 November the year before revaluation, as well as to publish lists for prescribed property types of the comparable properties that they used to determine the basic rate for revaluation.

In advance of the next revaluation in 2026, we are committed to exploring whether further improvements can be made to the transparency of valuations. We also introduced a new two-stage appeal system on 1 April, which took place alongside the transfer of valuation appeal committees to the Scottish tribunals. The new appeals system ensures that there is greater transparency and fairness, encouraging earlier information sharing and quicker resolution of cases for ratepayers, which is important for the success of three-yearly revaluations. We are committed to a fair and transparent non-domestic rates system that provides a level playing field.

The Barclay review recommended the creation of a general anti-avoidance rule, and the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 introduced regulation-making powers to empower councils to tackle rates avoidance tactics. The first anti-avoidance regulations under those powers came into force last month, delivering commitments in the Bute house agreement and the 2021 programme for government.

A number of other changes have also been made to level the playing field for all ratepayers: owners of self-catering properties that are liable for non-domestic rates became required, from 1 April 2021, to provide evidence of those properties being actually let for 70 days per year, in addition to being available for let 140 days in the year.

We removed the financial incentive for councils to award charity or sports relief to arm's-length external organisations and the eligibility for charitable rates relief from mainstream independent schools. We published statutory guidance on discretionary sports relief to ensure that it supports affordable community-based facilities.

We restricted the small business bonus scheme to occupied properties, focusing the relief on economically active premises, and previously exempt property in parks became rateable from 1 April.

We want to encourage empty properties back into economic use and the Barclay review recommended a number of reforms to empty property relief. However, those were superseded

when we devolved the relief to councils on 1 April this year. The reform was accompanied by a revenue transfer to councils of £105 million a year for three years, which is significantly more than the estimated cost of maintaining the national relief, in light of the decision to freeze the poundage this year. That delivers greater fiscal empowerment, as local authorities may use that money as they see fit, according to the needs of businesses and communities in their areas, which includes using it for discretionary local empty property relief. We will undertake an initial review of the devolution of empty property relief in advance of the next revaluation.

I have outlined key reforms and changes and significant progress that we have made following the Barclay review to deliver a system that better supports business growth and long-term investment, increases fairness and transparency and improves ratepayers' experience. The UK Government's fundamental review of business rates, which concluded in 2021, made recommendations that Scotland had already or has since implemented.

It is important to recognise that non-domestic rates are an important source of revenue to fund the local services on which we all rely. We continue to offer a strong non-domestic rates package; we have responded to calls from businesses to freeze the poundage and offered reliefs that are worth almost £750 million this year alone.

It will take time for the Barclay reforms to bed in and longer still for them to be evaluated. In line with the framework for tax, we want to provide certainty, convenience and efficiency to ratepayers. However, we also want the door to remain open to discussions about further improvements to the rates system.

In his statement on 18 April, the First Minister acknowledged the need for a new approach to the Government's relationship with business. On Monday this week, we announced the creation of a new deal for business group. One of the group's aims will be to establish a consultative sub-group to advise on further enhancements to the operation and administration of the non-domestic rates system, following the final implementation of the independent Barclay review. I will chair that sub-group and I look forward to it being set up and to hearing the business community's views.

As part of the new deal for local government, I will ensure that local government's views are fully taken into account when any further enhancements to the NDR system are considered. I have also written to invite the spokespeople from the other parties to raise their NDR concerns with me. I look forward to the constructive engagement that will take place between me and Opposition

party spokespeople and I look forward to the questions that will be asked this afternoon.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow 20 minutes for that, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I encourage members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button if they have not done so.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the minister for the prior sight of his statement. I will ask three questions. The minister is well aware that the Scottish Retail Consortium has persistently demanded the restoration of parity with England on the higher property rate. Such parity was promised in the Scottish National Party's manifesto in 2021, so why has it still not been secured? That adds to what the Scottish Retail Consortium has described as "damaging perceptions" about Scotland's lack of competitiveness.

Secondly, when the review was published in 2017, Kenneth Barclay rightly made it clear that all 30 of his recommendations were aimed at improving Scotland's economic climate. Does the minister accept that retail, hospitality and leisure industries have been put at significant disadvantage because, despite having the Barnett consequential to do so, the Scottish Government would not commit in the recent budget to the 75 per cent rates relief in 2023-24 that is available in England?

Thirdly, does the minister believe that, as the highest-taxed part of the UK, Scotland is in line with the competitive ambition that Ken Barclay expressed?

**Tom Arthur:** On the higher property rate, my statement touched on the fact that we are operating in demanding fiscal circumstances, but we are committed to meeting the commitment on that rate when that is affordable and finances allow.

Because of the small business bonus scheme, which is the most generous of its type, about 50 per cent of retail, hospitality and leisure premises pay no rates. As we move towards the budget process for next year, ministerial colleagues will be more than happy to discuss Opposition party priorities, but I note that allocating additional revenue to non-domestic rates relief would require revenue to be taken from other budget lines.

With regard to the overall net tax position in Scotland, it is important to look at that in aggregate because, in Scotland, we deliver a social contract that is unparalleled in other parts of the UK, and that is made possible only because of our progressive approach to taxation. Of course,

all decisions around tax will be set out at the budget, in line with established processes.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I thank the minister for prior sight of his statement. I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests: I am director of a company with retail interests and, indeed, it is probably important to add that my constituency office benefits from the small business bonus scheme.

I look forward to engaging with wider reform of non-domestic rates. The analysis that the minister alluded to leads with the point that the median rateable value increased by £450. With the median rateable value being below the small business bonus threshold, what is the actual aggregate rise in bills? Is it the 12.5 per cent that is mentioned on page 13 of that report? How does that compare to economic growth over the period?

One of Barclay's recommendations was about having national standards on assessment methodology, and the review also called for a statutory body, if needed. I ask the minister for his reflections on whether such a statutory body is needed at this time. Although he might not want to acquiesce to the calls for a 75 per cent discount, many small businesses complain about being at a competitive disadvantage compared to England, so has the Scottish Government assessed what impact that differential has had on Scottish businesses?

**Tom Arthur:** The total gross bill has increased by £127 million, which is 3.37 per cent after adjustments for the general revaluation transitional relief.

With regard to a statutory body, we have sought to increase standardisation through our reforms of the appeal process. As part of the discussions that we have through the sub-group of the new deal for business group and, indeed, engagement with Opposition party spokespeople, I am happy to explore what further standardisation and simplification could be undertaken.

With regard to the competitive position vis-à-vis the rest of the UK, we take a range of factors into consideration during our budget-setting process. As I touched on earlier, we provide the most generous social contract anywhere in the UK, which is made possible by our progressive approach to taxation. Where Opposition members feel that there should be a change to taxation policy, whether that be on income tax or on non-domestic rates, we are open to those discussions, but it is incumbent on Opposition spokespeople to identify not just the additional spend that they wish to see but where the corresponding reduction would take place elsewhere in the budget. I look forward to those discussions.



**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** In his statement, the minister mentioned the new deal with business. Can he tell us more about how that is progressing and, particularly, whether it might lead to further enhancements to the NDR system?

**Tom Arthur:** My colleague Neil Gray, the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy, co-chaired the first meeting of the new deal for business group yesterday afternoon. It will be agreeing the parameters and priorities for the new deal and how the agreed sub-groups will be established. As I mentioned in my statement, the consultative sub-group will be established to advise on further enhancements to the operation and administration of the non-domestic rates system, following the final implementation of the Barclay review. More details, including the membership of the sub-group, will be confirmed in due course. I very much look forward to engaging with the sub-group and Opposition spokespeople. In addition, my door is open to any member of the Parliament who wishes to engage on any matters that pertain to my portfolio, including non-domestic rates.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The minister mentioned the Tretton review of rating for small-scale hydro schemes, which we all want to support as part of our transition to net zero. Many of those schemes have seen punitive increases in their rateable value, potentially putting their viability at risk. The temporary relief that the minister mentioned is very welcome, but it does not provide the necessary long-term certainty that investors in those schemes want to see, as Scottish Land & Estates points out in its briefing to MSPs. Are we going to get a permanent solution to that significant issue, so that small-scale hydro ramps up to the levels that we all want to see?

**Tom Arthur:** Mr Fraser raises a very important set of questions. Of course, we will keep all of our non-domestic rates policies under review, in line with not just policy aspirations but affordability and other Government priorities.

We all recognise that there is a big role for the Scottish Government in realising the potential of hydro, and there is also a big role for the UK Government in realising that potential. We are committed to working collaboratively and constructively, using the powers that we have at our disposal, to ensure that hydro can flourish and play the important role that it can and must play in reaching net zero by 2045.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Small businesses are the beating heart of Glasgow's economy and culture. My constituency is home to the Subversion gallery, which is located in the west end. As a small business, it is eligible for the small business bonus scheme, the benefits

of which I know have been a lifesaver to many businesses across the country. Will the minister confirm how many Glasgow small businesses are eligible for the scheme and how much that has invested back into Glasgow's economy?

**Tom Arthur:** Our statistics show that, as at 1 July 2022, 11,410 business premises in Glasgow received the small business bonus scheme relief, with more than 90 per cent of those premises receiving a 100 per cent reduction. That has saved ratepayers in Glasgow an estimated £33 million in 2022-23 alone, and more than £160 million cumulatively over the past five years, between 2018-19 and 2022-23.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The changes introduced under Barclay on self-catering properties were already well out of date when they were announced. Wales introduced the 140-day rule back in 2010. A year later, the Government has announced more consultation on taxation affecting housing. In the spirit of suggesting areas of additional funding, will the Government consider including in that consultation abolishing the short-term lets rates relief, which could save councils £21 million?

**Tom Arthur:** I thank Mr Griffin for raising our on-going live consultation on potential reforms to council tax regarding second homes and empty properties and to NDR. As he will appreciate, those areas are interrelated, which is why, as well as asking specific questions on the proposition around council tax as it applies to empty properties and second homes, we also asked the question on NDR. I encourage all members to engage with that consultation and to promote it among their stakeholders and networks. Of course, we will report back to Parliament on the conclusion of the consultation.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** The review has offered local authorities an opportunity to incentivise the occupation of vacant properties by allowing them to consider applying an NDR charge in respect of empty properties. Does the minister agree that that provides an opportunity to breathe new life back into vacant town and city centre properties, which have regrettably become a more common feature of many streetscapes in Scotland?

**Tom Arthur:** The member raises a very important point. We are taking a number of actions across Government to support our town centres, which are being led by my colleague Joe FitzPatrick, who is the minister with responsibility for planning and regeneration.

With regard to the role that NDR can play, we have devolved empty property relief to councils as of 1 April this year. As I referred to in my statement, we are providing councils with £105

million in extra revenue funding annually over the next three years, which is far more than the expected cost of continuing empty property relief as a national relief, due to the freezing of the poundage.

We are taking a number of measures through the planning system, the tax system and the wider empowerment of local government to support the regeneration of our town centres.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I will press the minister a little bit further on Liz Smith's question about the large business supplement. When I looked back at the 2021 manifesto, it did not mention anything about affordability in that commitment. Of course, it is sensible to have affordability as a characteristic of the policy, but I am sure that that was considered when the manifesto was drafted. Therefore, why has the commitment been watered down, and will it be delivered by 2026, as was promised in the manifesto, especially considering the state of the high street just now?

**Tom Arthur:** I recognise the point that Willie Rennie is making, but I will just add that the challenges that our high street faces are multifaceted. Tax is part of the situation, but the member will appreciate that there is a broader range of factors that have impacts. We have made progress with regard to the number of properties that are eligible for the higher relief. We increased the threshold for the intermediate property rate from £95,000 to £100,000, so that less than 5 per cent of properties are qualifying for the higher rate.

I note that we are two years into a five-year parliamentary session. We have faced the highest inflation in my lifetime—in the lifetime of many of us in the chamber—as well as significant economic pressures. However, we have made a commitment and, as I have said, the decisions will be taken as part of the annual budget process.

I note again that we still have a number of years to run of this parliamentary session. There was a manifesto commitment that was to be delivered over the entire session; we have to take such decisions in the light of affordability at the time. We will, of course, keep members up to date through the annual budget process, as we always do.

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** To elaborate on the relevant comments in his statement, does the minister agree that it was right that, in 2020, Parliament decided to delay revaluation of non-domestic rates from 2022 to 2023 with a tone date of 1 April 2022 instead of 1 April 2020?

**Tom Arthur:** I absolutely agree with that. The Barclay review highlighted the dangers of economic volatility occurring between the

revaluation date and the tone date, which I know Ben Macpherson will be well aware of. The challenges around the tone date were the key determinant in the decision to delay revaluation.

If revaluation had not been delayed, the tone date would have fallen on 1 April 2020—just three weeks after Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic and during a period when many businesses had stopped trading. The tone date would not have delivered rateable values that reflect post-Covid economic conditions, because the rental markets would not have adjusted. Similarly, a tone date of 1 April 2021 would have been unsuitable because the volatility in the commercial property market continued.

We remain committed to three-yearly revaluation with a one-year tone date, with the next revaluation being scheduled to take effect on 1 April 2026.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Following Daniel Johnson's example, I note that my constituency office, too, benefits from the SBBS.

Analysis by the Scottish Parliament information centre in 2020 found that shooting estates benefit to the tune of £10 million a year from non-domestic rates relief through their eligibility for the small business bonus scheme. I am glad that, in response to the Barclay review, a review of the SBBS took place and some reforms were made. However, does the minister agree that shooting estates simply should not be eligible for such a tax break?

**Tom Arthur:** Shooting rights and deer forests were added to the valuation roll with effect from 1 April 2017, following the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016. In 2021-22, shooting rights and deer forests raised £1.7 million in non-domestic rates income and were in receipt of £4.9 million in reliefs including the small business bonus scheme and empty property relief. I acknowledge Ross Greer's views on these matters, and am keen to discuss them with him as part of my on-going engagement on NDR with members of all political parties.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** From the impact report, we can see that 70 per cent of properties in Aberdeen have had their rateable value reduced. I welcome the cut because I have been campaigning for it for the past seven years. Will the minister now accept that the valuations for Aberdeen were badly wrong and that the Government should have acted sooner to prevent the impact of SNP austerity in the north-east?

**Tom Arthur:** I am sure that Mr Lumsden is aware—I certainly hope that he is—that valuation is conducted independently by Scottish assessors. Valuation is informed by the rental value that is

estimated at the tone date, and it is determined by macroeconomic conditions. It is for assessors to determine valuations. It is for local authorities to administer non-domestic rates and the Government and the Parliament set the overall legislative framework within which that takes place, as well as property rates.

Beyond that, I am happy to engage directly with Mr Lumsden on any specific matters around non-domestic rate reform that he thinks merit further consideration. However, the issue of valuation that he has raised is a matter for the independent Scottish assessors.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government acted decisively at an early stage to implement Barclay review recommendations that did not require primary legislation. I note that the minister has already mentioned measures including expansion of the fresh start relief to help town centres, and changing the business growth accelerator relief. Will he provide more information on whether an evaluation has been done of the impact of the early introduction of those recommendations and their benefit to businesses in Scotland?

**Tom Arthur:** I am happy to inform Michelle Thomson that since the expansion of the fresh start relief it has saved ratepayers an estimated £17 million, between 2018-19 and 2022-23. Since the business growth accelerator relief was introduced it has saved ratepayers an estimated £96 million over the same time period. Our statistics show that, as of 1 July 2022, 320 business premises were in receipt of the fresh start relief, and 450 business premises were in receipt of the business growth accelerator relief. That demonstrates the positive impact that those policies are having.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** The minister seems to know an awful lot about Glasgow, but some people will worry that he is less familiar with the situation outside the central belt. Aberdeen's Union Street has many empty properties. What impact assessments and scenario planning did the minister do on the effect of the reforms on Union Street? What do those reports suggest the outcomes will be?

**Tom Arthur:** I heartily assure Liam Kerr that I am very familiar with Union Street, because I worked in Aberdeen for many years as part of my pre-political career in music. I recognise that Union Street, like many of our high streets across Scotland, has faced a range of challenges—the pandemic, Brexit, the specific challenges that the north-east has faced around oil and gas and the more general challenges that the retail sector has faced due to the changing nature of how people purchase products.

As I highlighted in my statement, the review was an independent review that was chaired by Ken Barclay. Following the review, there was an implementation group and a process of consultation and engagement. That process took place to look at how we set non-domestic rates policy for the whole of Scotland.

Under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, local authorities have a discretionary power whereby they can provide targeted reliefs for their areas. That is an important power and an important piece of fiscal autonomy for local government. We are committed to expanding that, as is demonstrated by the devolution of empty property relief.

## Sustainable Food Supply

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-09014, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland.

14:57

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** Making sure that our nation has a safe and steady food supply is one of the Government's key responsibilities. It is as important now as it was when the emperor Hadrian was worrying about losing access to north African grain-producing regions. Of course, Russia's illegal war against Ukraine has brought into sharp focus how vulnerable global food supply chains still are to unexpected shocks. In addition, key supply chains are still recovering from the impact of the global pandemic.

However, that is a shorter-term issue. Of much greater long-term concern is the completely avoidable disruption that was foisted on Scotland through Brexit. It was the Tories' choice to pursue a hard Brexit that removed us from the European Union, the single market and the customs union. As well as causing trade disruption, it has created significant workforce recruitment and retention issues for Scotland's food and drink sector. Of course, now Labour, too, is committed to Brexit and apparently thinks that it can make the unworkable work, despite all the evidence that shows that Brexit is making our economy poorer.

Brexit has weakened our food and drink sector in so many ways.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** One of the benefits of leaving the European Union is that it has given us the opportunity to take up the technology of gene editing, the current European legislation on which is, according to the European Commission's "Inception Impact Assessment",

"no longer fit for purpose".

Does the cabinet secretary agree with those words?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I am surprised that the member can find even one benefit of Brexit. We will come on to discuss some of those issues later in the debate.

Many exports to the EU have fallen. For example, there has been a 38 per cent fall in fruit and vegetable exports.

**John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP):** I am rather surprised that the Conservatives' extremely

lengthy amendment to the Government's motion, which is in fact longer than the Government's motion, contains absolutely no mention of Brexit. Does that perhaps lead us to believe that the Conservatives are now embarrassed by the impact of Brexit on the Scottish farming economy?

**Mairi Gougeon:** That is exactly the point.

As I was saying, our exports have fallen, with a 38 per cent fall in fruit and vegetable exports, and a 7 per cent fall in dairy and egg exports between 2019 and 2022. Thanks to the Tories' hard Brexit, products including seed potatoes and chilled meats can no longer be exported to the EU at all, entirely cutting high-quality Scottish produce out of that important market and having a knock-on impact on food security in those countries. Most of all, Brexit has harmed our trading relationship with the EU, our most important trade partner and one of the world's biggest agrifood producers.

Those shocks and challenges mean that we must focus more on national food security and build resilience into Scotland's food system as we seek to become a good food nation. We must anticipate and adapt to shocks and challenges as much as we can, and develop policies to try to mitigate them and reduce their likelihood.

That was the aim of the short-life food security and supply task force that I set up last year, in partnership with industry, immediately following the invasion of Ukraine. The task force enabled us to monitor, identify and respond to disruption to our food supply, and its report included a series of short, medium and longer-term recommendations to mitigate impacts, resolve supply issues and strengthen food security in Scotland.

Those recommendations have been substantively met. Most significantly, we now have a food security unit up and running in the Scottish Government. The unit is taking forward the legacy activity of the task force and will develop evidence-based monitoring for supply chain risks, including gathering and co-ordinating the best intelligence about risks and emerging issues.

The supply chain is complex, with every part, from producers to packagers and purchasers, reliant on others. Monitoring and horizon-scanning will provide Government and industry with better insight into global supply chain performance and will help to improve responsiveness to potential short and longer-term crises and challenges.

There is a further long-term challenge for us all to adapt to and address: climate change. In recent years, increasingly severe weather events have impacted the established rhythm of farming practice. Climate change is already affecting our food security and that will only become more acute if we do not transform our land use. If we want to create a more sustainable food supply for

Scotland, we must produce more of our own food and do so more sustainably.

Scotland's food and farming sectors have a critical role to play, producing food for consumption in Scotland and for trade, with exports of food and drink worth £8 billion a year. Scotland's seafood producers, farmers and crofters produce fantastic food. Our manufacturers, processors and distributors ensure that high-quality, sought-after products are prepared, packaged and distributed to a wide range of markets and audiences. We also should not forget the amazing fortitude and resilience that our food chain showed throughout Covid-19.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting our nation's producers, which is why we will maintain direct support payments for food production.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** The cabinet secretary commented on the challenge of climate change. Will she tell us how many of the recommendations that came from farmer-led groups during 2020 have actually been implemented?

**Mairi Gougeon:** That is exactly why we set up the agricultural reform implementation oversight board, which will help us to look at and implement those recommendations. The recommendations from the farmer-led groups are the absolute foundation of our future policy.

Our vision for agriculture has food at its heart, making clear our support for the farmers and crofters who provide the country with healthy and nutritious food while ensuring Scotland meets its world-leading climate and nature restoration targets. Co-development with the sector, through forums such as the agricultural reform implementation oversight board that I just mentioned, will enable the achievement of our shared objectives.

Protecting our natural environment and restoring biodiversity are essential to sustainable and regenerative agriculture. As Parliament agreed on 15 March, the agriculture reform route map shows that there is no contradiction between producing high-quality food and doing so in a way that delivers for climate and nature restoration.

Scotland's marine environment and our seafood sector play important roles in domestic food security and our economic security. Exports of Scottish fish and seafood were valued at £788 million in 2021 and Scottish salmon is the United Kingdom's biggest food export. Our marine environment contributes significantly to our good food nation, with local seafood forming part of the healthy sustainable diet that is the ambition of the local food strategy.

Our "Blue Economy Vision for Scotland" recognises the key role that Scotland's seas and coasts should play in contributing to the nation's future prosperity, especially in remote, coastal, rural and island communities.

However, as Seafood Scotland highlighted last year, Brexit continues to damage the sector's competitiveness, with a knock-on impact on the economy of our coastal and island communities.

In addition, however much the Opposition tries, we cannot escape the fact that Scotland remains vulnerable to the impacts of policies, omissions and poor decision making by Westminster, whoever is in power there. Energy is one such reserved issue, and we have called for energy price setting in the gas and electricity markets, as well as the powers and resources that are needed to tackle rising costs on the scale that is required—powers and resources in the areas of access to borrowing, welfare, VAT on fuel and energy bills, taxation of windfall profits and regulation of the energy market.

We remain concerned that the UK Government's energy bills discount scheme for businesses represents a significant reduction in funding for organisations that are already struggling with their energy costs.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I will not, at the moment. I need to make some progress.

We also need Westminster to act on migration or, better still, to devolve those powers to Scotland. Migration is crucial to our future prosperity and current UK policy is damaging our economy and society. The labour shortage is particularly harmful to Scotland's soft fruit, horticulture and seasonal vegetable production. In those sectors, more than 60 per cent of seasonal workers were recruited through the seasonal workers scheme in 2022, and producers experienced a 50 per cent fall in the return of EU settled status or pre-settled status workers in 2022 compared with 2021.

I have written repeatedly to UK ministerial counterparts to highlight those challenges for Scotland's food supply, but I have yet to see any meaningful engagement—and, judging by Suella Braverman's speech earlier this week, it is hard to see how or when that might happen. Last year, we contacted the UK Government about our proposals for a rural migration pilot—an initiative that was welcomed by the then Home Secretary, Sajid Javid—but we have still not even received a response.

However, I am ever the optimist, and I acknowledge the commitments that the Prime

Minister made in the “Farm to fork” summit that he hosted at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday. It would have been nice to have been invited, given the focus on matters that are of devolved competence, but I welcome his focus, not least on standards and the trade priorities. We want the UK Government to secure coherent trade deals that are nuanced, that protect vital yet sensitive agricultural producers and that deliver in line with our vision for trade.

However, we need the rhetoric to be put into practice in a way that avoids the situation that the former Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs secretary George Eustice MP referred to when he admitted:

“We did not need to give Australia or New Zealand full liberalisation in beef and sheep—it was not in our economic interest to do so”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 14 November 2022; Vol 722, c 424.]

It is therefore essential that the UK Government develops a coherent UK trade strategy that directly addresses the link between trade, the protection of domestic food production and food security. I hope that the constructive approach that the Prime Minister set out on Tuesday will translate into that positive action—and, of course, into hard cash, too, because funding to support food production now comes from Westminster. Since Brexit, the Tories have cut that and shown no willingness to agree a multi-annual funding framework, which we had when we were in the EU.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I am just closing.

I am afraid that, however much the Opposition tries to ignore the elephant in the room, securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland will always be more challenging outside the EU than it was in it. This is a complex issue because we are part of a complex food system and we have to try to balance very different considerations to meet short-term shocks as well as the long-term challenges, not least the climate and nature crises.

Recent challenges demonstrate the need for nuance and for Government to work with sectors and industry to create the right environment, in its widest sense, to support our food supply. We need a healthy natural environment and a highly skilled, motivated workforce, and we need to be able to support farmers, crofters and land managers effectively. We need opportunities to create prosperity through profitable trade deals and more affordable and accessible ways for people to access high-quality food at home. We need technology, innovation and efficient distribution. Haulage is a vital part of the supply chain and I am acutely aware of how important that sector is to our aim of a sustainable food supply for Scotland.

Across the Scottish Government, cabinet secretaries and ministers will do all that they can to achieve that, but it will always be done with one hand tied behind our backs, because only with independence will we have all the powers and levers that we need to focus on the needs and interests of our population.

Crucially, independence will allow us to undo the damage of Brexit: to remove the uncertainty and insecurity that it creates for our food producers, our manufacturers and our people. Brexit demonstrates clearly that rejoining the EU at the earliest opportunity as an independent country represents the best future for Scotland, particularly for our food security.

I move,

That the Parliament commends farmers and crofters, seafood and aquaculture industries, food manufacturers and producers for the role that they play at the heart of rural, coastal and island communities in contributing to Scotland’s £15 billion food and drink industry; notes that the hard Brexit negotiated by the UK Government has created serious, long-term harms for the food and drink sector, creating labour shortages, new barriers to trade and failing to prioritise Scottish interests in third country trade deals; understands the growing impact that the climate emergency is having on food production in Scotland and globally, and applauds the progress that is already being made by the sector to adapt to, and mitigate, climate change; recognises the important work of the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board, and the co-development of effective models to enable producers to produce while delivering for nature and the climate; welcomes the creation of a new, dedicated Food Security Unit as a result of the work of the Short-life Food Security and Supply Taskforce, established by the Scottish Government and industry to consider short- and long-term risks to food security; is concerned at current levels of food inflation; recognises that the UK Government holds the majority of powers and levers to support consumers and the food sector and urges it to act immediately to help them during the cost of living crisis, including with energy costs, and acknowledges that Scotland will need to further adapt how and what is grown and produced to address and mitigate climate change, as well as produce more food more sustainably, to meet Scotland’s commitments to be a Good Food Nation now and in the future.

15:09

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** The warm words from the cabinet secretary are cold comfort when they are not followed up with Government action to help food producers, farmers, coastal communities and rural areas. Today, therefore, I will pick apart some of the glaring inconsistencies between the Scottish National Party’s words and its actions, and I will then move to the positive steps that we as a Parliament could take to secure a sustainable food supply for Scotland.

Unfortunately, the Government motion has again made it clear that the SNP Government is more interested in stoking division than in doing

anything positive to help rural communities. When the SNP Government has nothing positive to say, out come the excuses. Every other sentence is an attempt to create grievance with the UK Government. We hear the usual refrain that it does not have the powers that it needs, despite the fact that this place is one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world. Ministers point the blame elsewhere—it is everybody's fault except the SNP's. It is the same old SNP story.

However, I tell the cabinet secretary that food producers—farmers and workers in Scotland's rural communities—are tired of hearing that. They know that the SNP ministers are acting not for the benefit of rural Scotland but as though they do not care about rural Scotland.

The harsh reality is that the Government sees farmers and fishermen as an inconvenience. It treats them with disdain and it ignores them, and at no point can the Government honestly claim to have put farmers, the fishing industry or the rural community first in any of its policy making. The SNP Government may claim all it likes that it is focused on securing our food supply, but the reality is apparent on the ground in rural areas and is far different from the alternative reality that the SNP Government tries to present. The inconsistencies between the Government's words and its actions are crystal clear. Those actions are not designed to support farmers, crofters, seafood workers, the agricultural sector or anyone in rural, coastal or island communities.

**John Swinney:** What does Rachael Hamilton say to NFU Scotland's horticulture convener, Iain Brown, who has commented on the fact that crops are rotting in the fields of our country because there are not enough workers to harvest those products and who said that the Home Secretary's rhetoric is making the situation worse?

**Rachael Hamilton:** The SNP needs to use the powers that it has. We heard today from my colleague Murdo Fraser that there is more inward migration than ever. Even the First Minister recognised that and said that we need to attract more people to Scotland to live and to work. We support that. I say to the First Minister: sort out the issues of depopulation and lack of housing for rural workers, and actually support the economy.

The SNP talks about developing a sustainable food supply, then acts in a way that would wreck our food supply. We know one of the reasons for that. The words are spoken by the cabinet secretary but, unfortunately, the actions of the Government are dictated by an extremist Green Party. It seems to be their way or Humza's majority hits the highway. Policies on food security are being drawn up by people at Holyrood who have absolutely no understanding of farming,

fishing or any such crucial elements of the rural economy—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Hamilton, I suggest that referring to members by their first names is not how we proceed in the Parliament.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I apologise. I will call Humza Yousaf the First Minister of Scotland.

I will take first the most obvious example: the proposals by the SNP and the Green Party for highly protected marine areas, which would ban fishing in large sections in Scotland's seas. How exactly would reducing the amount of fish that we catch right here on our shores and, instead, flying in costly imports from abroad secure a sustainable food supply? Before it was consumed, our food would have flown more miles than the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture in an average week. Fishermen made their feelings very clear when they heckled the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands last week, and I hope that she reflects on the strength of feeling that she encountered.

Then there is the apparent contradiction between the Government's talk of supporting island communities and the SNP's disastrous handling of the ferry-building contracts. It may be 10 years before vessels 801 or 802 are finished. During that time, islanders face cancellations and delays that are damaging businesses and ruining their way of life.

The gap between SNP words and actions does not end there. The Government talks of producing more food locally but will not even consider gene editing, which would keep food prices affordable while supporting farmers to earn a living. The Government's opposition to gene editing is based not on science or evidence but solely on political and ideological grounds, because the SNP wants to comply with whatever the EU says.

Maybe the most clear example of the SNP's confused rural policies is the fact that it keeps trying to split up the country, which would create a hard border with our biggest trading partners and rip up the internal market that the success of food production relies on so much. Nothing would do more damage to Scotland's food security than separation from the rest of the United Kingdom.

All those examples demonstrate the issue that rural and coastal communities have with the SNP and the massive gulf between rhetoric and reality. The reality is that SNP policies will mean that Scottish people get higher food prices and reduced quality—[*Interruption.*] We will not meet net zero targets, as we will need to import more costly food from abroad. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members!

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Does Rachael Hamilton think that 20 per cent food inflation right now is acceptable?

**Rachael Hamilton:** Jim Fairlie knows full well that food inflation has happened because of Putin's invasive attack on Ukraine. There is no acknowledgment of that. By contrast, at the recent Scottish Conservative conference I launched a paper entitled "Scotland's food future"—[*Interruption.*].

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members! We need to listen to the member who has the floor. Ms Hamilton, please continue.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The paper is about how we can support farmers and agricultural workers to keep producing the high-quality local food that is grown right here in Scotland and for which we are highly renowned. Our positive plans would bring more local jobs to rural communities, keep food prices as affordable as possible and give farmers support.

The proposals in "Scotland's food future" would also help to meet our net zero and climate change targets, because food that we support farmers to grow locally is better for the environment. It is vital that we focus on food security, because it means that we will have access to a wide and healthy range of first-class food without—as I said—having to import costly food that is flown in from abroad.

We also put forward plans for a Scottish genetic technology bill to help Scottish farmers and crofters by giving them the ability to grow more food with the same land. Our plans would also create a rural investment bank to provide an alternative source of investment for innovative farmers and support the wider rural economy. We would also set a 60:60 target for local procurement so that mainland councils are required to look locally for the bulk of their food. The Scottish Government could take all those steps and I urge it to do so immediately, because food security really matters, but it does not matter to the SNP anywhere near as much as it claims that it does.

I move amendment S6M-09014.1, to leave out from "for the role" to end and insert:

“, horticulturalists and the agritourism industry for the role that they play at the heart of rural, coastal and island communities in contributing to Scotland's £15 billion food and drink industry; notes the significant importance of the UK internal market in ensuring that Scottish farmers can maximise the benefits of their relationship with Scotland's closest trading partners in the rest of the UK, including access to a £30 billion agricultural market; understands the growing impact that the climate emergency is having on food production in Scotland and globally, and applauds the progress that is already being made by the sector to adapt to, and mitigate, climate change; recognises the value of

the recommendations from the farmer-led climate change groups, including the important work of the Suckler Beef Climate Group, as well as the work done by the Food and Agriculture Stakeholders Taskforce (FAST), and the Agricultural Industries Confederation, in developing well-evidenced strategies to enable food producers to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change without compromising production; understands that proposals have recently been launched by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, which would support Scotland's rural communities to secure jobs, livelihoods, and a viable future for farmers, crofters and fishermen, placing food production at the heart of the new Agriculture Bill, whilst investing in producers to keep food prices affordable for consumers, allowing farmers to produce more top-quality food in Scotland, whilst bringing in more local jobs for processing and transport and bolstering support for technology, including genetic technology and innovation, to help improve the UK's world-leading standards on health, the environment and animal welfare; notes that Putin's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in global food inflation; recognises that the UK Government has recently announced steps to mitigate this, including a review of fairness in horticulture and egg supply chains, and welcomes the £2 million investment in boosting agricultural exports and £1 million for boosting seafood exports, in addition to the previously-announced £100 million Seafood Fund and £42.2 million for fisheries funding.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rhoda Grant to speak to and to move amendment S6M-09014.2.

15:18

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The Scottish Government's motion is factually correct; however, we have concerns about its tone, which is complacent and passes the buck.

The Trussell Trust distributed 259,744 emergency food parcels in Scotland between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023—that is more than a quarter of a million, and almost one third of them were delivered to families with children. That is the largest amount of parcels that it has ever distributed and represents a 30 per cent increase on the year before. Those statistics represent families that are unable to feed their children. They represent people desperate for food—people who will have their health and life expectancy damaged because of poor nutrition. Can any one of us imagine what it must be like to be so desperate for food that you need to go to a food bank?

Although the work of food banks is a lifeline—and I pay tribute to the organisations and volunteers who provide that lifeline—it is dehumanising to be forced to depend on them. It is equally unacceptable that many of the people who do also work in industries that provide the food that we eat. The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union has surveyed its members and found that a third depend on family and friends for food and 17 per cent had used food banks. Imagine working in a bakery and smelling bread



baking but going home to empty shelves and hungry children.

The Scottish Government has levers to change that. It has promised a national plan for ending the need for food banks. It published the consultation responses in January 2022. At that time, it promised a final plan to end food banks that winter. That has still not been published. In the circumstances we face, that is not good enough. The Government must urgently produce its plan to end the need for food banks in Scotland.

During the passage of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, the Scottish Government also had the opportunity to enshrine the human right to food in our legislation, but SNP and Green members voted that down. They also voted down empowering the Scottish food commission to realise that ambition. That could have made a practical difference, but they voted it down.

We agree with the motion that the Conservative Government should do much more. We also agree that Brexit has been deeply damaging. However, we cannot turn the clock back, and re-entry to the EU is not an option at this time. The SNP knows that, but Brexit and independence are simply two sides of the one nationalist coin. For the Scottish Government simply to blame the UK Government without doing everything in its power to change the stark situation that our citizens face is hypocritical.

**John Swinney:** Will Rhoda Grant explain why it is not a practical possibility to rejoin the EU just now?

**Rhoda Grant:** For one thing, I do not think that it would have us back.

The Scottish Government could use procurement to ensure that people are paid the real living wage. It could insist that companies with which it contracts pay at that level and do not use zero-hours contracts or subcontract to companies that do. With one stroke of a pen, that would change the low-wage, insecure work patterns in Scotland—practices that force workers to food banks.

Although energy costs and the energy market fall to the UK Government, the Scottish Government has failed to use its powers to protect the poorest in society. Energy usage is very much in the hands of the Scottish Government. The fastest way out of fuel poverty is to reduce energy usage, but the Scottish Government does not have a strategy for that. It offers insulation loans, but people who live in fuel poverty and are dependent on food banks do not have the money to pay off loans. Instead, the Scottish Government insists that any heating assistance is invested in heat pumps, which simply do not work in homes that are not well insulated.

The Scottish Government set a ceiling for ScotWind licences, forgoing billions of pounds. It also did not insist on community benefit. Had it done so, that money could have been used to provide low-cost fuel for communities and funds to insulate homes.

The Government could also use its procurement powers, as well as agricultural subsidies, to ensure that food is procured as locally as possible and sustainably. That would not only cut carbon used to transport food long distances but sustain local farmers and crofters.

With the powers that the Scottish Government has, it could make a huge difference to people's lives, but it does not.

**Jim Fairlie:** On the point that Rhoda Grant made about reducing food miles, if the Labour Party gets into government in next year's election, will you rescind the New Zealand and Australia trade deals?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that we need to speak through the chair.

**Jim Fairlie:** My apologies.

**Rhoda Grant:** That is slightly above my pay grade because I am not standing for the UK Parliament and neither do I intend to next year. I will leave the matter to colleagues who are better placed to do those negotiations.

We support the Liberal Democrat amendment. It points out the importance of our seas to providing food security and rightly points out that it is undermined by the Scottish Government's HPMa plans.

The Conservative amendment appears to be taking a leaf out of the SNP-Green Government's playbook by being very self-congratulatory in the face of the grim reality that is faced by our citizens. Although there are things in the amendment that we would support, there are others that we cannot. The Conservatives appear to blame the war in Ukraine for all our inflation problems. That is clearly not the case, so we cannot support their amendment.

I move amendment S6M-09014.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that it is unacceptable in the 21st century, in a resource rich nation, that so many people are living in food poverty and relying on food banks; notes that many of those who are living in food poverty are those who work in the food industry; urges more action on addressing low pay, zero-hours contracts and insecure work for those producing Scottish food; recognises the powers that the Scottish Government has that could be used to mitigate the cost of living crisis; believes that food production and a sustainable environment can work hand in hand for the benefit of both, and do not need to be at the expense of one or the other, and further believes that the right to food should be enshrined in Scots law, and that the Scottish

Food Commission should be empowered to realise that policy urgently.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Beatrice Wishart to speak to and move amendment S6M-09014.3.

15:24

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I, too, would like to commend and acknowledge the work of all food producers, whether they work on land or sea, and their contribution to Scotland's food and drink sector.

The generations of fishing, crofting and farming families who are transitioning to newer ways of working and food production through innovation are all crucial players in Scotland's food industry and are vital to the communities in which they work and live. They are the beating heart of rural and island communities and Scottish life; they care about the environment in which they work and seek to protect it. We are thankful to them and to the others who support our £15 billion food and drink industry.

We know that Scotland produces high-quality, nutritious food and drink, whether for local consumption or export—lamb, beef, salmon, seafood, vegetables and berries of all descriptions—and one cannot mention Scottish drink without highlighting whisky and gin.

My amendment covers several issues. The first is Brexit, which has impacted labour supply across all aspects of Scotland's food and drink. There have been shortages of agriculture workers to pick the fruit and veg and of lorry drivers to deliver the produce, and there have been shortages in the hospitality sector, where Scotland's produce should be at the top of the menu.

The second issue is that of unreliable ferry services, as we have seen on the west coast. The failure to have a resilient service and an on-going programme of ferry replacement has, at times, cut off not only the inward supply of food to islands but the ability of island exports to reach mainland Scotland and be transported further afield. The financial impact is considerable; so, too, is the impact on people's wellbeing.

On the northern isles route, freight capacity issues have been well documented for years, with increasing seafood and salmon exports from Shetland. However, the known pinch points in freight capacity around the autumn livestock sales seem to come as an annual surprise to Transport Scotland.

The third issue is the impact that the Scottish Government's highly protected marine area policy proposals could have on our fishing and aquaculture industries, which are so important to

our coastal and island communities around Scotland. Our fishing fleet and the aquaculture sector play a crucial role in providing a sustainable low-carbon high-protein food source. Salmon is in demand across the world: with exports to 54 countries in 2019 at a value of £618 million, it makes a significant contribution to the Scottish economy.

Mussel farmers rely on healthy clean seas in which to grow shellfish. Growers obviously want to protect the marine environment to ensure that they have a sustainable business for the future. Two thirds of Scotland's mussels are grown passively around my constituency; the mussel sector is a form of food production with a low carbon footprint, which has much to offer.

What has been put to me, though, is that the uncertainty and risk that the HPMA proposals have introduced are harming companies' abilities to plan and invest even now. Without offshore sites, companies cannot produce or sell mussels and will not be able to generate sales; they are asking how they can invest if they might not have a future.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Does Beatrice Wishart agree that the SNP's introduction of its anti-fishing bill would potentially cause a second Highland clearance?

**Beatrice Wishart:** Those concerns have been well expressed in previous debates.

There are already worries about spatial squeeze: a profusion of offshore windfarms will create fishing no-take zones in all but name in the footprint in which they will stand, which will increase pressures on the catching fleet.

As I said in the chamber earlier this week, the HPMA proposals have united fishing and coastal communities who are anxious about the future of their livelihoods and the communities in which they live. Concerns over the proposals are already having a negative impact on businesses.

The opposition is not to the need to protect the marine environment and address biodiversity loss and the climate emergency, but to the way in which the policy was developed before engaging with those people who make their living from the sea and the communities that depend on them—the very people who produce food for Scotland.

Those communities include people in the wider supply chain in which they are all interdependent: the processors, hauliers, marine engineers, net makers, feed suppliers, the electrician repairing the fishing boat and the crofter who is also a fisherman and might also deliver the post. They are communities that are viable because of fishing and aquaculture, that keep working-age families in a place and keep the school roll up and the local

shop open, often in fragile areas. That diversity—with tradition, heritage and innovation—is a huge part of what Scotland is, and we should be doing all we can to work together to support it.

I move amendment S6M-09014.3, to insert at end:

“; recognises the high-quality and nutritious food that the fishery and aquaculture industries provide, the importance of producing fish and shellfish sustainably, and the interdependence of rural businesses; notes with concern that these sectors, major contributors to Scotland’s food industry and the livelihoods of coastal and island communities, are at risk of disruption from Brexit, unreliable ferry services and the Scottish Government’s approach to Highly Protected Marine Area proposals, and calls on the Scottish Government to guarantee that any work that directly affects coastal and island communities should always be undertaken in partnership with them to ensure that livelihoods are protected.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the open debate. I advise members that, at this point, we have a bit of time in hand, should members be minded to seek and/or take interventions.

15:30

**John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP):** One of the many privileges involved in representing the beautiful constituency of Perthshire North is the opportunity to appreciate and value the enormous contribution of the various communities and sectors to the production and promotion of food in Scotland. My constituency contributes a formidable proportion of the potatoes, cereals and vegetables that are grown in Scotland, the exquisite soft fruit that is synonymous with east Perthshire and the high-quality beef and lamb that are nurtured with care, invariably on the hill farms of Highland Perthshire, Strathardle and Glen Shee.

The strength of that activity contributes to the very highest-quality offering within the tourism, hospitality and food production sectors of our economy. That ranges from the work of the drinks industry in whisky, gin and new spirits that are based on traditional foraged crops—pioneered by Highland Boundary on Alyth hill—to the diversification success stories of Stewart Tower Dairy’s ice cream and the outstanding research work of organisations such as the James Hutton Institute, which is based in Invergowrie and recently became one of the first recipients of a King’s award for enterprise in sustainable development, and Intelligent Growth Solutions, which is also based in the JHI and has developed important work on vertical farming, which is becoming one of Scotland’s enormous export success stories.

There is much to be proud of, and much to celebrate, in the contribution of my constituency to

food production in Scotland. I want to see that continue and to thrive.

I know that the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government share that aspiration and are committed to working with the industry to address the twin challenges of the climate emergency and the development of an agriculture support regime after the Brexit process. I am sure that the decisions that the cabinet secretary has taken to proceed with that work in partnership with the agriculture sector through jointly chairing the process with my constituent, the president of the NFU Scotland, Martin Kennedy, will ensure that that focus on sustainability will be central to the decision making that is involved.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Mr Swinney mentioned Martin Kennedy, the president of the NFUS, who has called for the return of the £33 million that was allocated to Scotland following the Bew review but which was swiped from the rural budget when John Swinney was finance secretary. Where is that money, and when will it be returned?

**John Swinney:** Rachael Hamilton knows full well that those resources had to be deployed in order to assist in balancing the budget in the previous financial year because of the hyperinflation that was created by the Conservative Government in its September 2022 mini-budget. At that time, ministers gave a commitment—I believe that it still stands, although I am no longer a serving minister in the Scottish Government—that that money will be inserted into the budgets in due course, when the requirement is there for it to be paid. Therefore, I do not think that Rachael Hamilton should be going around the country spreading scare stories in the fashion that she has just done. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members, let us hear Mr Swinney.

**John Swinney:** Despite that willingness to engage in dialogue, it is necessary to recognise that there are many threats and challenges to be addressed in ensuring sustainable food production in Scotland. I want to concentrate on two: the cost of production and the availability of labour.

In preparing for this debate, I asked a number of my farming constituents for information on the costs with which they are wrestling. Fertiliser costs have risen by 200 to 300 per cent and electricity costs for essential refrigeration activity to sustain crops have often risen by the same margin—in some cases, individual businesses are having to find an extra £50,000 to £100,000 to meet just the cost of increased electricity.

Some of those cost pressures are a consequence of global events, especially the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia, but some are as a direct consequence of the policy disasters

that have been Brexit and the UK mini-budget last September.

Brexit has made the cost of trading with our nearest partners increase and has placed obstacles in the way, especially in key and valuable markets such as the seed potatoes market. As the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs George Eustice told us all, replacement trade deals have disadvantaged agriculture. The mini-budget last September has created the most difficult investment climate due to the increased cost of borrowing arising out of those catastrophic policy errors. The punishing effect of that folly is being felt by consumers, many of whom are now facing unprecedented hardship in putting food on their tables in 21st century Scotland. Rhoda Grant talked about that. The Scottish Conservatives have, of course, supported both acts of spectacular folly—Brexit and the UK mini-budget.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I wonder whether Mr Swinney remembers that, pre-Brexit, I did a survey of where all our food in the public sector—in schools, hospitals and Government buildings—came from. That highlighted that a lot of our root vegetables, dairy produce and meat was being imported from the EU. I wonder what families in Mr Swinney's constituency would think about only 16 per cent of the central Scotland Excel contract being fulfilled by Scottish produce.

**John Swinney:** The problem that my constituents now have, which I am just about to come on to, is that they cannot find the labour to pick the vegetables from the fields. That is a consequence of the stupid Brexit policy that the Conservative Party in the Parliament has supported. That is my second point: crops are not being picked and high-quality food is going to waste at a time when many consumers are struggling to feed their families. That is all because of the ideological obsession of the Conservatives.

The position just gets worse with the hostile comments of the Home Secretary, which show a devastating escalation of the obstructiveness of the UK Government. I know that Parliament will be sceptical about those comments from me, but I suggest that members listen to NFU Scotland's horticulture chair, Iain Brown, who is a soft fruit and vegetable grower from Fife. Mr Brown said:

“The Home Secretary's comments around training and recruiting a local workforce to pick our crops shows a significant degree of naivety over the reality of the current situation. In recent times, the Home Office has consistently failed to understand the challenges that the industry faces around sourcing labour.”

He went on to say:

“We need migrants to get the food that is grown on our farms onto our plates, and not rotting in our fields. We need

the government to move away from anti-migration politics and rhetoric to make good policy.”

So there it is: blunt words from the farming sector about the obstacles that it faces.

I encourage the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government to continue their engagement with the sector and to press the UK Government to move away from its disastrous positioning on migration and on Brexit. If it does not, there will be real threats to the sustainability of food production in this country, and the responsibility will lie fair and square at the feet of the Conservative Party.

15:38

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Let us return to the real world.

I am delighted to speak in this hugely important debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. As most members will know, I have a particular interest in the topic, and I have spoken about it many times in the chamber. I had hoped to have a constructive debate, because I know that the cabinet secretary can also have a pragmatic approach to the topic, and we have had many constructive conversations in the past. However, the fact that Mairi Gougeon had to stand up in the chamber and defend the most ridiculous motion from the Government must surely leave her embarrassed. All the things that we could have discussed and all the actions that we could take in the Parliament to positively address the issue—many of which I know the cabinet secretary supports—have been swept away under the SNP-Green mantra of, “Not our fault, gov.”

Far from improving our food security, the Green-driven Government agenda is making it increasingly difficult for our food producers to continue. According to the noisy minority, farms need to decarbonise, stop producing as much beef and plant more trees, and they must diversify—all with a lack of support from the Government, of course.

This week, I met representatives of the agritourism sector—by the way, I was the only politician from the five invited who turned up to listen to them and answer their questions—and a wonderful visit it was, too. The retail value of agritourism has increased by almost £50 million in the past year, rising to over £110 million. They are such an enthusiastic and resilient bunch, taking the blows that have been landed on them by the Scottish Government, getting back up and finding a way to keep developing.

However, some farmers have been forced into diversification to make ends meet because simply producing food is not good enough any more. These are the people who produce our food.

Farmers have been left on their own to sort out their local food chains. Smaller businesses find it hard to access public procurement and have little guidance on how to establish co-operatives.

**Jim Fairlie:** Does Brian Whittle understand that farmers have been diversifying for as long as they have been farming?

**Brian Whittle:** Yes, I understand that and, as I said, what a wonderful bunch they are, despite the policies of this Government. During that visit, I was told by those in the room that it feels as though there is no policy or financial support for agritourism from the Scottish Government.

**Mairi Gougeon:** Will the member give way?

**Brian Whittle:** I will in a second. The Scottish Government should be promoting agritourism to advertise the value of local food chains and Scottish rural businesses.

I will give way to the cabinet secretary if she will speak directly to the agritourism point.

**Mairi Gougeon:** That is exactly why I wanted to intervene, because I am really sorry to hear that the member has had that feedback. I ask the member to recognise that we have contributed nearly £0.5 million to ensure that we can run more agritourism monitor farms, in recognition of the importance of agritourism. I also co-chair a board with Caroline Millar. We absolutely want agritourism to grow in Scotland, which is why we have made that financial commitment.

**Brian Whittle:** Interestingly, we mentioned agritourism in our amendment, and one of the things that the sector raised was that planning policy is developed predominantly by those in urban areas and by urban MSPs—it is too stringent, slow and bureaucratic, with some policies being not fit for rural areas because they prevent diversification and development of the rural economy.

Given the SNP-Green vilification of our farmers, perhaps a solution would be to eat more fish. Wait a minute, though—apparently, the SNP-Green coalition has decided that our fishermen have to stop catching fish, they have to develop better methods of protecting the environment and they have to innovate, although, again, the Scottish Government is not going to help them. In fact, the SNP-Green Government has apparently decided that HPMA's will be imposed on 10 per cent of our seas but it will not tell us where that will happen or where that percentage came from.

**Mairi Gougeon:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Brian Whittle:** I have already taken one from the cabinet secretary.

Of course, there is no scientific evidence or data to back up that policy, according to the cabinet secretary herself in an answer that she gave to a question in the chamber. Retrospectively, the Government carried out a consultation on HPMA's and then it wonders why coastal communities are up in arms and why fishing communities are so universally against the policy.

After introducing all those anti-food-producing policies, which are coming from predominantly urban-based politicians, the Government seems surprised that this cack-handed way of treating our food producers is so unpopular. How does the Scottish Government expect people in the sector to invest in their businesses and how can it not recognise the impact of the uncertainty on recruitment and retention?

It is almost as though the Scottish Government has forgotten that we actually need to eat food and that the more pressure that it puts on our food-producing sector, the more that sector will disappear, requiring more and more of our food to be imported, which is exactly the opposite of food security.

The Greens are a one-dimensional ideologically driven bunch with no grip on reality; I do not know what colour the sky is on their planet, but it is definitely not green. Their policies, far from delivering a more sustainable economy, are adding to the climate emergency, and they have this delusion of adequacy. The SNP is blindly following them for the sake of the Bute house agreement.

Let us talk about food security—let us consider the difference that it would make if we focused on real policies that would have a real impact. How about the fact that we waste a third of our food? If food waste was a country, it would be the third biggest greenhouse gas emitter after China and the USA. It takes an area the size of China to produce the food that we throw away.

Let us consider the issue in terms of the increasing squeeze on land use and Scottish Government policy that is specifically putting our food producers' land under pressure. How about reducing the number of transport miles that their food undergoes? I have spoken about that issue since I entered Parliament.

What about public procurement of our food, making sure that the fantastic quality produce that we get from our farmers and fishermen and women makes its way into our school meals, our hospitals and every other Government building? That would reduce greenhouse gases considerably and contribute to the reduction in road miles—another of the Scottish Government's targets that does not have a route map—as well as getting our pupils used to eating local produce,

which would support our food producers and improve our poor health record. That would be joined-up thinking.

What about recognising the sea as three dimensional, which would mean that we could use the surface area for certain industries such as floating wind, as well as using the depth for seaweed farming, creating reefs and sea-grass plantations that would act as fish nurseries and carbon sequestration areas? There is no need for the Government to impose HPMAs. We need joined-up three-dimensional thinking.

However, instead of thinking outside the box by encouraging and rewarding innovative solutions that are already being deployed by our food producers—solutions that would tackle food security directly, all the while supporting our rural economy and impacting the health of our nation, as well as encouraging more pupils to consider a career in the rural economy—the cabinet secretary finds herself in a position of having to defend the Scottish Government's motion, which is content to wash its hands of any responsibility. The Scottish Government blames the UK Government, food producers and anyone else, which means that it does not have to take any positive action. The SNP's policy is being dictated by the Green Party, which lives in a dreamland—a Green Party that is the least green of any Green party on the planet. It is time to start being a Government and realise that policies actually have to be delivered.

15:46

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Climate change and global population growth are often cited as major challenges to ensuring that our food supply is sustainable. Africa remains the most affected by the climate crisis, with rainfall increasing by around 30 per cent in wet regions and decreasing by 20 per cent in dry regions, which is a potent formula for failing crops and agriculture. To date, the African continent has experienced a 34 per cent overall drop in agricultural productivity as a result of climate change, according to the United Nations. However, it is not just on moral grounds that that should worry us, as we import fruits, vegetables, coffee and chocolate.

**Finlay Carson:** We appreciate the effect that climate change is having on rainfall and droughts. Does the member agree that we have the opportunity through gene editing to produce potatoes and crops that are far more resilient to droughts and floods and that we could provide that technology to the global south to help to mitigate those circumstances?

**Kaukab Stewart:** I thank the member for bringing that up. I remember the debate that was

led by Stephen Kerr on gene editing, which I believe referred to potatoes and lemons. I will come back to that.

As well as fruits, vegetables, coffee and chocolate, we import fish—yes, fish—beef and nuts, to name but a few, from Africa. That is at a time when the United Nations predicts that the global population will increase to 9.7 billion people by 2050. I remind members that we are in 2023, and that is only 27 years away—some of us will be around for that. We are faced with more people and less food to feed them. We must sustain a healthy earth so that our earth can sustain a healthy us.

Added to the challenges that we face on food security across Scotland and the rest of the UK, as my colleagues have mentioned, is a hard Brexit that we did not vote for and do not want. The Centre for Economic Performance has confirmed that Brexit has caused the cost of EU food imports to increase by 6 per cent over a two-year period, in addition to global events that have caused many commodities to skyrocket in price. If we are having a serious discussion about future food sustainability, then aligning ourselves much more closely to our European neighbours, breaking down trade barriers and reversing Brexit must always remain on the table.

There are lessons that we can learn from our European partners, too. The European green deal has a farm to fork strategy at its centre. Like Scotland's good food nation approach, it acknowledges that food sustainability is tackling climate change and that tackling climate change is promoting good food sustainability. Importing and exporting food and drink is our country's past, present and future but, importantly, we must change our attitudes about where our food comes from. The nearer the farm is to the fork, the more sustainable that is by far as a way to keep our nation fed.

As I was previously a teacher, members would expect me to say that I firmly believe that education is the key to making healthy and sustainable choices about food. When people understand where their food comes from and when they develop an affinity with it, they make healthier choices about their consumption.

**Brian Whittle:** I am sure that we can have a point of consensus. Does Kaukab Stewart agree that we should have a public procurement process that replicates what happens in East Ayrshire, where more than 75 per cent of the food in schools comes from the local area?

**Kaukab Stewart:** I would always agree with that. The more we invest in our local producers, the better.

Every single member of this place will have grown up being taught about where their food comes from, whether that be through rhymes about Old MacDonald and his farm, about Little Bo-Peep, who lost her sheep, or about Mary and her little lamb, and let us not forget my favourite—“The Jeely Piece Song”. Unless young adults choose to pursue courses in home economics, hospitality or nutrition, our education about food seems to come to something of a stop after second year in high school.

In adult life, it is harder to make healthier and more sustainable food choices, particularly when the opposite of that is the more affordable option. In a cost of living crisis, that is a bit of an outrage. We must make healthier and more sustainable choices, and making better choices does not stop at what we buy and eat; it is also about how much we waste.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Kaukab Stewart:** Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have time for a very brief intervention.

**Stephen Kerr:** Given Kaukab Stewart's comments about food education, food science and people's ability to cook for themselves, does she agree that such education should continue all the way through to the senior phase, so that our young people leave school with a self-reliance that, sadly, they lack at the moment?

**Kaukab Stewart:** I absolutely agree. It is a shame that, many years ago, Conservative and Labour Governments undermined and took away kitchen facilities in schools. Maybe we can look at reinstating such facilities.

Last week, I raised the importance of farmers markets in nurturing people's relationships with food, particularly for people who live in urban settings. They provide a direct link to where the bulk of our home-grown food comes from. The Woodlands Community Development Trust's community garden, which is in my constituency, gives locals the ability to grow crops and enjoy that food together communally as a community. I have spoken with a number of businesses—particularly hospitality businesses—that have advocated the use of urban allotments, which would be transformational for our growing communities.

During the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—I took part in an event at the Woodlands community garden, where delegates from Ghana told me how urgent they see the climate change situation as being. One delegate said, “Everyone is talking about

climate change action for the future, but it is our present right now.”

Even food that is grown in Scotland has started to face volatility. Last year, low river water levels threatened crops, and the searing summer temperatures had an impact. That is why I bring my speech back to the point that, although we can talk about the food that we import from all corners of the globe and grow on our doorstep, if we do not slow down, stop and reverse the impacts of climate change, we will not be living in a world where our food is sustainable.

Our very ability to eat relies on our taking action to tackle climate change; action to deliver on our net zero obligations; action to ensure that retailers, producers and our schools educate all our children; and action to support our local farmers and producers.

15:54

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** It is right that, at this time, we are debating food security and sustainability in this Parliament, and it is right that we are scrutinising the commerce of our food supply and the economics of food poverty.

However, we also have to scrutinise the politics of food security, the politics of food supply and the politics of food poverty, because everywhere we look in our food production chain, we find injustice and inequality. The top 1 per cent of farm owners in Scotland accumulate 10 per cent of all farming support, and RSPB analysis shows that the top 20 per cent pick up almost two thirds—62 per cent—of Scottish Government farming support. Too much public money is going into the private pockets of Scotland's already wealthy corporations and landowners, and not nearly enough is going to give a helping hand to our tenant farmers, smallholders, crofters and farm labourers.

The same is true of the grant and investment schemes for forestry, where we are also witnessing the rapid emergence of speculative finance capital interests shamelessly—shamelessly—hoovering up public money so fast that the market for carbon credits is becoming a racket. Instead of stepping in to help the speculators to extract wealth and opportunity from our local communities, the Scottish Government should be stepping up to give those local communities access to land for food production.

Then there are the tax reliefs and tax exemptions for farm owners—relief from fuel duty on red diesel, exemption from VAT, agricultural land and buildings being exempt from business rates, and special exemptions from capital gains and inheritance tax. Again, all those measures benefit most the richest owners of the biggest

agricultural holdings and estates—the ones who need it least.

I will tell members what will happen in that rigged economy. As farm input prices rise, agri-inflation is at 18.7 per cent, those farmers who face uncertainty will be out of business or will simply be bought up by bigger and more powerful interests, with the result that, instead of having a flourishing and diverse rural economy, we will have a widening gap between the rural working poor and the all-too-often absentee idle rich.

Then, there are the agribusinesses. Yes—of course yields have gone up exponentially over the years, but so have the profits of the fertiliser and pesticide manufacturers, the animal feed suppliers and the oil and gas companies.

In stark contrast, have a look at the chilling report that was published just last week—“Food Workers on the Breadline”—by the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, which once again surveyed its members and found that more food workers are relying on food banks, that more than half say that they are worried about running out of food, and that two thirds say that their wages are insufficient to feed themselves and their family with good food. As the report concludes,

“the people who grow, distribute and supply our food are often unable to purchase the very food that they produce.”

It is like we are living in the depression-era novel “The Grapes of Wrath”, in which John Steinbeck wrote that the children of farm workers and the children of fruit cannery workers

“dying of pellagra must die ... of malnutrition—because ... food must be forced to rot”

“because a profit cannot be taken”.

“The line”, he presciently warned,

“between hunger and anger is a thin line”.

Let me repeat that warning today, because the line between hunger and anger is still a thin line.

I am glad that the Government wants a sustainable food supply for Scotland, and I agree with the National Farmers Union that

“the idea that we can just import our food must be exposed as naive in the extreme”,

although I fear that too many cabinet secretaries and ministers in this Government and the UK Government still believe in the credo of free trade and still cling on to the theory of comparative advantage, when we should be investing in an import substitution strategy and when, if we want a sustainable food supply, we need to invest in the food industry’s workers. Where is the minimum £15 an hour wage for undervalued low-paid food production workers, which their unions are demanding?

We have the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, which speaks to local food plans, but where are they? When will we get to the day when food security and nutrition are a basic human right that we meet? When will we reach an understanding that food security and net zero are not competing demands; that we cannot have one without the other?

Of course, the change that we need will be conditional on a redistribution of wealth and power—not in the direction that it is going at the moment, which is the wrong direction, but in the right direction, from those according to their means to those according to their need. It will rest upon the conviction that to win sustainability and security, we need to win greater democracy, and the conviction that it is not only our food; it is our land as well.

16:01

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Today’s motion, on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland, got me thinking—do we not all have a role to play in securing it?

When I say all of us, I mean every man, woman and child in the country, because we all need to eat every day. I mean every school, college and nursery; every farmer, crofter and horticulturalist; every hospital or care setting; this Parliament; caterers; and, without any doubt whatsoever, the major supermarkets and retailers that dominate 90 per cent of grocery sales in this country.

With that in my mind, I thought that I would try a different approach today by finding the areas that we can agree on and celebrating some of the real positives that we currently have in our communities. I have a list of the many allotments and urban growing spaces in my and John Swinney’s constituencies, which demonstrates the desire of many people to have their own growing spaces. Twenty years ago, they could barely give those plots away.

Last night, I attended a meeting of the cross-party group on food, at which we talked about dietary health inequalities, especially in areas of deprivation. As I have already said, fabulous work is going on all around the country, where small groups of mainly volunteers are doing things to educate, grow and create fabulous food-based initiatives.

One example in my constituency, which I have cited before, is Comrie primary school, where kids are taught to make soup, which they then enjoy outside during outdoor learning sessions. Under the guiding hand of John Castley from Wild Hearth Bakery, the school has also now established breaducation, whereby the pupils grow heritage



wheat, harvest and mill it and then go into the kitchen to bake bread. It is a fabulous initiative, but it is not some middle-class privilege thing; it is about basic life skills and an appreciation of our food source. We should continue to encourage folk to adopt that culture in all our education settings.

Through the growing food together initiative, there are growing initiatives in urban Scotland, too. Urban spaces all the way from Aberdeen to the Borders have been turned over to grow food, with people taking up the opportunity of Scottish Government funding. It never ceases to amaze me what a few dedicated and determined individuals can achieve when they set their minds to it. Those people can really help to shift and change the culture.

There is no doubt but that it is for the Government to direct the national food policy, but it is up to us as a society to take that collective responsibility and to rebuild connections with our farmers, growers and producers, and vice versa, so that we change our cultural and societal attitude to food, given its importance to our communities—both urban and rural—our local environment and our overall personal health.

Although I accept that the issues that I am citing are small scale and will never be the panacea for food resilience, they demonstrate that our culture is moving in the right direction. It amazes me that folk in my children's age group now take for granted that they can go to a farmers market to get local food. Such markets did not exist in Scotland until 1999. Farm shops are now a staple normal source of local food, but 20 years ago they were regarded as a special day out and not somewhere to just pop out to for food.

Richard Lochhead's 2007 national food and drink policy for Scotland was a major turning point in our journey as a good food nation. When James Withers said,

"If we want to be seen as a good food nation, we have to actually be a good food nation",

he was absolutely spot on. This Government's record over many years has proved that we are committed to being the good food nation that we want to be.

Securing sustainability is the aim of us all, but it is not something that can just be given to us by the Government. It is a cultural and societal issue, it is for our personal physical and mental health, and it is our contribution to helping our environment to recover and flourish. Having buy-in from the public will mean that our policy will be far more readily accepted when the public are ready to go with us.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Jim Fairlie talks about policies, but the policy proposals and

recommendations of the suckler beef climate group were published in 2021. That was two years ago—two years in which we could have made progress on delivering carbon-neutral beef, as other countries have done. Fergus Ewing was right behind that. Does Jim Fairlie not think that the Government needs to get on with this so that we can bring the public along with us?

**Jim Fairlie:** Rachael Hamilton is well aware that we are about to start our scrutiny of the bill, so I do not know where she is going with that.

Despite some of the political rhetoric that comes from Tory members, I am sure that they realise that the Scottish Government has an enviable track record of being good partners of the Scottish farming and fishing sectors. It works in collaboration with them to deliver policies that allow them to produce the food that we need to be sustainable and to tackle our climate and biodiversity challenges. Never was that level of trust and collaboration needed more than now, with Vladimir Putin reminding the world that it takes only one deranged ideologue to upset the balance of food security internationally. Ensuring that our domestic supplies are robust is essential.

To that end, I broadly welcome the food summit that Rishi Sunak held in Downing Street this week, which was a welcome change in the UK Government's direction. However, in the spirit of collaboration of which we are constantly reminded by all other parties in this Parliament, I wonder why our Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands did not receive an invitation from the Prime Minister to attend such an important conference while we develop the policy that will help to shape agricultural security in Scotland for years to come.

**Finlay Carson:** Will Jim Fairlie give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member will need to conclude his remarks.

**Jim Fairlie:** Okay.

That hardly demonstrates a willingness to work with, or respect, the devolved Administrations' elected offices or this Parliament.

I will see how much I can cut from my speech.

I would genuinely like to offer the Tories, who know what I am saying is correct—I say this in particular to Douglas Ross, who has once again written to farmers in my constituency to say that he will be their voice—the opportunity that is provided by this debate to make a plea to their Westminster masters to provide the certainty and security of multiyear funding, which the industry was guaranteed from the EU. The industry cannot hang on without knowing whether funding will be provided after 2025 by the UK Government. I say that because, although we could build the best

policy that Scotland has ever seen—we could tick every box and cover every angle—if we do not get at least the current level of guaranteed annual funding beyond 2025 from the UK Government, the policies or practices that we try to deliver here will come to nothing, and the resilience that we all say that we want will vanish.

16:08

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** It is another productive day—perhaps afternoon would be more accurate—for our food producers. Farmers and fishers are busy toiling to keep us fed and to fuel our rural economy. However, I am not so sure that the same can be said about us. Here in Scotland's national Parliament, we go through the motions—literally, the same old motions—with little to show for it. Scotland's rural and coastal communities have been poorly served in the devolution era, with decision making and decision makers more remote than ever before.

Unlike some members, I am not keen on quoting US founding fathers or Greek philosophers, but I note that it is often said that people get the Government or politicians that they deserve. Sadly, that is not true for our farmers or fishers and, in the case of my constituents, they have a Government that they did not vote for. Indeed, if our farmers operated to the same standard of productivity as this Government's, we would all be very hungry. They do not need a task force or working group to get on with it; they make the best of what they have. They complain—my inbox testifies to that—but not nearly enough, because there is no doubt that the endless dithering, delay and denial of accountability of this Government cost them and make a difficult job harder.

I have said it before, but Jim Fairlie enjoyed it so much the first time that it is worth repeating: Scotland's farmers are the beating heart of not just our rural economy but our way of life. They are central to food security and provide the one energy source that we cannot live without. They are the champions of our natural landscape and the true custodians of our environment. As I said before, the good news is that Scotland's farmers are up for the challenge.

**Jim Fairlie:** I have been listening closely and thinking about what you are saying. You have talked about all the things that the Scottish Government has not done. Do you think that what the UK Government has done through the trade deals with New Zealand and Australia has been good for Scottish farming?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members must speak through the chair.

**Jim Fairlie:** I apologise.

**Oliver Mundell:** That demonstrates the point that I was making. Jim Fairlie has made the same intervention that he made the last time I spoke on the subject. As I said then, the trade deals with New Zealand and Australia offer advantages to Scottish farmers, with whisky tariffs coming down. As far as I am aware, a significant amount of grain that is produced in Scotland goes into those products. If we sell more of them, there will be more opportunities for Scotland's farmers.

The SNP is so interested in self-isolation that it wants to put up yet another border with our biggest trading partner and bar the most important market for our farmers—it is laughable. That is how we know that the Scottish Government is not really behind our farmers.

We should be in no doubt about the fact that our farmers will find a way to survive and to manage and overcome the challenges that they face, but that should not be enough for us. In a country that has as many opportunities and as much agricultural potential as Scotland has, we should be looking to help our farmers to thrive, rather than talking them down and using them as a political football.

Farmers should be the SNP's first partners when it comes to driving change and its aspirations for rural Scotland. Sadly, that is not the case. In their seats in the Scottish Government sit the so-called Greens, whose answer to everything in the countryside is to ban it. I was probably unfair the last time I spoke on the issue, because it was discourteous to ask the Greens how you eat a Sitka spruce when they were not here to tell us. Obviously, that would involve them leaving the comfort of their Edinburgh wine bars. However, I have many farmers in Dumfriesshire who would be very happy to host them for a demonstration—not the kind where you hold up a banner, shout or glue yourself to a cow. What they are looking for is for the people in power—those who hold ministerial office—to face up to the reality of what their policies mean on the ground.

As good agricultural land in my constituency gets carpeted in commercial forestry, with no balance being provided and no thought being given to local communities, let alone to our ability to feed ourselves as a nation, the many excuses and diversions in the Government's motion ring hollow. The idea that, somehow, Westminster or Brexit are to blame for all the struggles in our rural sector is a myth.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** What does the member think about what Save British Farming had to say yesterday? It said:

“farming is the sacrificial lamb of Brexit ... We had the best trade deals in the world in the EU ... Brexit torched trade and now British farming is on its knees.”

**Oliver Mundell:** I recognise that there are challenges for farmers, and that that is one of them, but I do not accept what SNP members, including the former Deputy First Minister, have said about food inflation. I used to think that Mr Swinney was a serious politician, before his transition to back-bench flunkey, in which role he has tried to suggest that the biggest challenge when it comes to food inflation is the action of the UK Government. It is well known that there is high food inflation across the rest of the UK.

**John Swinney:** Will Mr Mundell give way?

**Oliver Mundell:** I am dealing with the previous intervention, but if there is time, I will give way to Mr Swinney.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is no time in hand.

**Oliver Mundell:** I say to Gordon MacDonald that I will not take lectures on leaving the EU from a party that, despite being so wedded to the EU, when opportunities such as gene editing come up, will not even listen to the EU's advice. Nor will I take lectures from urban MSPs who tell me that leaving the EU has been universally bad for our farmers, when farmers in my constituency have been pleased to have their less favoured area support payments restored.

Our coastal and rural communities know that the Brexit and Westminster myth is exactly that, because they have lived through this urban central belt anti-countryside Government's attacks on their way of life every day.

They see how fishing and farming are under attack.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, Mr Mundell.

**Oliver Mundell:** They see the fall in populations where lack of housing and poor infrastructure mean rural clearances by stealth and by design and they do not appreciate motions like today's, which suggest that the problem lies somewhere else.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call the next speaker, I advise members that we have used all the time that we had in hand and that any interventions should be absorbed within members' contributions.

I call Sarah Boyack.

16:15

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Thanks for the warning, Presiding Officer.

It is unacceptable that, in the 21st century—*[Interruption.]*—I cannot hear because of the people at the back.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, Ms Boyack?

**Sarah Boyack:** I was interrupted by people shouting at the back.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes. Members, please listen to the member who has the floor.

**Sarah Boyack:** It is unacceptable that, in 21st-century Scotland, we have a fantastic food resource but have people living in poverty. The cost of living crisis, which members from across the chamber have talked about, is making people's lives even worse and there is a cruel irony in the fact that many of those who help to produce our food are themselves living in food poverty. Those points were very powerfully made by Rhoda Grant and Richard Leonard.

We must think about how Scotland's food is produced. We need to ensure that those who produce our food—from farmers to people who work in factories—actually get a fair deal, that their work is valued and that they have decent terms and conditions. That should apply right across our food sector. We have mostly talked about food in Scotland, but I highlight the globally important Fairtrade mark, which speaks of good standards and decent pay for people in developing countries who make the food that we use. We must think about the people who produce our food.

We must also ensure that our food is produced in a way that respects high standards of animal welfare, cares for natural resources and supports our environment. Scottish Labour is clear that we want to support the sustainability of the sector. There are 39,000 jobs in food and drink manufacturing in Scotland and that sector indirectly supports 300,000 jobs that are key to our communities.

We must maximise the use of public sector procurement. I was really disappointed that the cabinet secretary did not mention procurement in her opening remarks, because it is a key way of supporting our food sector in Scotland. Procurement is linked to food standards and the environmental impact of production and can maximise supply chains for local food producers, enabling them to focus on producing good quality, healthy food for us all and giving them the opportunity to plan ahead.

**Brian Whittle:** Does Sarah Boyack agree that there is a huge irony here and that one of the key things that we must tackle is food waste? A third of our food is wasted.

**Sarah Boyack:** I was going to weave that issue in towards the end of my comments but can introduce it into what I am saying about procurement. The public sector can be critical in buying food, influencing attitudes about food waste

and thinking about how to avoid food waste, which is unacceptable. Food waste has an environmental impact, and there is something that is just wrong about throwing away food when people are starving.

We must take a strategic approach and must also ensure that we maximise the purchasing power of Scotland's public sector. At the same time, we can influence the private sector to ensure that the money that is spent on food is spent well.

I am also very keen that we support agritourism, which has been mentioned during this debate and is an opportunity for us to market our fantastic produce to those who visit Scotland. We must not miss that opportunity. I am looking forward to getting up at the crack of dawn tomorrow to visit Craigie's Farm in my constituency to see what it is doing.

We need a strategic approach and must make sure that we are delivering the best value for food production and for our environment. That means supporting farmers to ensure that they are able to meet our nature and climate standards and that they can be resilient in adapting and mitigating to address the coming climate and economic changes.

An adaptation strategy is absolutely critical. The Scottish Government must see that as a high-level issue, particularly when it comes to land use and farming. Statistics show that, in 2017-18 alone, extreme weather contributed to losses of £161 million from the farming sector and that soil erosion is costing about £50 million a year. We must support our natural environment, and food must be part of that joined-up approach.

Rather than just having good words about the ambition, we need to talk about how we are going to deliver in practice, and today's debate gives us an opportunity to do that. We passed the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill last year, but we need to address food poverty now. A quarter of Scotland's children are living in food poverty and 69 per cent of those kids live in working households. We need to join up the inequalities and social injustice. Colleagues across the chamber have made some good points about that. We have the highest gap in life expectancy between the most affluent and the worst off in our communities since 1997, so we really need action.

One of the ironies about the cabinet secretary's speech is that she mentioned energy powers but she did not talk about the many more things that the Scottish Government could do to maximise community benefits in our rural areas, or about the ScotWind failure whereby we have failed to deliver the economic opportunities. I also note that we still do not have the publicly owned energy company that was promised. More action is needed.

We need to focus on what our communities are doing and give them more support. None of us wants to have food banks. Those who provide them do not want to have to do that. They do a fantastic job, but last year there was a 25 per cent increase—

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I must ask you to conclude, Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** —in those using them for the first time.

I need to conclude. Let me just mention community food growing, which was mentioned by Kaukab Stewart.

**The Presiding Officer:** I have to ask you to conclude at this point because you are out of time.

**Sarah Boyack:** It is important and we need more of it. Let us make sure that that is part of the strategy, too.

16:21

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I thank the cabinet secretary for setting out how the Scottish Government is working to increase sustainability in the food system and food security in Scotland. I would like to expand on the concept of food security and add food sovereignty to the mix. Building food sovereignty can boost food security and the sustainability of our food system at the same time.

Food sovereignty is built on six pillars: food for people, valuing food providers, localising food systems, putting control locally, building knowledge and skills, and working with nature. I will take each pillar in turn.

Food for people means a few things. It means ensuring that everyone has sufficient healthy and culturally appropriate food, which is why the Scottish Government and Greens will bring forward a right to food in the forthcoming human rights bill. It also means shortening the chain between food sources and people's plates, using resources efficiently to provide more food with less environmental impact. That means supporting farmers who want to grow food for people over crops for livestock or alcohol to do so; it means putting venison larders in place so that that sustainable meat can be processed locally; and it means eating more wild-caught fish from sustainably managed Scottish fisheries instead of importing fish to feed farmed salmon.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ariane Burgess:** I am not going to take any interventions, because we have been told that we are tight for time.

The second pillar is valuing food providers. Those who work on our land, on the coast or at sea to provide food for the nation are some of our most vital key workers and they need to be supported, but their livelihoods are being undermined by post-Brexit trade deals made by Westminster that encourage imports of food that has been produced to lower standards. Meanwhile, low-impact fishers who are rooted in their communities are being squeezed out—not by the call for fish nurseries, which will make fish more abundant, but by the trawl and dredge businesses that put profit over people, which are currently railing against the visa changes that will protect their workers from exploitation.

How can we support our food providers? We should put pressure on supermarkets to give providers a fair price for their product. We should invest in other ways for farmers to get their food to market, such as community-supported agriculture and local authority procurement. We must also incentivise and support providers to produce food as sustainably as possible.

Many farmers and crofters are already producing food through nature-friendly farming, but big changes are coming as diets change, UK funding changes and the climate crisis becomes ever more urgent, so we must design the farm payment framework to accelerate the necessary changes in land use and land management. Strong conditionality will make what is right for the planet right for farm businesses and livelihoods, too. That support must be available to all who want it—not just large landowners but small-scale farmers, crofters and tenants, including those without livestock.

In the marine space, we must support fish farms to clean up their practices in line with the forthcoming vision on sustainable aquaculture—limiting pollution so that the surrounding fisheries, too, can thrive.

The next pillars are about local food systems and putting control locally. The good food nation plans from local authorities and other public bodies are key mechanisms for that. It is crucial that the process involves working with local communities to develop food resilience and build community wealth.

The fifth pillar is about building knowledge and skills, which is a key element of food sovereignty. The Farm Advisory Service should be scaled up and refocused to support the vision for Scottish agriculture, investing in pilots of new approaches such as indoor horticulture in less favoured areas, woodland crofts with food production, and high-welfare practices such as cow-with-calf systems.

A wider range of specialist organisations should be funded to deliver advice. That should not be top

down. Peer-to-peer knowledge exchange is the most effective way to extend innovation and regenerative practices across all farming systems. I am aware that that already takes place and is welcomed by farmers.

The sixth pillar is working with nature. That must be done at scale. I look forward to the upcoming regional land use partnerships' presentations of the frameworks from their pilot projects, because that is an essential way to go. However, working with nature should not be addressed separately. Everything that I have outlined will bring us closer to working in harmony with nature, not against it.

I will add two things. Farming and the food system must be shaped by our commitment to protecting 30 per cent of land and sea by 2030; and we will need more people working on the land to produce food, working on our coasts in shellfish and seaweed farms and in sustainable fisheries, and working to restore nature everywhere so that it continues to provide for us as we become a more self-sufficient, sustainable and secure good food nation.

**The Presiding Officer:** Emma Harper is the final speaker in the open debate.

16:27

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I represent a hugely rural region that has many of Scotland's hard-working farmers, so I wanted to speak. As does the Government's motion, I applaud the progress that has been made by the agriculture and aquaculture sectors to adapt to and mitigate the impact of the twin global climate and biodiversity crises.

Our farmers face huge pressure in the media and, as NFU Scotland has pointed out, often feel vilified and blamed for causing climate change. That is not the case. Our farmers and fishers are our food producers. They work incredibly hard to mitigate the impact of climate change. The evidence shows that, particularly in Scotland, our farmers, crofters and food producers have already hugely adapted to the practices that have been mentioned in order to protect our environment and reduce their carbon footprint.

Much of that change has been made possible through investment in agricultural sciences and emerging technologies. I have witnessed much research—for instance, the dairy nexus at the Barony campus of Scotland's Rural College, and vertical farming, which has been mentioned by John Swinney.

I know from farmers in Dumfries and Galloway that they are installing on-farm renewable energy production, such as solar panels and wind turbines; that they are minimising the use of

petroleum-based fertilisers and pesticides; and that they are reducing dependence on fossil fuel inputs for their farming, storage and transportation of crops and livestock. They are increasing soil health by increasing plant matter, and building soil fertility through practices such as compost application, the planting of cover crops and reduced-till or no-till cultivation.

My constituent Christopher Nicholson, chair of the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, who farms at Whithorn, has not ploughed or deep-cultivated for more than 20 years. He says that not only is there a big cost saving in fuel and machinery, there is improved soil health and a higher level of soil organic matter. Soil health is crucial for food security. Kaukab Stewart spoke about that.

The Scottish Government's vision is for Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. There is no contradiction between high-quality food production, food security and the production of food in a way that delivers for the climate and nature.

**Finlay Carson:** Will Emma Harper take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** I do not think that I have the time to do so, Presiding Officer, because last time I took an intervention from Finlay Carson, he made a speech, and I think that we are out of time.

The Scottish Government continues to support food production and secure food supply in this country. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of maintaining support for the sector. That is why it has committed to maintaining direct payments. Additional support is provided to the food producing sector by ensuring payments through the basic payment scheme and greening payments, which were made in advance. Annually, the Government provides around £420 million through those schemes.

However, in the face of the support that the Scottish Government is giving to support our food producers, we are continually hammered by UK Government policies. As the motion states, the food and drink sector in Scotland and across the UK has borne the brunt of the clarty—yes, clarty—Brexit that was pursued by the UK Government, particularly due to the loss of free trade and free movement.

Martin Kennedy, the president of NFU Scotland, said that the Brexit dividend has certainly not come about at all and that all the things that it was concerned about—the whole reason why we backed remain at the time—have come to fruition. Scotland's food and drink sector lost many of the benefits that it once had when we were trading with the European Union and part of the single

market. Many Scottish food industries, including seafood and cheese producers and livestock transporters across Galloway in my South Scotland region, have suffered from reduced exports to the EU. At a time when food security faces unprecedented threats, it was appallingly reckless for the UK Government to place our trading relationship with the EU in jeopardy.

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

**Emma Harper:** I absolutely welcome the food security unit that the cabinet secretary established in response to the war in Ukraine. The unit will look at current and future threats to ensure food resilience across Scotland, and I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary established it.

Brexit means that the Scottish Government no longer has long-term certainty of funding. That the unilateral choices that are being imposed by the Treasury provide insufficient replacement EU funding is a huge concern.

**Oliver Mundell:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Emma Harper:** The Scottish Government has been clear and consistent in its position. It expects full equivalent replacement of EU funds to ensure that there is no detriment to our finances and it expects the UK Government to fully respect the devolution settlement in any future arrangement. However, the Scottish Government has no clarity about the future budget and already faces a shortfall of £93 million because those guarantees have not been honoured.

I am proud of our farmers in Scotland. We should all be proud of our Scottish farmers. They are our food producers and the custodians of our land, and they deserve our thanks. I will support the Scottish Government motion at decision time tonight.

**Rachael Hamilton:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Please could the chamber have some clarification on the length of the debate. We were told by the Deputy Presiding Officer that there is no time for interventions and two of the last speakers have not taken interventions, saying that their time is restricted.

**The Presiding Officer:** We are on schedule at this point. The point that I believe the Deputy Presiding Officer made, and which I will make myself, is that we are on time. Whether a member accepts an intervention is therefore wholly a matter for them with regard to the management of their time.

**Emma Harper:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek some further guidance. My understanding was that we were out of time, so I cut my speech short and did not take any

interventions. I normally do, but the last time I took interventions, members went on and used up half of my speech time. I am conscious that I had some time in hand at the end. I seek clarity, as my understanding was that I did not have enough time.

**The Presiding Officer:** My understanding is that there was time during the debate and that other members had shared that time. At this point in time, we are on time; there is no additional time. Whether a member accepts an intervention is therefore wholly up to them. We are certainly not in the position of cutting time short.

We move to winding-up speeches.

16:34

**Beatrice Wishart:** It is fair to say that we have had a robust debate that has shown the passion in communities across Scotland for ensuring our food supply. Should my amendment be agreed to, that will signal to communities around our coasts that the Scottish Parliament is listening to the strength of feeling about the Scottish Government's HPMA proposals.

As I previously mentioned, communities that are concerned about HPMA's are not against protection of our marine life—quite the opposite. Aquaculture and fishing can continue alongside evidence-based policies to protect our seas, natural habitats and life.

Rachael Hamilton highlighted the work across the food and agriculture sector to develop strategies to tackle the climate emergency without compromising production. We can improve our land and sea environments in conjunction with the people who work in them and we can bring them along with us.

We know that the impact on food prices of the cost of living crisis has been stark, as Sarah Boyack and others said. Rhoda Grant spoke about the many people, including those who work in the food industries, who rely on food banks, while Richard Leonard spoke of the thin line between hunger and anger. Our sustainable secure food supply must be affordable for consumers while giving farmers and growers a fair deal, too. After all, without a home-grown farming sector, we will be far from keeping consumer costs down.

Food security was spoken of but little before the invasion of Ukraine, but policies from both Scotland's Governments have had negative impacts on achieving it. Food prices have been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, but the UK Government's Brexit deal has left us having to tackle higher inflation than there is in comparable countries, where inflation rates are lower.

Without the willing workers who used to come from the continent, food has been left to rot in the fields, as John Swinney outlined in his speech.

Brexit enthusiasts told us that we would be first in line for top trade deals and that countries would queue at our door to sign deals with us. However, the UK Government's approach to trade deals has risked undermining Scottish and UK agriculture and is undercutting the goods that we produce to high environmental and animal welfare standards. NFU Scotland has described post-Brexit trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand as

“one sided, with little to no advantage for Scottish farmers” and as posing

“a long term threat to key Scottish agricultural sectors, such as beef, lamb and dairy”.

Scottish Liberal Democrats want to reaffirm that all trade deals should meet UK standards in environmental protection and animal welfare.

Brian Whittle spoke of reduced food miles and joined-up public procurement, which would bring about improvements to health. Kaukab Stewart spoke about the global situation and the importance of education for making healthier choices.

Scottish Liberal Democrats call on the Scottish Government to build on the initial agricultural transition funding that was won by our party and which rewards environmental stewardship and helps agricultural businesses to make investments that will rapidly reduce emissions. We will look closely at and support means to keep farming profitable and sustainable with a focus on the need to ensure that food is on tables and shop shelves throughout the country.

16:37

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** In their opening remarks, the cabinet secretary and her colleagues laid the blame for harvests rotting on the vine on Brexit and its impacts. It is, to be frank, embarrassing that seven years since that vote the Scottish Government continues to wring its hands instead of rolling up its sleeves and getting to work.

Scottish Government ministers know that a country's economy cannot be based on importing labour from overseas. Of course, we must always welcome new neighbours, but that must be in addition to, not instead of, developing our own labour strategy, because without an industrial strategy for a sustainable food supply chain that recruits, trains and values workers through unionised jobs and excellent pay and conditions, we will all go hungry.

**Jim Fairlie:** Does that mean that Mercedes Villalba agrees with Suella Braverman?

**Mercedes Villalba:** It is telling that the intervention from the SNP back bencher focuses on Westminster politics. It demonstrates that the SNP knows that, at the next election, there is a choice between only two parties and it can continue to support the rotten Tory Government or get behind Labour and give Scotland the Government that it needs.

We heard from Rachael Hamilton that our food security issues are entirely the fault of events elsewhere—never mind the Tory Government’s decimation of the economy, its unwillingness to tackle the gross inequalities that are at the heart of our economic system and its overseeing of the rising food bank use that shames us all.

Food producers, agriculture workers and every single one of our friends and neighbours who are donating to and accessing food banks weekly have one thing in common—failed Tory economics that allow supermarket profits to soar unchecked while children go hungry, and which allow our food producers to be undercut by the party’s disastrous post-Brexit trade agreements. Tories then have the audacity to stand up in Parliament and claim to advocate for rural mental health and rural repopulation and livelihoods. Whether it is denial or delusion, that is utterly shameful.

**Oliver Mundell:** I enjoyed the start of the member’s speech more than this section.

Does she agree that there is absolutely no reason why we are not building enough houses in rural Scotland, which has absolutely nothing to do with Brexit?

**Mercedes Villalba:** It has everything to do with the economy. Mr Mundell’s Party is totally failing in that regard.

It does not have to be this way. Many of our producers are leading the way with high nature value farming, conservation grazing and a wide range of measures that will have a positive impact on the local and global environments and the economy.

However, the current systems do not reward those steps enough. We need radical actions to address the injustice and harm that our current system is doing, because until no child in Scotland is hungry and no food banks are needed, we cannot call ourselves a good food nation.

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** The Social Justice and Social Security Committee recently took evidence from Cara Hilton from the Trussell Trust, who said that

“the Scottish child payment is a great example of a policy that is”

absolutely working and

“starting to make a difference”—[*Official Report, Social Justice and Social Security Committee, 4 May 2023; c 20.*]

because there has been a reduction in the number of food parcels that are going out to those children, as is clear in the trust’s statistics. Does the member welcome that information?

**Mercedes Villalba:** We welcome the Scottish Government coming behind Labour on our call for that increase.

As I was saying before that intervention, we cannot call ourselves a good food nation until no child in Scotland is hungry and no food banks are needed. That is why Labour is calling for the right to food to be enshrined in law and empowered through the food commission, and why the next Labour Government will end use of the zero-hour contracts that so blight our food supply chains and economy.

Labour would see every child fed, every worker heard and every flower bloom.

16:43

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Seven years after the vote to leave the European Union, the SNP-Green coalition is still dithering on what will come next for our food sector, and the clock is ticking.

Recently, 300 farmers gathered outside Holyrood demanding that food production be at the heart of the new agriculture bill. Despite George Burgess, the director of agriculture and rural economy, describing the event as a celebration of Scottish food, make no mistake that it was a protest to send a clear message to the Scottish Government that secure and sustainable food production needs to be at the heart of the new agriculture bill.

Farmers are desperate to continue to invest in and to protect a sustainable and secure food supply across the whole country, and that goes hand in hand with meeting biodiversity and climate change goals. Scotland’s farmers have already taken great strides towards reducing their emissions, despite the lack of any significant support from the SNP-Green Government, but farmers know that there is still much to be done, and the industry relishes the challenge, provided that people are kept fully informed of what is expected of them and know what the end game is, which is something that has been seriously lacking up to now.

We have had many different pieces of legislation being lined up for this Parliament to consider, concerning the biodiversity plan, the climate change plan and land reform, as well as the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland)



Bill. However, worryingly, despite being asked repeatedly throughout her time in office, Mairi Gougeon has failed to answer this straightforward question: is she proposing an agricultural policy that takes note of environmental biodiversity and emissions targets, or is she planning to have environment, biodiversity and net zero policies that agriculture sits behind?

Well, we all know the answer now, because it is clear that agriculture is just trailing in behind the overriding environmental policies that are being influenced by the unevidenced policies driven by the urban dwelling, extreme Greens, whose chamber contributions do not even stand up to scrutiny. We can see that in the hated HPMA policy. Where is the economic impact assessment of that approach, which we could use to determine the damage that is being done to Scotland's rural economy?

Since 24 June 2016, when many of us first discussed the implications of leaving the common agricultural policy at the Royal Highland Show, we have said that there would be a need for a new agriculture policy, and this Government should have been right on to it. However, we have had seven years of dilly-dallying and consultation after consultation with no clear direction of travel or outcome.

To make the impact of delaying worse, it comes at the same time as we undoubtedly need to rapidly implement far-reaching policies to address climate change. Some great work has been done by the farmer-led groups, which were established to develop advice and proposals for ways in which the Scottish Government could cut emissions and tackle climate change. They reported in March 2021, and the good news is that many of the recommendations that were adopted are now delivering tangible results.

However, the bad news is that those recommendations are not being delivered or adopted in Scotland. It is the Irish who appear to have implemented many of the actions from the FLG report. The Irish Government has backed measures to encourage and promote suckler beef production in Ireland to the tune of €265 million over five years, and that is to our detriment. Furthermore, 41,000 farmers in Ireland have signed up to the lime subsidy scheme to condition soils and improve productivity and therefore reduce inputs. Here, however, the Government has attracted fewer than 200 farmers to sign up for a £500 deal to take soil samples. What an abject failure—a failure not on the part of our farmers, but on the part of the SNP Government.

I touched on the recommendations of the farmer-led groups. There was also the important work of the suckler beef climate group, the food and agriculture stakeholders task force and the

Agricultural Industries Confederation. Our academics and research organisations are doing an amazing job in developing well-evidenced strategies to enable food producers to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change without compromising production. However, we need the Government to play its part. Right now, there is no sign that it is stepping up to the mark anywhere near fast enough or with adequate resources.

It is only right that we recognise the role that horticulturists and the agritourism industry play at the heart of rural, coastal and island communities, and the £15 billion contribution that they make to Scotland's food and drink industry. As Brian Whittle mentioned, the retail value of agritourism has increased by more than £50 million to more than £110 million. With farmers facing many pressures, they need to diversify simply to make ends meet—producing food is simply not enough, and farmers are left to sort out situations, including their local food supply chains. The Government should have dealt with that many years ago, but many insist that it still feels like there are not enough policies, adequate policies or financial support in this expanding sector, and that more needs to be done to promote the sector and advertise the value of local food chains and Scottish rural businesses.

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party's proposals will support Scotland's rural and island communities by securing jobs and livelihoods and creating a viable future for our farmers, crofters and fishermen. Scottish Land & Estates recognises that Scotland's land is essential to produce food, sequester carbon and enhance biodiversity, and it urges the Scottish Government to stand up for Scottish farmers and rapidly realise opportunities from new free trade agreements and the development of agriculture support schemes.

**Jim Fairlie:** What opportunities for beef and cattle farmers will come from the New Zealand trade deal?

**Finlay Carson:** We have a whole range of different opportunities. The problem with the Scottish Government is that it would rather put constitutional grievance above getting the day job done. We have had seven years since we left Europe to make the best of the job. Whether or not we agree with Brexit, the SNP Government has failed to step up to the mark.

We have heard again today that Scottish salmon are an extraordinary global success story that supports thousands of jobs and contributes millions of pounds to the UK economy. Scottish salmon have among the lowest carbon footprints of any farm-raised animals, as the evidence from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations tells us. However, the SNP-Green coalition is planning to introduce mandatory

HPMAs in 10 per cent of Scotland's waters when over 40 per cent are already subject to restrictions.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, Mr Carson.

**Finlay Carson:** With the biodiversity and climate emergencies and rising food costs and inflation across the globe, there is the risk of a perfect storm. The SNP Government must bring forward strategies and policies as a matter of urgency to allow proper and thorough scrutiny, with proper peer-reviewed science at the heart of them, to ensure that we have a future agriculture policy that has sustainable food production as a focus. It is only with that approach that we can hope to deliver for the future health of our communities—that is, health in the widest sense and the long-term health of our planet.

16:51

**Mairi Gougeon:** I thank members for what I think we can all agree has been a very lively debate—as it should have been. That shows the level of interest in the issue and demonstrates the importance of food security to all of us. I also thank the organisations that contacted us with briefings for the debate.

There is an awful lot of ground to cover. I will try to get through as much as I possibly can and will address as many of the points that have been raised in the debate as I can.

First, I will touch on each of the amendments that were lodged. There are elements in all of them that we would welcome.

On Beatrice Wishart's amendment, we absolutely agree on the importance of our fishing and aquaculture sectors. Scotland's fishing industry is the lifeblood of our coastal communities. It supports jobs and businesses, sustains a unique heritage and way of life, and contributes substantively to our wider economy through processing and exports. We will see fish and seafood become even more important to our food security in the future. That is why we have continued to work to secure £486 million-worth of fishing opportunities through our international negotiations, why the marine fund Scotland is supporting the innovation that we want to see in those sectors, and why we spend over £9.7 million on science.

**Finlay Carson:** Does the cabinet secretary believe that those additional fishing opportunities would have been available if we had still had the common fisheries policy?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I will come on to address the point that Finlay Carson has raised. However, it is a bit rich of him to talk about fishing opportunities, considering all the promises that were made to our

fishers during Brexit, which have yet to materialise.

I fully recognise the concerns that have been raised in the chamber today and that have been aired in a series of debates in the past few weeks about HPMAs, in particular. The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition and I have made it clear that we are listening and that we will carefully consider the results of the consultation. We will also engage with communities and the fishing industry. When I was in Shetland earlier this week, I took the opportunity to do just that, as well as engaging with other bodies, including Shetland Islands Council, to discuss more of the issues that Beatrice Wishart had raised.

I welcome the fact that, in her amendment, Rachael Hamilton at long last acknowledges the progress that the Government and the food and drink sector are making on transforming how we farm. I am more than happy to remind her and the Scottish Tories that the SNP is keeping direct support for farmers and crofters while it is their party that is removing such support in England.

We are seeking clarity on the funding that was announced on Tuesday. I trust that, should that be new money, Rachael Hamilton and her colleagues will support my call for a fair share of that funding to be devolved to Scotland, for us to determine how to spend it on Scottish priorities in food security.

There were some points in Finlay Carson's closing speech that I need to address, in relation to his assertions and the lack of support for our industry. Again, this Government committed to direct payments instead of withdrawing that support, as the UK Government has done down south. I wish that Mr Carson would actually take the time to read the information that we have published—our vision for agriculture and our route map, as well as the list of measures that we published alongside that. I think that it is clear from his closing speech that he has not taken the opportunity to do that, because the list of measures that we published alongside the route map, which sets out when the key decisions will be made and when we will be providing more information, is based on the work by the farmer-led groups. As I said, that is the foundation for the policy that we are taking forward, and the list of measures is evidence of that.

Both Finlay Carson and Mercedes Villalba seem to have forgotten about the Scottish Government's commitment to stability and simplicity in the key period between Brexit and now, so that our farming industry has had that certainty and stability as we progress to a new policy.

Turning to Labour's amendment, Rhoda Grant's contribution focused on food security as it affects

people and households. We agree that affordability is a key issue. We know, from the latest Office for National Statistics estimates, that, in the 12 months up to March 2023, average food prices for UK households rose by almost 20 per cent. That is why we have allocated almost £3 billion to support policies that tackle poverty and protect people, as far as possible, during the on-going cost of living crisis. We know that that is providing vital support—including by helping people to access emergency cash in their local communities—while, in the long term, we seek to ensure that people have sufficient income to buy a diverse range of healthy and nutritious food.

Rhoda Grant's amendment also highlights just how limited our powers are in this regard and how much is still reserved to the UK Government. I welcome Scottish Labour's recognition of these issues and the limits to what we can do currently, and I hope that Scottish Labour will now join us in arguing for more powers, more funding and more levers to tackle food insecurity and employment.

**Rhoda Grant:** I was speaking about the Scottish Government using its own powers. For example, its consultation on ending the need for food banks in Scotland was supposed to come forward with a plan of work last winter and it has not. When will we see that plan of work?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Ms Grant has taken my next point from me, because that was exactly what I was coming on to. The statistics that Ms Grant highlighted from the Trussell Trust and the truly shocking figures that she presented on the amount of food parcels that are now being delivered shows how stark the situation is.

She mentioned the plan for ending the need for food banks. Since consulting on the plan, the context in which that consultation was done has changed considerably, given the cost of living crisis, among other factors. The plan will be published shortly, showing the actions that we will take to tackle food insecurity, but I would be happy to follow up with the member and give her more information on that.

We have touched on the importance of local food and local food supply chains, and we are working to create more food security locally for people, businesses and communities. Through the food for life programme, we are providing a further £480,000 of funding over the next financial year to the Soil Association so that more local authorities can be accredited to deliver more locally sourced, healthier food in schools. We have also provided over £700,000 since 2020 to the Scottish Grocers Federation for its go local programme, which is helping to transform convenience stores, with dedicated display space for Scottish produce.

We are also working with key stakeholders to finalise our local food strategy to connect more people with local food, to connect Scottish producers with buyers and put more local food on local menus, and to harness the power of public sector procurement.

**Brian Whittle:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I am sorry, but I need to make some progress.

That brings me to the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022. So many of the issues that were mentioned by Brian Whittle and Kaukab Stewart will be fundamental to the good food nation plan that we must produce. Food links so many different areas of policy in Government, and we will pull all of those—food waste, education, improving health, resilient supply chains and procurement—together in that key document. Procurement is an issue that the member has raised with me on previous occasions, as well as being focused on by Sarah Boyack in her contribution today, and it is important to all these discussions, too.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Not at the moment—I need to make progress.

Jim Fairlie made a really important point today, because, in talking about how food links all these different areas, he made the point that food impacts each and every one of us.

Richard Leonard asked about the progress of the good food nation plans. We have set out the timescales for bringing those forward in line with what is set out in the legislation.

I will touch on a key point that has been raised in a number of contributions. Rachael Hamilton and the Tories have a brass neck to talk about reducing the amount of costly food that is being flown in from abroad. It is their party that is allowing imports to come into this country completely unimpeded. It voted down a motion that would have seen our high animal welfare standards protected in trade deals, which its own DEFRA minister admitted sold our producers down the river. The same party repeatedly pushed back import checks, with the very real biosecurity risks that that would present, particularly to vulnerable sectors such as our pig sector, which faces real threats from the likes of African swine fever.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, cabinet secretary.

**Mairi Gougeon:** I will conclude, Presiding Officer.

I did not want to touch on Oliver Mundell's contribution, to be honest, since all he seemed to do was hurl insults and mistruths. He talked about the one benefit of a trade deal—

**Oliver Mundell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mairi Gougeon:** No, I will not take an intervention. The member has heard that I must close.

I agree that there may be benefits for the whisky industry, but we should never be looking for benefits for one sector over another. He completely forgets about the beef and lamb producers in this country, who have been completely sold down the river by his UK Government.

As much as we do to make food supply more sustainable and secure at all levels in Scotland, we do that with only a fraction of the powers, levers and funding that we need. We need more powers so that we can do more to protect our own people from the ravages of food inflation, use our own energy resources to benefit our own people and businesses and, frankly, help more of them to keep the lights and the machines on.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland.

## Decision Time

17:01

**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-09014.1, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09014, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland, 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.

17:01

*Meeting suspended.*

17:04

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to the division on amendment S6M-09014.1, in the name of Rachael Hamilton. Members should cast their votes now.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South 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)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-09014.1, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, is: For 28, Against 83, Abstentions 0.

Amendment *disagreed to*.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-09014.2, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09014, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South 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)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-09014.2, in the name of Rhoda Grant, is: For 83, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-09014.3, in the name of Beatrice Wishart, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09014, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (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)  
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (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)  
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)  
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (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)  
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-09014.3, in the name

of Beatrice Wishart, is: For 49, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-09014, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
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)  
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
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)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South 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)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-09014, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on securing a sustainable food supply for Scotland, as amended, is: For 83, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament commends farmers and crofters, seafood and aquaculture industries, food manufacturers

and producers for the role that they play at the heart of rural, coastal and island communities in contributing to Scotland's £15 billion food and drink industry; notes that the hard Brexit negotiated by the UK Government has created serious, long-term harms for the food and drink sector, creating labour shortages, new barriers to trade and failing to prioritise Scottish interests in third country trade deals; understands the growing impact that the climate emergency is having on food production in Scotland and globally, and applauds the progress that is already being made by the sector to adapt to, and mitigate, climate change; recognises the important work of the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board, and the co-development of effective models to enable producers to produce while delivering for nature and the climate; welcomes the creation of a new, dedicated Food Security Unit as a result of the work of the Short-life Food Security and Supply Taskforce, established by the Scottish Government and industry to consider short- and long-term risks to food security; is concerned at current levels of food inflation; recognises that the UK Government holds the majority of powers and levers to support consumers and the food sector and urges it to act immediately to help them during the cost of living crisis, including with energy costs; acknowledges that Scotland will need to further adapt how and what is grown and produced to address and mitigate climate change, as well as produce more food more sustainably, to meet Scotland's commitments to be a Good Food Nation now and in the future; believes that it is unacceptable in the 21st century, in a resource rich nation, that so many people are living in food poverty and relying on food banks; notes that many of those who are living in food poverty are those who work in the food industry; urges more action on addressing low pay, zero-hours contracts and insecure work for those producing Scottish food; recognises the powers that the Scottish Government has that could be used to mitigate the cost of living crisis; believes that food production and a sustainable environment can work hand in hand for the benefit of both, and do not need to be at the expense of one or the other, and further believes that the right to food should be enshrined in Scots law, and that the Scottish Food Commission should be empowered to realise that policy urgently.

*Meeting closed at 17:11.*



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

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