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Wednesday 9 November 2022

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 9 November 2022

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is rural affairs and islands. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or enter the letters "RTS" in the chat function during the relevant question. I call for succinct questions and answers in order to get in as many members as possible.

Meat Exports (United Kingdom Regulations)

1. **Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential impact on Scotland's agricultural sector of the United Kingdom Government's upcoming new regulations regarding meat exports. (S6O-01508)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government's assessment is that the European Union's requirement for meat to come from farms that are subject to regular veterinary visits will affect mainly the non-farm-assured livestock sectors. However, it will create bureaucracy across the industry that would have been unnecessary had the UK Government chosen a closer relationship with the EU based on shared standards. The vast majority of cattle, sheep and pigs produced in Scotland are farm assured.

The Scottish Government is working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to try to find a pragmatic solution that will allow farmers and the meat industry to continue exporting and minimise trade barriers. I have raised the issue with the UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Thérèse Coffey, to urge a speedy solution.

Fiona Hyslop: The results of Quality Meat Scotland's annual export survey underline the importance of European markets to those who produce Scotland's world-class meat, and the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers has been clear about its concerns that businesses

"stand to lose millions of pounds of export business unless DEFRA relents".

The UK Government has already forced Brexit on Scotland's farmers and producers; it should be looking to make things easier, not harder. In the cabinet secretary's engagement with the secretary of state, has she received any other information as to whether DEFRA is likely to amend this problematic set of regulations?

Mairi Gougeon: I am absolutely aware of the industry's concerns. It has contacted me directly about the situation to highlight just how stark it is. I fully agree with the member that it is the UK Government's approach to the issue and to withdrawal from the EU that has caused these burdens for Scottish farmers and Scottish businesses. As I said in my initial response, I raised the issue with the secretary of state, Thérèse Coffey—I did so at the interministerial group meeting that we had just at the start of this week. Officials, led by the chief veterinary officer, are working with DEFRA to develop a workable solution, and I hope that such a solution is still possible.

However, it is also important to highlight just how proud we can be of our Scottish producers, because the vast majority of Scottish farms belong to an assurance scheme such as the one from QMS, which the member referred to. It is quite right that we celebrate that.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): We are right in the middle of the store lamb and calf sale season right now, with prices linked to what fat producers believe the longer-term values will be. The timing of the decision could be hugely damaging to hill and upland farmers—the very farmers who need more support than others—and I know first hand the stresses that the situation will be causing and the impact that it could have.

Was the cabinet secretary given any notification of the change by DEFRA or the UK Government? If not, does she agree that, on issues of such grave importance to our livestock and meat sector, they both have a duty to consult the devolved legislatures?

Mairi Gougeon: In relation to the member's question about consultation, from what I understand, DEFRA said that it had engaged with stakeholders. However, we were certainly not involved in any formal consultation in relation to the issue until the most recent discussions with the chief veterinary officer. Given the impact of such decisions, we should of course be involved in the decision making and we should be consulted as early as possible.

Farm Payments (Convicted Criminals)

2. **Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government for an update on

what action it is taking to withhold farming payments from convicted criminals. (S6O-01509)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): There is no provision within the current legislation governing the basic payment scheme to recover or withhold payments to an individual business if it is meeting the scheme requirements. We are, however, considering whether future changes to legislation could introduce provisions to withhold payments to those who may not be fit and proper persons.

Russell Findlay: The cabinet secretary will probably be aware that the reason why I ask is that, in July, we learned that a farmer who was jailed for the sexual abuse of three children had been awarded almost £50,000 in subsidies by the Scottish National Party Government. At the time, a Government spokesperson indicated that it was considering whether the law could be changed in order to block such payments in future, as the cabinet secretary has just repeated. Weeks later, however, the *Daily Record* revealed that the same individual was given another £36,000. Can the cabinet secretary give any indication as to when that loophole might be closed?

Mairi Gougeon: The member raises an important point. It is critical to highlight that, although the powers over the basic payment scheme are devolved and we have the powers to change eligibility, we can do that only when it would simplify or improve the existing rules. At the moment, within the current powers and the legislation that we have in place, it is not possible for us to do that. As he will no doubt be aware, a consultation is open right now on legislation that we are looking to introduce in the Parliament, and I very much hope that he will take part in that consultation and make his views on the issue known. We will give that consideration when that legislation is brought forward.

Pet-owning Households

3. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on whether there are households that took on a pet during the Covid-19 pandemic and are now struggling to look after them, in the light of the cost of living crisis. (S6O-01510)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government does not hold data relating to pets that were purchased during the pandemic and whose owners may now face difficulties with providing adequate care for them as result of the crisis.

The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reports that the number of calls received from concerned pet owners has

increased by 218 per cent compared with last year. Concerned owners looking for help and advice can contact the Scottish SPCA, in confidence, via its helpline. It is really important that, if people feel that they need help, they do that. The helpline number is 03000 999 999, and people can also visit the Scottish SPCA's website to find out more about its pet aid scheme, which can help pet owners with essential food supplies.

John Mason: I thank the cabinet secretary for her detailed answer. As she says, some of the figures are stark. The Scottish SPCA has reported that, in the whole of last year, 194 dogs were taken into care, and in the first six months of this year, the number was around 700. Can the cabinet secretary advise pet owners about where else they can get food for their animals—food banks, for example? Clearly, it is better if they do not have to hand over their animals to charities.

Mairi Gougeon: It is really distressing to hear the figures that the member has highlighted. It is upsetting when anyone feels as though they have no option other than to give up their pet, which is, of course, part of their family. I absolutely would encourage anyone who is experiencing difficulties, who thinks that they cannot cope or who thinks that they cannot keep their animal to reach out for support, because there are people who can help.

I specifically highlight the Scottish SPCA's pet aid initiative, which supports people, and their pets, who are struggling. Recently, I met the Scottish SPCA in my constituency to hear more about the initiative. Through pet aid, the organisation supplies pet supplies and food through food banks and community larders. That initiative is in a number of locations throughout Scotland, and the Scottish SPCA is looking to expand the network further.

The Scottish SPCA does not want people to be separated from their pets. It was really awful to hear from the organisation about some instances in which people have been effectively starving themselves to try to feed their animals. I do not think that that should be a choice that anyone has to make.

The Scottish SPCA provides invaluable support and assistance. As I highlighted in my initial response, it can be contacted by phone or via its website. If anyone is struggling, I would encourage them to reach out and ask for help and support.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I highlight the work that the Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home does to provide support. During lockdown, increased demand for dogs saw increased prices, resulting in dog abductions surging a staggering 170 per cent, according to one charity. The current law does not do a good job of tackling the problem: the data is poor, the

maximum punishment does not fit the crime, and dogs are treated as objects instead of living beings. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need much better options if we are to tackle that heartless crime, such as those in my new proposed dog abduction bill?

Mairi Gougeon: I appreciate that the member is bringing forward that bill and I am, of course, more than happy to discuss it with him in more detail.

We know that, when they are sentencing, the courts will take into account the circumstances of any theft, including whether a loved family pet has been stolen. However, dogs and other pets are not the same as inanimate objects and I know that, when a theft of a pet occurs, it can cause significant upset.

We know that microchipping is an effective method of identifying animals, which can help to reunite lost or stolen dogs with their owners. The Scottish Government made it compulsory for all dogs to be microchipped and for contact details to be kept up to date. I encourage all dog owners to ensure that their dogs are microchipped.

I appreciate what the member is looking to do and, as I said, I am more than happy to consider his proposals when they come forward, and to discuss the matter further.

Food and Drink Sector (Impact of Brexit)

4. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its latest assessment is of the impact of Brexit on Scotland's food and drink sector. (S6O-01511)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): As a result of the United Kingdom Government's reckless approach to European Union negotiations, Scotland's food and drink sector lost many of the benefits that it once had when trading with the EU. The full economic consequences of exiting the EU are still to be realised. However, businesses now face additional expense when trading, and some food producers have found that their goods can no longer be exported to the EU. Many of Scotland's food industries are still suffering from lower exports to the EU. There has been, for example, a 52 per cent fall in exports of fruit and vegetables and a 25 per cent fall in exports of dairy and eggs in the first months of 2022 compared to the same period in 2019.

Kaukab Stewart: Dr Liz Cameron of Scottish Chambers of Commerce recently stated:

"Scottish exporters are telling us that they continue to face growing challenges trading with countries in the EU post Brexit."

Given the absence of any meaningful effort to alleviate the impacts on Scottish businesses of the

UK Government's economically inept and ideologically driven Brexit policy, does the cabinet secretary think that it is issues of competence or a thinly veiled contempt for Scotland that drives UK Government decision making on these issues?

Mairi Gougeon: It is disappointing to look at the series of decisions that have been taken and the catastrophic impact that they continue to have on Scotland and on our businesses. We can see that in the export figures that I have outlined, but we also continue to see the damage in the labour shortages that we see across our food and drink industry and many other sectors in Scotland.

Snaring

5. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish the outcome of both the statutory review of snaring and its additional review, which was considering a potential ban on snaring in Scotland. (S6O-01512)

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): We published the outcome of the statutory review of snaring earlier this year on 1 April, and it can be found on the Scottish Government website. As Mr Smyth mentioned, I commissioned a review on the animal welfare aspects of snaring and also the implications of a ban on snaring on land management activities in Scotland. I expect to be able to publish the findings of that review soon, including any decisions made regarding the future of snaring in Scotland.

Colin Smyth: I note that the recommendations of the review that were published in April seem to implement the recommendations of the previous review in 2017, which have not yet been implemented. I hope that they will be delivered this time.

Can the minister give a clear assurance that, should there be any proposed legislative changes arising from the wider review of snaring—which, of course, I hope will involve a full ban—the timescale for publishing the review and any necessary consultation will allow any proposed changes to be incorporated in the proposed wildlife management (grouse) bill, which is the obvious place for them, rather than having to wait for separate legislation in the future?

Màiri McAllan: I am happy to confirm my view that, should my view be that legislative change is needed as a result of the review, that will correlate with that bill and be included therein.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): NatureScot predicts that the capercaillie will become extinct in the next two to three decades, and the British Trust for Ornithology notes that curlew populations have been rapidly declining over the past two decades.

Predation by species such as fox is one of the foremost challenges that are faced by these rare birds, so how does the minister intend to confront biodiversity loss and protect species such as the capercaillie and curlew while her Government systematically dismantles the tools for ethical predator control, such as snaring?

Màiri McAllan: On the one hand, I understand why many people instinctively feel that snaring is cruel but, on the other hand, I understand that land managers require access to control methods for legitimate purposes, including conservation, as Rachael Hamilton said. It was for exactly those considerations that I commissioned a review and, as I said to Mr Smyth, I will consider its outcome and publish it shortly.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On 25 November 2021, in answer to my colleague Colin Smyth, you indicated in your ministerial role that the Scottish Government would extend the scope of the snaring review to include a potential outright ban on snaring in Scotland. Is that still on the cards?

Màiri McAllan: Yes, it is. The statutory review is, I think, required to take place every five years, although I might be getting the number of years wrong. I commissioned the separate review that Christine Grahame referred to, which went beyond the terms of the statutory review and looked at the potential and impacts of banning snaring in Scotland. That is the review that I hope to publish soon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 was not lodged.

Argyll and Bute (Depopulation)

7. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what further financial support it will provide to Argyll and Bute to help tackle depopulation of rural areas and islands. (S6O-01514)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Despite our capital allocations being significantly restrained as a result of the United Kingdom Government's spending review, we continue to invest in our rural and island communities. That investment is provided through a range of programmes, such as the affordable housing supply programme, our rural and islands communities ideas into action fund and the Argyll and Bute rural growth deal. However, it is crucial that we acknowledge that the Scottish Government alone cannot tackle the critical challenge of depopulation. National and local government and the third, community and private sectors all have a role to play if we are to tackle depopulation collectively.

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary will be aware that Argyll and Bute is the second largest local authority by area in Scotland, but it is suffering from significant depopulation. At the same time as the population increased across Scotland, it decreased in Argyll and Bute, most notably by 34 per cent in the 25 to 44 age group. There are two infrastructure constraints: the first is the lack of a reliable ferry service and the second is the on-going problem on the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful. In the latter case, can the cabinet secretary tell me when medium and long-term solutions will be found for the A83? Has the funding for that been identified in the budget?

Mairi Gougeon: Of course, if the member has not already done so directly, I am happy to raise those questions with the transport minister.

I come back to the initial part of my response to the member, which was that we alone cannot fix the challenges of depopulation. It takes work on a variety of fronts to tackle the sheer scale of the challenges that we have, whether that is transport or digital infrastructure, or housing.

I also emphasise that I am part of a ministerial task force that is looking at this. We will also bring forward a depopulation action plan; alongside my ministerial colleagues, I am leading on elements of that. We are intent on tackling the issues in and around all these problems and doing what we can across the piece, as well as across other parts of Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Beatrice Wishart has a supplementary question. I flag up to Ms Wishart that the question is about what further financial support the Government would provide to Argyll and Bute to help tackle depopulation in rural areas and islands.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): In addition to Argyll and Bute, other areas are experiencing population decline. [*Laughter.*] In Shetland, infrastructure such as fixed links has proved positive in reversing depopulation. What additional financial support can the Scottish Government provide to island areas for tunnel or fixed-link infrastructure to help tackle depopulation?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Wishart; that was very deftly done. I feel that it is always important to bring supplementary questions back to the question that is in the *Business Bulletin*.

Mairi Gougeon: Again, I highlight my first response to Jackie Baillie's question, in which I mentioned the significant capital restraints that we face in relation to our budget. It is important to work across Government, the third sector and local government to tackle the issues that communities on our islands face.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I represent Argyll and Bute, and it is important to recognise that Highlands and Islands Enterprise's business panel survey noted that 53 per cent of businesses feel that workforce challenges are a perceived risk to their viability. Migration has a critical role to play in tackling population workforce challenges and, sadly, Labour is now actively engaging in a race to the bottom on immigration. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the need has never been clearer for Scotland to have its own immigration system to meet the needs of rural and island communities, including Argyll and Bute, to reflect our values and to repair the damage of Brexit?

Mairi Gougeon: Absolutely. Migration is a crucial part of the required approach to addressing our population challenges. We know that the United Kingdom Government's immigration policy does not reflect the needs of Scotland's rural communities, and that is exactly why we made the rural visa pilot proposal. It is a bespoke approach, and it not something that we have developed and delivered ourselves—we have worked on it with, and it has been supported by, a range of partners, including our local authorities. I know that Shetland Islands Council has previously commented that it considers the scheme to be an extremely important step when it comes to addressing the demographic challenges and skills shortages, which simply must be counted among the most serious issues that our economy is facing.

Members in the chamber will be aware that, during the debate on the rural visa pilot proposal in September, it was endorsed by a clear majority in the Scottish Parliament. I strongly encourage the UK Government to be more receptive to the democratic will of this Parliament and to allow the proposal to go ahead.

Proposed Agriculture Bill

8. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. Having attended the chamber for yesterday's statement, I think that I know the answer to this question.

To ask the Scottish Government whether its proposed new agriculture bill will be introduced before 2024. (S6O-01515)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Yes.

Edward Mountain: That was predictable. Let us see whether we can get a yes or no answer to this question.

Yesterday, the cabinet secretary failed miserably to answer my question on whether farmers will be any more aware of the

conditionality of future farm support. Forever the optimist, I will try again. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that all farmers will have access to all the agri support schemes that replace the single farm payment and that they will not be excluded by their location or land type? A yes or no answer would suit me.

Mairi Gougeon: My initial response was only predictable because the member was here for yesterday's parliamentary statement. I had already committed to introducing the agriculture bill to Parliament next year.

As I outlined yesterday, what we are introducing in 2025 is a rollover of the schemes that we have at the moment. To be crystal clear, when the enhanced payment is introduced—it is the first element of the new framework that we will be looking to introduce—we want it to be available for everyone, which is why we are working with stakeholders to produce the appropriate measures for that payment through our national test programme, testing actions for sustainable farming.

We know that many farmers and crofters have been leading the way, and it is only right and fair that their work is recognised, as I outlined yesterday. The enhanced payment will not only seek to recognise and award those people who have been pioneering that work but aim to support and incentivise the continued efforts of others, too. Therefore, I strongly encourage all farmers and crofters to join the national test programme, which is testing the actions that could form part of that enhanced payment, to ensure that it is developed in a way that is accessible for everyone.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the importance of livestock farming in Orkney and of the growing concern about the fall in suckler cow number in the islands. What assurances can she offer that the agriculture bill will actively support retaining the critical mass of the Orkney beef herd and will help to build desperately needed confidence in the wider farming sector in our islands?

Mairi Gougeon: The proposals in the bill, which are currently out for consultation, include powers to enable us to continue to support beef and sheep farmers. That includes those who farm in our most marginal land. We know that grazing livestock is vital for food production, and we also know that it is vital for our biodiversity and for various habitats and species. That is why we are committed to providing that support.

I also take the opportunity to mention the agriculture bill consultation, which we will be extending by another couple of weeks. The consultation had been due to run until 21 November, but it will now run until 5 December.

That is specifically because we will be holding an in-person consultation event in Kirkwall on, I believe, 28 November. Of course, I would be happy to circulate further information about those events.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs and islands. We will move to the next portfolio after a short pause to allow front-bench teams to change position.

Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is health and social care. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or enter “RTS” in the chat function during the relevant question.

I ask for succinct questions and answers, so that we can get in as many members as possible.

Advanced Clinical Practitioners (Training)

1. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the training of advanced clinical practitioners. (S6O-01516)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): In its broadest sense, the term “advanced clinical practitioner” can be applied to a range of healthcare professionals. Such practitioners are able to take on expanded roles as a consequence of advanced educational achievement, which is reflected in the scope of their practice.

In Scotland, we have an established advanced nursing practice education and training network, and we committed to training 500 additional advanced nurse practitioners by 2021. That target was exceeded, which was made possible with £4 million of Scottish Government funding to all regional national health service boards for trainee advanced nurse practitioners across all nursing fields and settings, including acute, community, care homes and prisons.

Gillian Martin: The cabinet secretary has largely answered my supplementary question. However, I will highlight that an ACP working in an accident and emergency department told me that, with the training of more ACPs, the burden on consultants would be significantly reduced and A and E waiting times improved. Is the cabinet secretary minded to look at developing that strand of training and recruitment with those things in mind?

Humza Yousaf: We are absolutely committed to continuing to invest in our advanced nurse practitioners and other advanced clinical practitioners. Today, I was at Wishaw general

hospital's A and E department, where I spoke to an advanced nurse practitioner. It was very clear that that person, from the excellent work that he was doing, freed up some of the time of, for example, consultants, medical staff and other nursing staff to look at other cases. They are worth their weight in gold—and more, I would suggest. Therefore, we will continue to invest in ANPs and ACPs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Carol Mochan, who joins us online, has a supplementary question.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Training advanced clinical professionals is vital to ensuring that the NHS develops and improves the level of care that it provides. Allied health professionals from across Scotland, including many of those who were in this Parliament last month—there were nearly 100 of them—are seeing the pressures that specialised NHS staff face daily.

AHPs are our third-largest workforce, and their skills can and will improve patient outcomes. Will the minister commit to listening to and working with AHPs to ensure that they are supported and adequately resourced, so that NHS service planning includes pathways for AHPs to further develop advanced clinical roles, ensuring clinical leadership from them across health and social care?

Humza Yousaf: I agree with almost all of that. Our AHPs play a tremendous role, whether in acute settings or in the community. I am committed to continuing to work with the professional bodies that represent our allied health professionals, continuing to invest in them and, where appropriate, making sure that we invest in their further education and training. As is the case with the point that Gillian Martin rightly made, we know that, given the demands on the health service, the wider and broader that we can spread the workload, the better it is for everybody involved.

I agree very much with Carol Mochan, and I am very happy to discuss the matter further with her offline if she wishes to do so.

Excessive Alcohol Consumption (Impact on National Health Service)

2. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what additional strain excessive alcohol consumption is having on the national health service. (S6O-01517)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Excess alcohol consumption is an important public health challenge in Scotland. It contributes to an increasing risk of developing a number of

conditions, including cancers, heart disease and stroke. In 2020-21, there were 35,124 alcohol-related hospital admissions in Scotland. That was a decrease from the previous year, although Covid-19 and lockdown measures are likely to have contributed to that.

Jamie Greene: I thank the minister for the statistical update. After I wrote an article recently in *Holyrood* magazine about my own, very personal family experience of alcohol, a constituent wrote to me with some on-the-ground feedback about what is happening with alcohol services. She said:

“The lack of societal responsibility for our national shame is clearly demonstrated through a lack of coordination of services. When there is no coordination, there is no responsibility. We should never have to beg to be cared for. It is humiliating.”

I simply ask: why are so many people being let down at the moment by alcohol treatment services? Why are so many people not being treated? Why are so many people not being listened to? I am sure that the experience of my constituent is shared by thousands of people across Scotland. It is simply not good enough.

Maree Todd: Alcohol and drug-related harms are vitally important public health issues in Scotland. That is why we established a national mission to improve and save lives. At the core of that mission is ensuring that every individual is able to access the treatment and the recovery that they choose.

We are working to ensure that people with alcohol use disorder continue to receive the same quality of care as those with problematic drug use. The forthcoming alcohol treatment guidelines, on which we are working with the United Kingdom Government and which have been delayed multiple times, will provide support for alcohol treatment similar to the medication-assisted treatment standards for drugs. We are also developing alcohol treatment targets alongside stage 2 of the drug's target implementation in 2024.

We are absolutely aware of the challenges that the community faces in accessing care. We are investing in residential rehabilitation, which will benefit the people who are experiencing challenges with alcohol as well as those with drug addiction.

Alcohol absolutely remains a priority for the Scottish Government. Our alcohol and drug teams work very closely together on these issues, sharing our knowledge about what works and ways to reduce the impact of addiction, as well as routes through treatment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Paul O’Kane has a supplementary question.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): In the summer recess, I visited Moving On Inverclyde, which is a community-based service supporting people who are in recovery from addiction and supporting families who have lost a loved one to alcohol or drugs. Crucially, such services contribute to the reduction of strain on our national health service.

Inverclyde is one five local authorities in which alcohol-specific death rates have remained above the Scottish average consistently for the past five years. In response to those figures, Dr Alastair MacGilchrist, the chair of Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems, has called on the Scottish Government to increase funding and resources for alcohol services.

What additional support will be made available to ensure that people have access to life-changing and life-saving support, which is so often delivered by the third sector, particularly given the challenges that many charities are facing just to keep the lights on and the doors open because of the cost of energy and resources?

Maree Todd: The first thing to say is that every death from alcohol is an absolute tragedy. At the moment, in Scotland, we lose 24 people a week to directly alcohol-related causes, and that is simply the tip of the iceberg. Behind those statistics of directly alcohol-related deaths, there are also a number of deaths in which alcohol is a factor, including some cardiac deaths, accidents and all sorts of other deaths. Cancer is also a big issue.

We are—absolutely—investing in addiction services as a whole, because of the national drugs mission. We are determined to improve the situation for people who are facing alcohol-related harms. As I said in my answer to the previous questioner, we are awaiting national treatment guidelines, which are being worked out on a four-nations basis. Once they are in place, we will be able to develop targets and scrutinise what is happening on the ground and to invest impactfully in areas where there are gaps in order to ensure that the situation improves.

As well as our work to directly improve access to addiction care, we are working on a whole-population basis to ensure that the long-standing and challenging relationship that we have with alcohol in Scotland is altered in the future. The whole Parliament will be asked whether we should continue one of our flagship policies in that effort—the minimum unit pricing of alcohol—and, if so, whether we should review the price at which it is set. A number of other policies are also in the pipeline, including an alcohol advertising policy and a whole suite of policies that we are determined to use to tackle this long-standing blight on our national landscape.

Long Covid (Support)

3. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support is in place for people with long Covid. (S6O-01518)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): All national health service boards are providing support for people with long Covid, across local primary care teams, community-based rehabilitation services and referrals for further investigation in secondary care settings, where that is clinically appropriate.

For example, in September, I was pleased to meet the multidisciplinary team that is responsible for NHS Lanarkshire's long Covid rehabilitation pathway, which covers the member's constituency. That is delivering a single point of access for assessment and co-ordinated support from services, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, psychology and speech and language therapy, depending on what is most appropriate for the individual's needs.

Fulton MacGregor: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response and for his response to my recent written question on the matter. I welcome the development of the centre in Lanarkshire.

Over the past few months, I have been dealing with a constituent, Tracy McMullen, who has been in touch about her son Jonathan. I know that Tracy has also been in touch with the cabinet secretary directly. Jonathan is in his third year of suffering from long Covid and has been bed-bound for more than a year. It is truly a tragic set of circumstances, as he should be attending sixth year at high school, applying for university and having fun, but, instead, he cannot get out of bed most of the time.

Jonathan's parents have found it extremely difficult to get any support through the NHS or to get him a diagnosis. They have found that primary care givers have no one to refer him to, and the family have had to turn to private providers, where he has recently been diagnosed with mast cell activation syndrome, which is common in long Covid. Hopefully, the symptoms can be treated, but that will be at considerable cost.

Is the Government undertaking any meaningful research into long Covid? When will multidisciplinary teams of knowledgeable healthcare professionals be established to help people such as Jonathan with diagnosis and medical intervention?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Fulton MacGregor for raising Jonathan's case in Parliament. I met his constituent Tracy in June, and I know from speaking to her just how challenging the

symptoms are and what a detrimental impact they are having on her son, Jonathan. I have also written to Jonathan, and my understanding is that he has now been offered NHS support through the pathway that I referred to in my previous answer.

On the specific question on mast cell activation syndrome and research, the Scottish Government has worked with a range of specialists, including immunologists, to develop an implementation support note that provides practical information for clinicians on the identification, assessment and management of the long-term effects of Covid-19. That includes information on mast cell activation syndrome.

We have funded nine Scottish-led research projects on the long-term effects of Covid-19, with a total funding commitment of £2.5 million. Those studies aim to improve our understanding of the long-term effects of Covid-19 on physical and mental health in Scotland, and to inform clinical interventions to support recovery and rehabilitation. Although none of the projects focuses specifically on mast cell activation syndrome, our chief scientist office research funding schemes are open, and applications relating to the syndrome are welcome. Applications would go through the CSO standard independent expert review process to allow funding decisions to be made.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): In October 2021, 90,000 Scots were suffering with long Covid. In May 2022, the Scottish Government announced that £3 million from its long Covid fund will be allocated in 2022. The number of Scots with long Covid is now 200,000, which is more than the population of Aberdeen. How much of the £3 million has been allocated and for what purposes? Does the cabinet secretary accept that the number of long Covid cases in Scotland will continue to boom, as has been the case over the previous 12 months?

Humza Yousaf: I will write to Dr Sandesh Gulhane with the details not only of how much has been allocated but of how much has been allocated per health board, if he would find that useful. We can also give him some detail of each of the projects. As he will know, there is a £10 million commitment over three financial years.

The important point to make is that there is no doubt that there has been a rise in the number of those who are suffering from the long-term effects of Covid—we have seen that in the Scottish health survey and in Office for National Statistics data—so I expect health boards to readjust their spending in the light of the additional demands. The member will know that there is exceptional pressure on our health budget—in fact, my health budget is worth £650 million less than when it was set in December, as a result of inflationary

pressures alone. We are in difficult financial circumstances, but, where we have an increase in demand, as we have seen with long Covid, I expect health boards to adjust spending appropriately.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Last week, Long Covid Scotland published a harrowing report that revealed that only one person out of the hundreds who replied had fully recovered and that relapses were common in four out of five people experiencing symptoms. Those are not just statistics; we are talking about our friends, our families and our neighbours.

Let me come back to the point about money. When the £3 million for long Covid services was announced, 79,000 people had been diagnosed with long Covid. According to the ONS, a year later, the number had increased to 202,000 people, which represents a staggering 155 per cent increase. Rather than leave cash-strapped health boards to pick up the slack, will the cabinet secretary increase the budget to meet that significant additional demand?

Humza Yousaf: As I said to Dr Sandesh Gulhane in my previous answer, whenever there are increases in demand, we expect health boards to adjust their spending accordingly. As, I think, Jackie Baillie is quite aware, I have had to reprofile £400 million of funding in order to deal with the inflationary pressures that have impacted on our budget and to ensure that our NHS staff get a fair pay deal. She has stood up in the chamber and publicly criticised some of the reprofiling relating to mental health services, social care and primary care. Those were all really difficult decisions, and I took no pleasure in making them, but I had to make them because we live within a finite budget. If Jackie Baillie has any ideas about how else we should reprofile money and put it into, for example, long Covid support, I would be more than happy to have that discussion with her.

National Treatment Centres (Staffing)

4. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the reported present staffing crisis, how it will ensure adequate staffing for the proposed national treatment centres. (S6O-01519)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): We are committed to recruiting 1,500 additional staff during this parliamentary session to work across our national treatment centres. The Scottish Government is providing a range of recruitment support, training and development activity to assist health boards in securing the right mix of new and experienced staff. That includes additional funding to support international recruitment; providing additional postgraduate specialty training places in medicine;

funding training opportunities through the NHS Scotland Academy, including training for new perioperative staff; and actively considering future staffing needs as part of on-going workforce planning activity. We have also taken action to support the retention of experienced staff and to develop new pathways into NHS Scotland careers.

Alex Rowley: The cabinet secretary says that he is committed to providing 1,500 additional staff. He might want to say how that is going. Will he set out a timetable for it? In recent weeks and months, I have met local staff and trade unions in Fife and across the region, and they ask that question.

Is there not also a need for greater transparency? Although people acknowledge the difficulties that the NHS faces, they must have confidence that the Government is on top of the issue. If staff who work on the front line do not have that confidence, how can the cabinet secretary expect anyone else to have it?

Humza Yousaf: I speak to staff regularly. In fact, I did so today during a visit to Wishaw general hospital's accident and emergency department, in Lanarkshire.

The Government has a proud record on NHS staffing and on growing staffing levels—NHS staffing is at record levels. We have committed to publishing next year, in our regular statistics, details of how the recruitment is going for the NTCs. I state, again, our commitment to provide 1,500 additional staff for those centres. From the information that I have to hand and from my discussions with the local health board, I know that the recruitment for the Fife national treatment centre is going well and that things are very much on track for its opening next year.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): The 10 national treatment centres should deliver at least 40,000 additional elective surgeries and procedures a year by 2026. Luke Farrow, an orthopaedic surgeon and research fellow at the University of Aberdeen, told BBC Scotland that getting the treatment centres online is an absolute priority and that, every week, the backlog gets worse. Mr Farrow also stated that there must be planning to ensure that the 1,500 staff for the national treatment centres are not taken from elsewhere in the NHS, which would merely serve to worsen wider recruitment issues.

The NHS Lothian treatment centre in Livingston will need 400 staff, but NHS Lothian has warned that significant risks and challenges exist around that level of hiring. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that none of the 1,500 staff that are required for the national treatment centres will be taken from the current NHS staff?

Humza Yousaf: I reiterate what I said to Alex Rowley: we expect the 1,500 staff to be additional.

It is worth noting that the commitment to recruit 1,500 additional staff equates to recruiting less than 1 per cent of the total NHS workforce, so the risks of destabilisation are slim, although we will of course engage with boards—like we would do with NHS Lothian—in order to monitor any local challenges.

When we look at the recruitment of staff, we are aware that significant challenges exist, not just in urban settings such as our NTC in Edinburgh, but also, in particular, in our rural and remote communities. We will engage with boards regularly, but I give a firm commitment that we are talking about additional staff and add that the risk of destabilisation is very slim.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Boasting about recruitment track records and talking about the current crisis as being a “challenge” underestimates the real crisis that we have in our NHS. Just this week, we have heard about the astonishing waits at accident and emergency and about the crisis in our mental health services, yet the cabinet secretary talks as if he is managing the system well. When will he get real about the crisis in the NHS, and when will he sort it out?

Humza Yousaf: That was yet another Willie Rennie intervention, full of constructive ideas, solutions and suggestions. I say to him that nobody—not I nor anyone in the Government—underestimates the challenge that the NHS faces. That is why I spend every waking moment trying to do our best to resolve some of the issues that we are facing, not just in the NHS but in social care. That is why the Government has invested record funding in our NHS and social care, and why we have record staffing in our NHS. That is not a boast; it is simply to demonstrate that we are taking action to help our NHS in a period of difficulty and challenge, which will only increase over the course of the winter.

If Willie Rennie has any constructive suggestions—he is shaking his head to show that he does not—I am more than happy to sit with him and have that discussion off table.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): In light of Keir Starmer’s truly irresponsible comments on reducing the number of migrant workers in the NHS, how can the Scottish Government ensure that Scotland attracts the finest talents from overseas to address the immediate staffing shortages in our health service?

Humza Yousaf: I agree with Stephanie Callaghan—Keir Starmer’s comment on overseas workers was inflammatory and such comments have no place in Scotland. Our NHS family should be proud of the fact that it is diverse. People from across the world choose to work in our NHS; they

come here and provide excellent care to people in need. Whether you are a nurse, doctor, cleaner, member of admin staff, porter or anybody in between—whatever your role is and whether you have been in Scotland for 20 years or for just a couple of weeks—not only is Scotland your home but we are proud to have you as part of the NHS family.

The Labour Party, instead of chuntering from the sidelines, should care less about the front pages of certain right-wing newspapers and do what we do in the Scottish Government: care more about the front line of our NHS.

Rural General Practices

8. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it can provide an update on the steps it is taking to encourage more general practitioners to work in rural practices. (S6O-01523)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): We are fully committed to ensuring that all communities in Scotland receive safe, reliable and sustainable healthcare services, including in general practice.

The Scottish Government offers a wide range of initiatives specifically to attract GPs to rural areas, which includes golden hellos and bursaries for newly qualified GPs to take up posts in hard-to-fill rural locations. I add that our new Scottish graduate entry medicine programme—ScotGEM—which focuses on general practice and rural working, is proving very popular, with the first cohort of 44 students graduating in June of this year from the University of Dundee and the University of St Andrews.

Sharon Dowey: Current recruitment strategies are clearly not working. In the rural area that I represent, GP practices have had to close as they were unable to recruit more GPs.

Other practices have stepped in, but they, too, are struggling due to recruitment issues and have to rely on expensive locum GPs. That situation is replicated across rural areas throughout Scotland. I ask the cabinet secretary not to repeat previous answers as we need something different. What more is the Scottish Government doing now to address rural GP recruitment issues? What incentives are there for doctors to specialise in general practice? How many additional places will be made available at Scottish universities to help fill future vacancies?

Humza Yousaf: We have a manifesto commitment to increase medical graduate places by 100 per year, and we are fulfilling that commitment, so that is something very tangible. However, it is important that we are also able to ensure that a percentage of those graduates end

up in general practice. Our GP specialty trainee bursary has been a phenomenal success that is contributing to our target of having 800 more GPs in Scotland between 2017 and 2027. In an effort to make GP training a more attractive career option, Scotland offers a one-off taxable bursary of £20,000 for GP STs. The scheme's criteria are about posts that are historically hard to fill.

Notwithstanding that and what I have said already about what we are doing, I recognise the points that Sharon Dowey and others have made. We are proactively looking to recruit from other parts of the UK. Sharon Dowey might have seen our campaign marketing Scotland as an attractive destination for GPs and other medical staff to come to in order to set up a life and work.

As part of the latest round of that marketing campaign, our team attended the joint Royal College of General Practitioners and Wonca Europe event held in the ExCel arena in London, where it made more than 80 contacts with delegates who shared a desire to come to Scotland to work, either now or in the future.

We are straining every sinew possible in that regard, and we have a number of incentivisation programmes in place. It will be hard graft, but it is work that I am convinced that we can continue to do to ensure that we have as many GPs as possible coming here to train, work and build a family. If any members wish me to look at specific situations, I am happy to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can squeeze in two supplementary questions, if both questions and answers are brief.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): It is not only rural areas that struggle to fill vacancies; the same situation exists for island posts. What can the cabinet secretary say to a local doctor promoting a GP role in the community of Hillswick, when a British Medical Association Scotland survey found that nearly 50 per cent of junior doctors are considering leaving the profession? How can that be squared with the 2007 SNP manifesto commitment to encourage people to train in rural medicine and commit to working in rural areas?

Humza Yousaf: I am afraid that it is important that we do not lose sight of the impact of interventions such as Brexit. That is particularly relevant to islands such as Shetland, where a considerable number of doctors and medical staff were from Europe. Notwithstanding that fact—Brexit has been taken forward at full scale by the UK Government—I will not repeat what I have said about the incentivisation schemes. However, I am happy to discuss the issue with Beatrice Wishart if she thinks that there is more that we can do, particularly for island communities. I continue to

have regular dialogue with Shetland, Orkney and our colleagues in the Western Isles and the Highlands and Islands.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I welcome the steps that have been taken so far, but can the cabinet secretary expand on the challenges of recruiting GPs from overseas, which, if overcome, could help with the GP numbers in rural areas and the Highlands and Islands?

Humza Yousaf: That is an important question. It is a source of constant frustration for most Government ministers that the UK Government's immigration system does not meet the needs of those living in Scotland. I suspect that it is also doing damage to the profession in England and the UK more widely. I have raised the issue of the Home Office immigration rules, and I intend to raise it again. There are particular issues with regard to tier 2 visas, impacting on international medical graduates who work in the UK after training in Great Britain. They are often left in the position of potentially being in the country illegally if they cannot find a sponsor within a few weeks of completing their training and they are unable to apply for indefinite leave to remain. Something has to change.

I will again write to the Home Office to intervene on that important issue, and I will seek a meeting on the matter. The Scottish Government will continue to press the UK Government on those issues at every available opportunity, and my officials are working with stakeholders to pull together best practice guidance to assist GP practices that wish to become sponsors to enable such highly skilled professionals to continue careers in the NHS in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. That concludes portfolio questions on health and social care. There will be a short pause before the next item of business.

Forestry (Contribution to Net Zero)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06658, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on forestry's contribution to net zero Scotland. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

14:56

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): This debate is timely: it comes as world leaders gather for the 27th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP27. I take the opportunity, on behalf of the Scottish Government, to urge the very greatest possible ambition, action and bravery from all those who are negotiating, because that is sometimes what it takes. Climate change is a crisis of existential proportions, and it is no exaggeration to say that our future on an inhabitable planet relies on the actions that they will take.

Last year, COP26 affirmed the role of forests in balancing greenhouse gas emissions and removals, adapting to the impacts of climate change, and maintaining healthy ecosystems. The Glasgow declaration committed signatories to halting and reversing forest loss globally by 2030, which is hugely important.

Much of our domestic forest resource was established to create a strategic reserve of timber after global supply chain disruption. Today, our forests are no less strategic. Indeed, they are vital in addressing a multitude of global challenges, including the race to net zero, tackling nature loss, and delivering benefits for our economy and people.

Today, I will reflect on our achievements while recognising the current challenges and setting out how we in the Scottish Government plan to continue to optimise the many benefits that our forests offer.

In Scotland, our forests cover just 19 per cent of our land area. That can be compared with a European average of around 46 per cent. However, we have targets to expand Scotland's forests and to create 18,000 hectares of new woodland each year from 2024-25.

Since the launch of the forestry grant scheme in 2015, it has supported the creation of 68,000 hectares of new woodlands. That is an area that is equivalent to the size of East Lothian. Indeed, in recent years, 80 per cent of all new trees going into the ground across the United Kingdom have

been in Scotland. The grant scheme also supports the management of existing woods, including the restoration of our native woods and Scotland's iconic rainforests.

Since the devolution of forestry and the publication in 2019 of "Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029", forestry in Scotland has been a real and growing success story.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We should all celebrate the success of the tree-planting strategies. However, the minister will be aware of the very real concerns from the agricultural community about the loss of productive agricultural land to trees. That has been raised with me by two branches of NFU Scotland, and I know that it was raised at its recent conference, at which the minister spoke. Does the Scottish Government have a strategy to address that issue, or is it simply the case that, when agricultural land is put up for sale, it is a free-for-all as to what use it is then put to?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, minister.

Màiri McAllan: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank Murdo Fraser for raising that point. My view is that sustainable food production and increased forest cover must be part of a net zero Scotland. The Scottish Government's strategy—if I can speak to it in the generality—is about recognising the many opportunities that our land gives us to rise to the challenges that we face with climate change and nature loss, and making sure that we optimise each of those, while not undermining the others.

At the conference that Murdo Fraser mentioned, I was able to share with delegates the fact that the total amount of woodland that has been planted on prime agricultural land since 2015 amounts to only 0.2 per cent. However, it is a question of having a balance. Our strategy is to have the right tree in the right place.

Later this year, I will lay in Parliament a report that details some of the successes to which I have referred and sets out the progress that has been made so far in delivering on the 2019 strategy.

As I was saying in response to Murdo Fraser's question, I am clear about the co-benefits that forestry is delivering for Scotland—for climate, for nature, for people and for the economy.

First, I want to talk about climate. Scotland's forests are our largest carbon sink—they absorb about 14 per cent of Scotland's gross greenhouse gas emissions. Our targets for woodland expansion will help to grow and maintain that carbon store. Last year, Forestry and Land Scotland launched a climate change plan for the public forests, which set out commitments to using

nature-based solutions, adapting how we manage Scotland's national forests and land, reducing emissions, capturing more carbon and developing renewable energy capacity.

Those carbon benefits of forestry are also attracting private finance to invest in woodland creation projects. Landowners who receive grants towards the cost of planting trees are allowed to register with the woodland carbon code. Recently, Scottish Forestry has strengthened the rules of the woodland carbon code to ensure that that carbon market is reliable, credible, has integrity and, crucially, creates additional resource.

The carbon dioxide that is stored in the trees as they grow continues to be stored in wood products throughout their life and in the built environment. As the world population grows and demand for products that can store carbon and which take little energy to manufacture grows, we must be prepared to rise to that growing demand.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I share the minister's sentiments and wish her well, and I hope that she is enjoying the portfolio as much as I did.

I would like to direct the minister's attention to new research that was commissioned by Scottish Forestry, the outcome of which provided firm evidence that it is our established spruce forestry that will capture most carbon in the near future—it will capture 14 times more carbon than broadleaves will in the early years of growth. Even over an 80-year span, conifers can capture three times as much carbon as broadleaf natives, especially if that spruce or coniferous wood is used in construction.

Màiri McAllan: I am very much enjoying the portfolio. It is a pleasure to have taken over from Fergus Ewing, who did so much to support the industry in his time as cabinet secretary for rural affairs. *[Interruption.]*

I agree with Fergus Ewing's point about the importance of commercial forestry that can absorb carbon quickly and lock it up in a wood product. Equally, my point today is about balance and optimising everything that forestry can deliver for us.

On that note, I would like to move on to talk about nature. All our forests make a contribution to nature, enhancing wildlife habitat and supporting priority species. Riparian woodlands also play an important role in connecting wildlife and guarding against flooding.

Scottish Forestry and NatureScot are working together to improve the ecological condition of our native woods, particularly our designated sites and our Atlantic oakwoods—Scotland's rainforest. I am delighted that, recently, my colleague the Minister

for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity and I were able to announce £1.3 million of additional funding to support rainforest conservation in Scotland. Critical to that will be clearing invasive species such as rhododendron, while managing livestock and other matters.

I could talk about nature all day—I am sure that Lorna Slater will do more of that later—but I am conscious of time and would like to move on to what I see as the third co-benefit of forestry in Scotland, which is what it brings to our rural economy.

The UK as a whole is the world's second-largest importer of sawn timber and timber products. As much as 80 per cent of demand is being met by imported timber, which comes mostly from the European Union. Each year in Scotland, we sustainably harvest around 7 million cubic metres of timber from our forests, which is roughly the same volume of timber as we use.

Scotland is fortunate to have some of the world's most technologically advanced sawmills and wood panel manufacturers, and work with Edinburgh Napier University over many years has established the suitability of our home-grown timber for many uses, including construction. We have an on-going target to increase the amount of timber going into construction, not just to prolong the life of carbon stored in the timber, but to add as much value as we possibly can around the supply chain and jobs.

As the minister responsible for forestry, I co-chair the forestry and timber industry leadership group, which is working to increase efficiency and innovation in the supply chain, develop the workforce for the future, and add the value that I was talking about. At the last count, forestry and timber contributed £1 billion to Scotland's economy and supported 25,000 jobs. The sector's own strategy, "Roots for Further Growth", aims to double the contribution to our economy by 2030.

It is clear that the creation and management of forests create many opportunities for us. However, as I said in my response to Murdo Fraser's question, our land—as important and rich as it is—is a finite resource and, to achieve our woodland creation targets, we must balance.

I am very clear that farmers are part of the solution to climate change. As I said, we need both sustainable food and increased woodland cover in a net zero Scotland.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Màiri McAllan: I am conscious of time, Presiding Officer, but I will take one more intervention.

Rachael Hamilton: Funding for rainforest recovery is valued at £1.3 million. Woodland Trust Scotland says that the Scottish Government needs to invest £500 million to meet the COP26 targets. What will the minister say next week, when she travels to Egypt, to ensure that we can meet last year's targets?

Màiri McAllan: In a very packed programme, I have opportunities to speak with a number of international colleagues about forestry. One thing that I will be saying is that, despite Covid and some of the worst winter storms ever experienced, Scotland still managed to meet 80 per cent of its target. I think that we planted more than 10,000 hectares, whereas the equivalent figure for the rest of the UK is 3,000 hectares. Therefore, I will be saying, "Here's how you can learn from Scotland and the successes that we have had so far."

If I can, Presiding Officer, I want to finish my point about woodland and farms. I believe in having the right tree in the right place and the co-existence of trees and agriculture. More than half of the forestry grant scheme applications for grant support for woodland creation are for smaller woodlands—those under 20 hectares—which are typically part of existing agricultural businesses. They provide shelter for livestock and habitat for wildlife, reduce our carbon footprint, provide an alternative fuel supply, and help planners with flooding.

Farmers and crofters are, of course, part of wider rural communities. As we increase our forest and woodland resource, and attract greater levels of private investment, we are determined to ensure a just transition and benefits for our people.

I would like to mention timber transport. I know that a number of communities are dealing with the impact of transporting timber from our forests to sawmills and other processors. Much of the rural road network is older than our forests, and I know that moving timber can cause disruption. That is why the Scottish Government continues to support the strategic timber transport scheme, which invests in road and other transport infrastructure to make the haulage of timber from our forests more sustainable and less disruptive.

As well as being the minister responsible for forestry, I look after the land reform portfolio, and I am clear that we must make sure that people, including future generations, are poised to benefit. Community ownership is an important part of that, as is Scottish Forestry's Community Woodlands Association.

To bring about a just transition, we need a framework of policy and law that supports community engagement and attracts investment in

good green jobs and industries. I very much hope that responses to my consultation on the proposed land reform bill will allow me to take the bill forward in that regard.

Presiding Officer, I want to get this on the record, so I hope that you will afford me the time to do that. I hope that today there has been a shared recognition of the importance of forests and the wide range of benefits that they deliver, but I recognise that there are on-going challenges. Through this parliamentary session, we will invest £100 million in the forestry sector, primarily through the grant scheme, which is geared towards woodland creation and management. The forthcoming Scottish agriculture bill will provide the legislative basis for future grant support for forestry, and ensure continuity and enhancement.

In the shorter term, and as announced in the September programme for government, we will build on the success of the forestry grant scheme with further enhancements. Those will include a new riparian woodland grant, which will provide multiple benefits for biodiversity; more support and advice for farmers who wish to integrate trees into their business; and a package of measures to support public engagement. I am pleased to announce that we will consult on future grant support for forestry early in the new year to ensure that the legal provisions provided by the forthcoming agriculture bill can be deployed most effectively.

All of that and more is about the Government's determination to support the broad range of social, economic and environmental benefits that Scotland's forestry is well poised to deliver.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the essential contribution to net zero that trees, woods and forests make, tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, especially ahead of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP27; notes the importance of growing and maintaining a resilient forest resource to sustain its economic, social and environmental contribution; welcomes the achievements made in implementing Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029; further welcomes the creation of 4,362 hectares of native woodland in 2021, delivering the target agreed in the Bute House Agreement, which will be reviewed in the forthcoming biodiversity strategy, and reiterates the commitment to increase the use of domestic timber, and the Scottish Government's annual woodland creation target, which increases to 18,000 hectares by 2025.

15:10

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to open the debate for the Scottish Conservatives. I thank the Scottish Government for bringing a debate on such an important issue.

I also thank Màiri McAllan for her opening speech. I will do my best not to go over time as I

know that she has to fly to Egypt shortly to help to ensure that the First Minister achieves her ambitious target for high-level selfies.

As the motion indicates, getting Scotland's approach to forestry right is essential to tackling the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. It is not unusual for MSPs to accuse one another of not seeing the wood for the trees, but this is one debate where it is important that we see both and, indeed, look beyond the forest altogether.

There is no question but that forestry makes significant contributions to our economy and our ecology, and I will touch on a few of those contributions in my speech. Forestry plays a role in everything from house building to preserving wild salmon stocks and, all too often, is underappreciated and underrecognised.

As members will see, the amendment in my name stresses the need to go further in a pragmatic and sustainable way. I use the words "sustainable" and "pragmatic" deliberately. Addressing the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss is not simply about shifting priorities but about balancing them. If all that we sought to do was to plant as many trees as possible, that would be simple, but, in the process, we would create a different set of problems for the environment.

Land on which we can plant trees can also be planted with food. My colleague Rachael Hamilton will shortly expand on the point that allowing productive farmland to be used for tree planting would be a grave mistake. However likely that scenario is will depend greatly on how well the Scottish Government structures the agricultural support schemes and helps to finance not only tree planting but agriculture. For many small farmers and landowners, a relatively small change in the structure of subsidies could make the difference between food production and forestry. As members know, I am a firm believer in the benefits of local food production for the planet, the economy and public health. I urge the Scottish Government to ensure that food production remains a priority.

Alongside that, we must strike the balance between protecting and growing more woodlands that contain native species and ensuring a sustainable, home-grown timber supply. As the Forestry Policy Group rightly advises the Scottish Government, we should be expanding forest cover using the principle of having the right trees, and the right mixture of trees, in the right place for the right reason. At the moment, that appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

According to the report "State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021", Scotland has around 65 per cent non-native woodland cover. Scottish

National Party members always like to hear about how the SNP's performance compares with performance in other parts of the UK, so I will tell them. In Wales, the figure is around 50 per cent and, in England, it is even lower, at 30 per cent. The Woodland Trust and Confor have called for 50 per cent of trees planted in Scotland to be native species. Over the past six years, the Scottish Government has been able to achieve an average of only 40 per cent.

Of course, it is not as simple as saying that we must radically shift towards native species, as Scotland's forests must be productive for industries that rely on timber. However, they must also be productive for nature. I welcome moves to increase the use of domestic timber but, for timber to be truly domestic, the industry cannot and should not continue to rely so heavily on imported saplings. The Woodland Trust Scotland has stated that at least 20 different tree diseases and pests have been imported into Scotland since 1990. As we face the loss of up to 75 per cent of Scotland's ash population in the next 20 years through ash dieback, it is time to ask ourselves how long we are willing to risk our mature trees by continuing to import so many saplings.

Native woodlands are the key to sustaining so many other elements of Scotland's natural habitat and biodiversity. Riparian woodland is a prime example. Such woodland along rivers and watercourses helps to prevent flooding and to control the water temperature, supporting stocks of wild Atlantic salmon, which are impacted by rising water temperatures. The roots prevent erosion, and fallen leaves and branches provide nutrients and shelter. Alder, which is particularly common near water, even has bacteria on its roots that fix atmospheric nitrogen into the soil, improving its fertility.

Native woodlands give us a prime opportunity to support the diversity of Scotland's forests through planting a wide range of species and building biodiversity from the ground up. Diversity of planting strengthens the resilience of the forest and can act as a barrier against the spread of disease, as well as encouraging a broader range of other plants and animal life.

There is a place for fast-growing conifers that are quick to harvest. However, alongside that, we must do more to increase the numbers of broadleaf woodlands to deliver larger long-term stores of carbon. To put it another way, the SNP should be more supportive of diversity in woodlands than it is of the diversity of opinions among its back benchers.

There is no way that the targets set by the Scottish Government can be achieved unless they are matched by ambitions to grow the workforce in the forestry sector. Agriculture, forestry and fishing

account for 21 per cent of all businesses in rural Scotland, and that figure is only forecast to grow in the coming decade.

Some of our most successful businesses and largest rural employers are related to forestry. In my own South of Scotland region, where employment in the sector is four times the national average, I have been pleased to visit many such businesses. However, from every one of them, I hear the same story—they want to grow but they are being held back by the lack of a properly skilled workforce. That is just one of the many reasons why I continually urge the Scottish Government to better integrate the needs of the green economy into our education system.

Fergus Ewing: Does Mr Whittle agree that the industry throughout Scotland, whether in the sawmill sector or in the panel products sector, very much relies on and requires there to be a continuous, reliable, steady and long-term provision of commercial species, mostly coniferous species, so that it can continue to use wood as a construction material and thereby contribute to not only the economy but the more sustainable use of materials in construction—gradually replacing brick and concrete, we hope?

Does Mr Whittle believe that there must be a continuing focus on the provision of commercial coniferous species, which is essential to and a mainstay of our commercial wood products industry in Scotland?

Brian Whittle: Of course we have a significant industry in Scotland around conifers, and of course we need to maintain it. Whether it be EGGER, an international forestry and wood products firm that has a base in Cumnock, the Glennon Brothers sawmill in Troon—incidentally, 40 per cent of its timber comes in by sea—or Ailsa Wood Products outside Girvan, there has to be that ambition. We have to maintain the industry.

However, as we have said to the minister, we have to have a balance, because we also need to look at biodiversity, which I will come on to. Scotland's forestry sector, as I have said, should be a prime destination for school leavers looking to develop an interesting and successful career. Scotland's young people have shown us time and again that they are committed to a green, net zero future for Scotland, and the forestry sector is one that will be leading the charge. Net zero will not only create entirely new opportunities in the economy but transform the existing sectors of that economy. That includes everything from decarbonising timber production to better integrating tree planting and agroforestry into our farming sector.

I turn to biodiversity. It may be that climate change gets the most headlines, but halting our

declining biodiversity is no less critical to the future of our planet. Franklin D Roosevelt said:

“A nation that destroys its soil destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.”

I think that we can go further and say that forests bring strength not only to our people but to the planet itself.

By now, we will all be aware—at least, we should all be aware—that Scotland ranks 212th out of the 240 nations assessed for the quality of our nature. It should therefore come as little surprise that, in 2021, 40 per cent of Scotland's sites of special scientific interest for woodland were classified as being in an “unfavourable” condition, with another 20 per cent being classified as “unfavourable but recovering”. The Climate Change Committee's 2022 report to the Scottish Parliament says that

“whilst Scotland's vision for a well-adapted nation is welcome, more needs to be done to translate ambition into actions that are commensurate with the scale of the challenge.”

To put it more directly: ambition is good, but action would be better.

I am aware that I am running out of time. This has been called the decisive decade for climate change; it is in this decade that we will make the decisions that will determine whether we are successful as a nation and as a planet in taking the steps that are required to head off climate change. Just as forestry must plan years, even decades, ahead of its planting, we have to think for the long term about our approach to climate change. As the ancient Chinese proverb puts it, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best time is now.

I move amendment S6M-06658.1, to leave out from “achievements” to end and insert:

“progress made in implementing Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029, including the creation of 4,362 hectares of native woodland; notes that Scotland continues to experience significant biodiversity loss and species decline; considers the delivery of an effective, ambitious biodiversity strategy to be critical to the preservation of Scotland's diverse ecology and reversing the decline in biodiversity; acknowledges the potential of Scotland's commercial forestry sector in carbon sequestration efforts, including through increasing use of domestic timber, while also recognising the critical biodiversity benefits of new woodland creation using a diverse range of native species; further acknowledges the importance of protecting farmland to improve food security and food production; recognises the need for greater funding to develop the skills of existing and new forestry workers; raises concern that the Scottish Government only created 9,414 hectares in the last year, below its 12,000 hectares target; notes that the Scottish Government's annual woodland creation target will be increased to 18,000 hectares by 2025, and considers it critical that this and other targets to strengthen forestry's contribution to achieving net zero and halting biodiversity loss are met on time and in full.”

15:20

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): As the world gathers in Egypt for COP27, it is easy to forget that just 12 months ago, Scotland hosted COP26, when the Glasgow leaders' declaration on forests and land use was signed. That committed 145 countries, covering 90 per cent of global forests, to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. However, unless that commitment in Glasgow is turned into action in Sharm El Sheikh, it will go the same way as the failed 2014 New York declaration on forests to halve deforestation by 2020.

We know that it will not be possible to keep the planet below 1.5 degrees of global warming without stopping deforestation and land degradation. The Glasgow commitment recognised that we have an interest in and a responsibility for what happens beyond our borders and how our actions impact on fragile forests overseas, but it should also focus our minds on what happens within our borders.

The UK remains the second largest net importer of timber in the world, after China, in order to meet our growing consumption of wood products. In fact, we currently import 80 per cent of our timber. Population growth and economic development drive that demand, but so does our desire to transition to low-carbon products—for example, using more wood instead of steel, concrete and bricks in construction.

If our consumption of wood in the UK continues to increase at the same pace as in the past decade, it will rise by an estimated 78 per cent by 2050, at a time when current estimates forecast that, from the 2040s, UK supply will fall. Labour recognises the need for far more ambitious tree planting targets in order to address long-term timber demand, avoid ever-growing imports and, crucially, lock in the other benefits of tree planting for nature, carbon storage and public health. Crucially, we also need to ensure that the targets are met. Although the Government's aim is to deliver at least 18,000 hectares of trees planted per year by 2024-25, the target of 12,000 for 2022 was missed by nearly 2,000 hectares.

When delivering those targets, we need to deliver the right mix of trees, in the right place. Today, forest and woodland cover 19 per cent of Scotland's land, but that varies across the country. In Dumfries and Galloway, 31 per cent of the land is covered with woods and forests, making it the most forested part of Scotland. The geography—the land is close to a motorway and rail links to the market—means that, in 211,000 hectares, there is a disproportionate focus on tree species that will meet demand for timber. Although that is important, not least because of the local jobs that are created, it results in pressure on inadequate infrastructure where planting takes place, including

roads that were never built for the 40-tonne wagons that are used to remove the timber. Even with the timber transport fund, those roads are badly in need of more investment. It also results in pressure on communities who feel that their landscape is being carpeted by Sitka spruce, with a loss of natural habitat and little or no input from those communities, who want to see more native and broadleaf trees.

Fergus Ewing: I share many of Mr Smyth's sentiments. However, I allude to the research that I referred to earlier, which was commissioned by Scottish Forestry and prepared with the assistance of Forest Research. The research states that the impact of reducing commercial spruce forestry would result in more imports and threaten climate targets.

Colin Smyth: Having higher targets would reduce our demand for imports, as would, crucially, meeting those targets.

As I have just said, there is pressure as a result of sometimes having the wrong trees in the wrong place. That has prompted calls for a review of the current grants scheme by groups such as Communities for Diverse Forestry, in the south-west, to deliver a better geographical spread of commercial planting locations and to ensure that more native trees and woods are part of that mix, both through expanding native woods and properly caring for existing ones.

As Fergus Ewing has said, there is a great deal of research in this area. We know from the Woodland Trust's landmark "State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021" report that ancient woodlands in Scotland hold, on average, 30 per cent more carbon compared to the average carbon stocks for other woodland types.

Brian Whittle: Does the member agree that there is a balance to be struck, because commercial forestry has a negative impact on the biodiversity of the land that it is planted on?

Colin Smyth: There is absolutely no doubt that there is a balance to be struck, and that is one of the reasons why, as we increase our targets, Labour not only wants to see a significant increase in trees to meet timber demand but supports the Woodland Trust's call for at least 50 per cent of all woodland expansion to be through native species.

It is essential that we do more to ensure that future cultivation and tree planting is carried out carefully in the right soils, using the right methods, or we will fail to maximise our carbon storage from forestry.

There are many examples of excellent projects doing just that, such as the Tarras valley nature reserve in the Eskdale valley, where the community raised an astonishing £6 million to fund

a community buyout of 10,000 acres of Langholm moor. The community's vision and plans for the moor are truly inspiring and include action to play its part in tackling the nature and climate crises through peatland restoration. With community support from the Woodland Trust, native woodland will be expanded and the ancient woodland will be restored.

Ownership matters. One of Labour's concerns is the rise of the so-called green lairds. Scotland's largely unregulated land market has allowed companies to buy huge swathes of that land so they can claim that they have green credentials by offsetting their carbon. Many of those purchases take place off market in secret private sales, which prevents communities from seeking to register an interest in that land, and, of course, land-price inflation often makes community ownership impossible, even if the community were able to register an interest.

The Scottish agriculture sector is also feeling the effects of land acquisition for forestry and carbon offsetting. It is seeing inflated land prices that are often unaffordable, restricting opportunities for those new to the industry and raising fears of the loss of productive agricultural land.

So, what can we do about it? We need to better protect the people's interest, especially on off-market land sales. The Scottish Land Commission needs the power to act on land monopolies and to have a genuine public interest test for large land purchases. We need to look at the financial support regime and how that can be better controlled when ownership is simply big business trying to offset its own carbon footprint. Further, we need to better support the community ownership of land, tasking Co-operative Development Scotland to promote that co-operative and mutual ownership model of land in Scotland.

Getting the relationship right between forest management, biodiversity and agriculture is challenging, but it is key to delivering a transition to net zero—and that needs to be a just transition. The forestry sector contributes almost £1 billion gross value added to the Scottish economy every year and supports more than 25,000 jobs, many in our rural communities.

I pay tribute to everyone who has worked in the sector—past and present—and has contributed to its growth. I also place on record Labour's thanks to the trade unions that represent many of those workers—Unite the union, the GMB, the Public and Commercial Services Union, Prospect and the FDA—for the work that they do to secure the best terms and conditions for their workers.

Forestry is a high-risk industry. Every year, workers in it are injured at work—in some cases, they are, sadly, killed, and many more suffer from work-related illness. We should recognise the important role that our unions have played in driving up safety standards for workers, and we should thank those workers who have not only delivered the success story that is Scottish forestry but will continue to do so in the future. I am, therefore, pleased to move the Labour amendment, in my name, so that this Parliament can place on record our thanks to that workforce.

I move amendment S6M-06658.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises that the rate of growth in tree planting in Scotland slowed in recent years; calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that forestry plans deliver its tree planting targets, increase biodiversity and tackle climate change; celebrates the contribution of Scotland's forestry workers and their trade unions, and recognises the importance of maintaining and increasing a highly skilled workforce, and contributing to a low carbon Just Transition.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who have made an intervention and intend to speak later in the debate that they should press their request-to-speak button again.

15:29

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I want to start by complimenting the minister. She has genuinely listened to the concerns that have been expressed—particularly the point that Murdo Fraser made about the conflicts and competition around land use. I will deal with some of those issues later, but I must first say that her speech showed that she has listened well, particularly when she talked about the need for balance, the finite amount of land and the important role that farmers play in the use of the land.

I think that the minister must have one of the best jobs in the Government. She recently got to meet Tarzan, the logging horse, at Loch Arkaig pine forest, in Argyll. As members know, I have a particular affection for animals and photo opportunities, so I was particularly jealous of the minister's opportunity to meet Tarzan in Argyll.

I considered a career in forestry, but it is probably a relief to those who are interested in trees that I chose politics instead. Therefore, I am still a layman with regard to forestry, but I have been particularly keen to understand the real conflicts and tests of the huge competition for the use of land in Scotland.

The ambition is great. I remember standing on platforms during the 2019 election campaign, when there was a massive bidding war between all the political parties as to who was going to plant the most trees across the United Kingdom. In

some ways, that was bizarre, but it was uplifting that we were competing on such an important environmental issue. It is a fine goal, and we have achieved some significant progress. Although, as the minister has admitted, the targets have not been met, progress has been made.

I accept the points about Covid and the weather, but we have a long way to go if we are to make up the time that was lost for tree planting during that period. I hope that we have plans to meet the target of 18,000 hectares planted by 2025 and to make up the time that we have lost. We have met only nine of the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets, and we have a long way to go if we are to meet the rest of them.

I thought that Fergus Ewing's point was interesting. It is a wide and varied sector with massive competing demands and interests. There is a conflict between imports and the use of land in our country to plant trees not just for biodiversity, but for production and construction. We do not always want to import, because of the carbon miles that are involved. We also have other competing demands for land in this country. For the purpose of food security, we want to reduce food miles. Particularly because of the uncertain world that we live in now, we want to grow more in this country.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: I will take it in a second.

Should we be using land for the production of barley for whisky? Is that more useful than just growing trees? That is a debating point. I have an anaerobic digester in north-east Fife that is using sugar beet grown on the land to generate gas. That might be quite a good thing, considering the issues with Russia and energy security, but should we be using land in this country to generate gas when we are trying to reduce our carbon emissions?

Of course, trees sometimes take productive land. As the minister has said, 2 per cent of our productive land has been lost since 2015. That might not sound like a lot, but the farmers feel it, and that is why they are raising the matter with us repeatedly. I accept what the minister said—it sounds a small amount, but the farmers feel the pressure of that, particularly as land prices are shooting through the roof. Those are all massive competing demands, and we cannot look at them in isolation; we need to consider them in the round.

Rachael Hamilton: What is Willie Rennie's opinion on greenwashing? We know that not only farmers but gamekeepers can be displaced. Gamekeepers are integral to managing the land in

order to preserve our declining species, such as the capercaillie.

Willie Rennie: That is slightly left-field, but, yes, I think that it is important. I understand the concept of having the right tree in the right place. The James Hutton Institute has highlighted that just planting trees does not necessarily mean that we capture more carbon. Sometimes, there is a net loss because of the loss from the soils, so it is important that we plant in the right place, and the Labour Party highlighted the regulatory arrangements around that. Primarily, we are using the carbon market, grants and the woodland creation approval system to regulate that, but all of that seems to encourage more tree planting rather than necessarily putting trees in the right place.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rennie has to wind up fairly shortly.

Willie Rennie: I would love to, but I had better not.

The minister talked about the land reform bill and the agriculture bill that are coming—I hope that we might see an improved regulatory arrangement, so that we can deal with the long-term issues that may come.

I accept that there have been some improvements with the woodland carbon code, which is a good thing. The smaller grant schemes, particularly for farmers, are a good thing, as are the tennis court-sized schemes and the biodiversity grants that have been announced recently. All of those are good, but I wonder whether we need to do more to regulate not only how but where we are planting the trees, to allow us to deal with all the competing demands.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I advise members that we have pretty much exhausted the time in hand, so interventions will have to be accommodated in the speech allocations.

15:35

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to speak in favour of the Government's motion, which underlines the essential contribution to reaching net zero that trees, woods and forests make in tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Forests and woodland cover nearly a third of Argyll and Bute, and they are wonderful places to explore. I am afraid that I had a picture there of Willie Rennie dressed as Tarzan, flying through

the trees. Established in 1935, the Argyll forest park, as Forestry and Land Scotland says, has it all. It has craggy peaks, hidden glens, peaceful sea lochs and rushing rivers, as well as an abundance of diverse wildlife including red squirrels, sea eagles and beaver.

Argyll and Bute is also home to some of the world's most significant ancient oakwoods and temperate rainforests, where almost every surface is covered with lichens, fungi, mosses, liverworts and ferns.

Almost exactly a year ago, at COP26, I travelled to Cormonachan community woodland, in Argyll and Bute. I was there to attend a blessing of Scotland's Celtic rainforest by five indigenous leaders from the Amazonian rainforest. The community event that followed was a blend of Gaelic cèilidh and traditional songs from the Amazon. It was truly international and inspirational.

As the species champion for the Celtic rainforest, I am pleased to be able to promote and support, in the chamber and outwith it, the amazing work that communities and organisations across the west coast of Scotland are doing to encourage the regeneration of our rainforests. The April 2019 report on the state of Scotland's rainforests notes that

"With just over 30,000 hectares remaining, there is very little rainforest left in Scotland."

The report identified that overgrazing, invasive species, mismanagement and neglect, as well as pests, disease and climate change, are threatening the rainforest's survival. However, with the creation of the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest, Scottish Government support and passionate communities, things are beginning to improve. The Scottish Government's £65 million nature restoration fund is there to support projects that address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, and I suggest that the Celtic rainforest is a fantastic match.

On the island of Seil, the community met to hear about a project that proposes to reconnect fragments of Argyll and Bute's rainforest. Seil has one of Scotland's finest examples of ancient Atlantic hazelwood, and islanders are sharing their skills—from collecting seeds to tree planting, and from fencing to deer management—to protect and expand it. The project is being led by Seil Biodiversity Community Interest Company, which is already working hard to clear the island of invasive rhododendron ponticum, with the Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust. The idea of becoming part of an international restoration project is still in its early days, but mapping has been done to pinpoint areas of

interest, which include Knapdale woods, Taynish nature reserve and parts of Mull and Islay.

The aim of creating a bigger and better-connected Celtic rainforest will ensure more resilience to threats and environmental changes, helping it to survive and thrive. It will also contribute to sustainable development and economic growth. However, Argyll and Bute's treescape is not only Celtic rainforest—Argyll and Bute has almost twice the Scottish average of its land under woodland cover. The forestry industry, through planning, harvesting, management and maintenance activities, and timber transport, makes a major contribution to Argyll and Bute's economy and employs a relatively large number of people, particularly in the rural areas.

Foresters in Argyll and Bute have been very innovative in adapting to the market and economic conditions, which, given the terrain and distances from markets, has always been challenging. We hear a lot about upskilling for green jobs in oil and gas, but I wonder whether that could apply to forestry, too, particularly—as we heard earlier—with the emphasis on more home-grown wood materials and less reliance on imported materials. We need to have the skills for that and should perhaps even re-establish local sawmills.

When I am travelling around my constituency, it is rare for me not to see a timber lorry full of felled trees. To enable that important industry to remain, the Scottish Government has, as the minister has referenced, invested in and improved strategic timber routes. Timber is one of the many reasons why the transport minister announced in August an acceleration of the work to achieve a safe and timely solution to the problems at the Rest and Be Thankful.

Over the past six years, an average of 40 per cent of all the new planting in Scotland has been non-native species, with the rest being production conifers. Although farming and forestry can co-exist, farmers have raised concerns with me about productive land being bought and forested, which impacts on their livestock and productivity. One described their farm as becoming the only restaurant in town for foxes and sea eagles. We need to listen to such concerns, and finding a balance is important.

However, we also need to listen to those who are diversifying and planting on areas that are less productive for livestock. The Government supports a farmer and crofter-led initiative that has a network of farm woodland demonstration sites across Scotland. Together, Woodland Trust Scotland and Soil Association Scotland have produced a report on integrating trees on farms and crofts in Scotland.

The Baleveolan croft, on Lismore, is a thriving and diversified business. It even has a tea plantation, as well as an orchard and 5,000 trees. The Baleveolan croft and other crofts and farms across Argyll and Bute show that trees that complement farming and crofting systems can be successfully incorporated into the farmed landscape.

I recently spent an energetic Saturday working with friends on Islay, removing the plastic cones that were protecting the trees that we had planted—there were almost 4,000 of them—in 2017 to commemorate the first world war. We were supported by Woodland Trust Scotland.

In “The Cone-Gatherers”, the great Argyll novelist Robin Jenkins writes about two brothers who are tasked with collecting seeds from cones to replant a forest that is felled for the war effort. Now, replacing our forests is even more important. By planting the right trees in the right place, we can soak up more emissions while providing a boost to our environment, our economy and people’s lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Ms Minto. We all have an image of Willie Rennie dressed as Tarzan, now.

15:42

Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): It would be interesting to know who Jane is.

Around 100 years ago, only 5 per cent of Scotland’s land area was covered with trees. That figure, which is creeping up towards 20 per cent, does not take into account the swathes of landscape in which trees are unable to grow.

The capacity for forests to contribute to meeting Scotland’s net zero ambitions is indisputable. However, as we have heard today, there is more to planting trees than simply finding space, sticking them in the ground and patting ourselves on the back for doing a good job.

As my colleague Brian Whittle has mentioned, Scotland’s farmers are facing significant spatial pressures at a time when global food security is under severe strain as a result of Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. Producing food while looking after our environment is at the heart of farming in Scotland, and a drive towards the afforestation of arable land is of severe concern to many farmers across the country, as members have described.

Last week, I met members of the local NFU Scotland branch in my constituency, in the Scottish Borders, many of whom were at the rally outside the Parliament last week. They were keen to express their concerns about forestry impacting their ability to produce food. Such was their

concern about the Scottish Government’s land use strategy, they were keen to share the figures that I quoted at the beginning of my speech.

I am not raising that issue to dispute the vital role that forestry has in capturing carbon from the atmosphere—the Scottish Conservatives share the Scottish Government’s net zero ambitions. However, forestation in Scotland seems to come with needless costs. We have already heard of the damage that non-native planting causes to Scotland’s biodiversity. A relentless drive towards more trees at all costs is also damaging Scotland’s ability to put our valuable productive land to best use: growing crops, grazing livestock and filling supermarket shelves.

Fundamentally, I believe that forestation must be balanced against Scotland’s agricultural needs and food security. It must also take into consideration the needs and vitality of rural communities.

Sadly, the Scottish Government’s cloak-and-dagger acquisition of the Glenprosen estate, in Angus, has raised eyebrows across the country. The acquisition comes at a cost of £25 million to the taxpayer. I know that Nicola Sturgeon would describe that as a very small amount of money, but the real cost of the acquisition is far more than that—it comes with the loss of five livelihoods and the decimation of the Glenprosen community.

As that sets a precedent, rural communities are rightly concerned about which estate might be next. How many more families will be forced out of their homes through dodgy deals? How many more jobs will be lost and industries damaged? The Scottish Government committed to helping those families who were displaced by its acquisition of Glenprosen estate to find new homes and new jobs. I wonder whether the minister, in closing, could provide us with an update on what kind of jobs were found and how far away those individuals had to move to take them.

FLS said that buying the estate would help Scotland to realise its climate change ambitions in areas such as woodland creation and biodiversity, putting aside the evidence that planting non-native trees in these areas will do nothing to harm biodiversity. Does the minister also believe that there is no other way to achieve those ambitions than through secret deals that her Government has sworn to prevent, which destroy rural communities, or is there a more sensible approach?

I have been keen to emphasise that there are clear benefits of forestry in Scotland. I would add that I sincerely welcome the fact that the minister has brought this debate to the chamber.

I will depart from speaking on the missteps of the Government on woodland creation and focus my comments on something a little closer to home. As Scotland's riparian woodland champion, I have been working closely with Tweed Forum over the past year on its riparian woodland restoration project, and I am delighted to be hosting an event on riverwoods at the beginning of next year, to highlight the fantastic work to repair a riparian woodland that the forum has been involved in. I invite colleagues to attend and learn more about that in January.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Rachael Hamilton: Yes, quickly.

Mark Ruskell: I recognise the member's interest in riparian woodlands. Does she recognise that the growth of deer populations severely impacts our riparian woodlands, which is exactly why the Government needs to take on the recommendations of the deer working group and bring population numbers down?

Rachael Hamilton: It is important to control deer—there is no doubt about it—but we should do that without having secret, dodgy deals whereby we are planting woodland. We have to manage the land, and we need land managers to do that. We need gamekeepers to help us, as they are trained to kill deer. We need a proper approach to this that involves the community as well. I thank the member for his intervention.

We have discussed biodiversity at length through the debate. Although reservations about the impact of non-native woodland on Scotland's biodiversity have been clearly outlined, the restoration of riparian woodland offers a real opportunity to start pushing the needle in another direction. Fish stocks as well as land-based species are known to benefit from the protection of riverwoods, and I hope that the minister will join me in holding the Scottish Government to its manifesto commitment to improve support for tree planting around rivers and streams.

I hope that, in her approach to the future of forestry in Scotland, the minister will commit to considering more closely the needs and opportunities of rural communities and our country's food security. The Scottish Conservatives are calling for a sensible approach that listens to the needs of farmers, landowners, gamekeepers and rural workers and communities.

15:48

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I commend all the speakers in the debate thus far. On Rachael Hamilton's last point, plantation high

in the river catchment areas can contribute to alleviation of flooding, for example.

Most industry in Scotland is conducted in cities or towns. Very few industries are, or can be, conducted in rural Scotland. Forestry is the industry of rural Scotland and rural Britain. When we hear the figures that others have mentioned in the debate—25,000 jobs and £1 billion turnover—it is important to reflect on the fact that more than three quarters of those jobs are in the sawmill and panel product sectors. I repeat: three quarters. Over three quarters of that £1 billion in revenue derives from that economic activity. I say that to put this in context.

That industry has had some tremendous successes. In my constituency, a total of £145 million has been invested in one plant, the Norbord plant that is now owned by West Fraser. I thank those two companies for that investment, because now we have, just outside Inverness, what I believe is the most modern plant in Europe. It is therefore able to compete better than plants that have lacked investment, as we have seen in many other industries, leading to the demise thereof. Companies such as West Fraser and James Jones and Sons, which plans to invest a staggering £70 million in Mosstodloch, and £150 million in 2022, are some of the largest investors in Scotland.

I say that because, all too often, when we think of forestry, we think of lumberjacks and rudimentary physical labour. However, the industry is now one of the most sophisticated engineering industries in the world. If members have visited modern sawmills, as I suspect they have, they will have seen exactly what I mean. Automation is the name of the game, and high investment is necessary to ensure success.

I therefore wish the minister well, and I want to use most of my time to make a series of suggestions about how, together, we can best achieve the ambitious planting target of 18,000 hectares a year. In politics, success is a land to which one seeks to travel but where, sadly, in my experience, one does not often arrive. However, in my five years as cabinet secretary, we doubled the number of hectares planted from about 5,000 to about 10,000, although we did not quite get to the target, as Mr Mountain repeatedly and very helpfully pointed out to me in committee.

To get to 18,000 hectares, there are some things that the minister might wish to consider doing. The first is to look at the bottlenecks and constraints in the handling of consent applications. In each conservancy—I visited all the conservancies in my time as cabinet secretary—there are professional staff who are doing that work. However, the salary scale is such that, when they reach the top of that scale, in many cases,

they go to the private sector, where they can earn substantially more. That is a very real problem. The loss of one person in one of those offices can result in delays, bottlenecks, constraints and difficulties. The minister should consider whether we can increase the salaries for those professional officers so that they can do the work more quickly. If they cannot, we will not get to 18,000 hectares of planting.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I promise not to mention, at this stage, the failure to achieve planting targets. When the member was cabinet secretary, he tried to streamline the planning process. Is he going to bring up that issue, because it is one of the biggest bottlenecks that we face in the countryside?

I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

Fergus Ewing: I am pleased that Mr Mountain has gone from being my greatest critic to being a mind reader, because I was just about to say precisely that. The process—not simply the planning process but the overall process—was simplified and streamlined by Jim Mackinnon, the former chief planner. Because he was so well respected, he took people with him and his 21 recommendations were implemented. However, the process needs to be reviewed, whether that is done by reinstructing Jim or in some other way, because I am hearing that there are too many delays.

We need to maintain and not reduce the current proportion of 60 per cent of new plantings being commercial. We also need to maintain, as far as possible if we are to remain consistent with the forestry standard, the proportion of restocking that is of coniferous species. We also need to ensure that the enterprise agencies incentivise innovation. There are now machines that can plant a million trees in a day—the innovation is incredible. However, I am not sure that the enterprise agencies help in that regard. A ministerial direction to that effect would quickly sort things.

There should be a standing council involving the Governments of the four constituent parts of the UK, because many of the issues involve cross-border working. I do not have time to go into those issues now, but that would be a good idea.

The tension between agriculture and forestry has been remarked on, and it is there. As the minister said, one way to alleviate it is by ensuring that more farmers can access forestry schemes. I particularly commend setting up a scheme for secure tenant farmers—it would be a template scheme whereby such farmers and their landlord can invest in partnership. A separate scheme for that is well worth exploring, possibly along with

reform of the right of resumption, which is a bit of an issue.

I will conclude, because I am in danger of going over my time, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are over it already, Mr Ewing. Please conclude.

Fergus Ewing: The forestry officials who serve the minister are excellent and of high quality—many of them are here today, so I am just buttering them up a wee bit. With their help and with a bit of change, I am sure that we can achieve the ambitious target and that the minister can succeed where I did not quite manage so to do.

15:54

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): It should be not a radical idea but a basic tenet of democracy that there is transparency in our political system, openness in government and honesty in communications, and that we seek to answer the big questions of our age—the climate crisis; the continuing threat of war, including nuclear war; the rampaging inequalities in income, wealth and power; and the unyielding rise of the corporate economy. That is why, for me, politics is not a game; it is the serious job of this Parliament to consider who the winners are and who the losers are—who gets the money and who has to pay.

If we take our land and our forestry, what we are witnessing is not an extension of community ownership but an explosion of corporate ownership. When it comes to forestry subsidies, over a quarter of a billion pounds has been awarded since 2015, and 95 per cent of that has gone to private interests. Much of it has gone to rich individuals and organisations. Over half of that money is still going to subsidising the planting of non-native highly profitable conifers, so it is no good SNP and Green ministers lodging motions in this Parliament about biodiversity and native woodland when, under their watch, out in the real world, nothing much changes.

Mark Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Richard Leonard: I have not got the time.

There are some new entrants, of course, such as Aviva, whose website slogan is not, “Helping you save the planet”, but

“Helping you make the most out of your money”.

There is also BrewDog, a privileged new nobility masquerading as philanthropic punks, and Standard Life Investments Property Income Trust, which has recently acquired thousands of acres in the Cairngorms national park, not for the common good but as a speculative asset.

Then there is the Gresham House forestry fund, which is bankrolled by the Scottish National Investment Bank. Its business objective is not to plant trees or save the planet but to aid the super-rich in avoiding paying taxes—income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax and inheritance tax.

Of course there should be public investment in woodlands and the public subsidy of forestry, but what is happening is that the money is almost all going to already mega-wealthy individuals and organisations.

I accept that that is not entirely new. That inspiring socialist John McEwen—himself a forester—refers in his seminal book, “Who Owns Scotland”, to the Economic Forestry Group, which was established in the early 1960s on the back of what it freely admitted was

“a helpful tax structure and generous Forestry Commission grants”.

Neither is the pattern of land ownership new. Half of Scotland is owned by fewer than 500 people; that is the same as it has been for centuries. That is what lies at the heart of this debate—not just the question of land use and land management but the question of land ownership.

There is nothing new, either, in that old landowner lobby, now spearheaded by Scottish Land & Estates—which is chaired by a former banker whose family has owned a 4,500 acre estate in Moray for generations—even in recent weeks declaring that, without Scotland’s private landowners, we will fail to deliver net zero. It claims that a public interest test would be

“counter productive to ... the just transition to Net Zero ... given the major contribution estates make”.

You could not make it up. I say to them this afternoon that we have the most concentrated ownership of land in the whole of Europe. Does that mean that all the other European countries with a fairer distribution of land ownership and land wealth that are attending the COP27 summit in Sharm El-Sheikh will miss their net zero targets because they do not cling on to feudal landlordism?

Forestry grant systems and tax breaks are private wealth funds for the few, paid for by the many. That is why I say to the Government that an unregulated market in carbon credits, coupled with an unregulated land market and a huge concentration of wealth, is not making for a just transition but for an entirely unjust transition. In these debates, we hear a lot from the minister about human rights—the human rights of landowners, speculators and absentee interest groups—but what about the human rights of the people who live and work on the land and in those

communities? Do they not have human rights as well?

We need an end to the commodification of climate change; we need an end to so-called green capitalism and an end to the phenomenon of green lairds, which is nothing more than extractive capitalism, pure and simple. We need a new start, which means radical land reform as part of a wider democratic renewal, because in the end that is the only way that this Parliament will find the answers to those big questions that we face. Peace over war; climate before capitalism; redistribution of wealth and power; democracy in our economy as well as in our politics—that is the only way that we can organise a better future, build a better tomorrow and give people hope for today.

16:01

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): I will start with the international dimension of the debate, then move to its national and local dimensions, while recognising the essential link between biodiversity and climate change in this agenda.

This Monday, the inaugural forest and climate leaders summit took place at COP27. Some 26 countries, including the UK and EU countries, announced a commitment to join the forest and climate leaders’ partnership. The partnership will help to deliver the commitment that was made in Glasgow at COP26 to halt and reverse forest loss and degradation by 2030, while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation.

The US and Ghana will chair the new partnership and will preside over the first ministerial meeting on Saturday 12 November. The countries in the partnership account for more than 33 per cent of the world’s forests and nearly 60 per cent of global gross domestic product. The partnership will hold annual meetings to encourage accountability and, starting from 2023, will publish an annual global progress report.

However, only 22 per cent of the €12 billion in public money that was pledged for forests, to be disbursed by 2025—funds that were committed to in Glasgow—has so far been disbursed, which means that 78 per cent has to be disbursed in less than three years. Germany has doubled its financing for forests to €2 billion through to 2025, which is welcome.

Scotland has planted 80 per cent of all the new woodland in the UK—more than 10,000 hectares of new forests—for the past four years. It has a commitment to increase the use of domestic timber, and the Scottish Government’s annual woodland creation target will increase to 18,000

hectares by 2025. However, we need to focus on how we do that.

Land ownership and the delivery of net zero is a key connection. Today's agenda must be aligned with land reform, agricultural support and the fourth national planning framework.

I am concerned that so many of Scotland's farms are being sold off market for forestry, but I know that if a desire for diversification is flagged, mixed use for food, forestry and possibly energy can be achieved, rather than selling to forest hedge funds—if that is not an oxymoron. Forestry Land Scotland stands willing to help.

I am also concerned that international measures for carbon trading will come too late and that green lairds, which are often international companies that pay no tax here, will benefit twice—buying lands for future investment returns and forestry grant incentives and gaining the ability to trade for carbon credits on top of that. With the danger of spatial double accounting for carbon reductions, there is the risk of a false sense of security about progress in that area.

During our recent visit to the Arctic Circle conference, I was very struck by the keen interest in learning lessons from Scotland, where vast tree planting projects took place that caused real damage to our peatland carbon sinks; by the need for wetlands to be restored globally; and by the role that we can play by being frank about what should, and should not, be done.

Trees that are planted on deep peat might dry out, causing the soil to rapidly decompose, which might release more carbon than the trees absorb. When we were in Iceland, we also heard the argument that there should be no planting or harvesting at high altitudes, because leaving the snow bare reflects light and reduces overheating in the atmosphere.

The Woodland Trust told us that carbon in Scotland's woodlands needs to be stored for the long term, to avoid passing the climate change problem to the next generation. Therefore, we need permanent woodland cover, alongside sustainably managed commercial plantations where the wood is used in long-lived products. Only this morning, I addressed the issue of the timber industry with Ivan McKee, our Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise, with regard to how we can cut carbon miles in our construction sector and benefit from the increase in forestry production that my colleague Fergus Ewing, who has so much experience in the area, has set out.

The Woodland Trust tells us that the longevity of trees is a key factor that is currently missing from climate change and nature policies. That is important advice. It also told us that ancient

woodland in Scotland holds, on average, 30 per cent more carbon than other woodland types. I was interested in what Tom Arthur, the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth, said yesterday about NPF4 in that regard.

As I bring my remarks to an end, I come to the local. Beecraigs forest in my constituency has, along with West Lothian Council, produced an environmental action plan, "Beecraigs Forest Plan" that takes us to 2033. The forestry management objectives of the plan include:

"to manage the forest in a sustainable manner to continue providing the Country Park facility for generations to come ... to enhance the landscape for the enjoyment of visitors including the retention of big trees where possible ... to safeguard and enhance the biodiversity and historical features ... and to produce timber and other wood products which can provide income to help support the management of the forest and other facilities."

Appropriate woodland expansion can bring many benefits, including richer and more diverse habitats; enhanced landscapes; carbon sequestration and storage; timber, wood fuel and other woodland products; ecosystem services, such as clean water, mitigation of diffuse agricultural pollution, and reduced flood risk; and secure jobs and a stronger economy.

I am pleased to support the motion to recognise the role of forestry in delivering net zero.

16:07

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): It is clear that the sharp impact of the climate and nature emergencies is reminding us every day that the window for action is closing. We must work together to reshape our relationship with nature if we are to avoid those tipping points of the collapse of nature and our climate. I am proud that, with Greens now working as part of the Government, the restoration and expansion of Scotland's native woodlands is happening on an unprecedented scale.

As we have already heard from Jenni Minto, native woodlands are the strongest of the nature-based solutions that we have to capture emissions and move us ever closer to the target of net zero by 2045. The Woodland Trust's report, "State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021", shows that ancient woodlands in Scotland hold 30 per cent more carbon compared with the average carbon stocks for other woodland types. Although all woodlands have important roles to play, expanding our ancient woods will not only lock up carbon but provide a home for the wildlife that is struggling right now to adapt to climate change.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to the member for giving way. Does he agree that, when we plant saplings, it is really

important to procure and grow them locally rather than importing so many trees, which is causing so much disease in our indigenous species?

Mark Ruskell: Mr Whittle raises an important consensual point. The important work that Government needs to do is about building up the supply chain and the capacity of the commercial sector and the sector that is growing our native woodlands across Scotland.

I warmly welcomed the minister's announcement of a consultation on the next stage of the forestry grant scheme, which I hope will allow for an even sharper focus on that climate and nature objective and the need for woodlands and forestry to deliver multiple benefits.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: If there is time in hand, Presiding Officer, I would like to take an intervention from Mr Ewing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no real time in hand at this stage.

Mark Ruskell: In that case, I apologise to Mr Ewing.

As a regional MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, I know that communities and third sector organisations are at the heart of our efforts to restore, protect and expand woodlands. For example, the heart of Scotland forest partnership in highland Perthshire is a wonderful blueprint for how partnerships can protect and expand native woodlands while creating public access for those of all abilities and delivering skills and economic opportunities for young people.

I was delighted to be invited by the John Muir Trust to officially open its Foss Loop path, under Schiehallion, in the summer. It is a beautiful walk-and-wheel route that helps to tell a Perthshire story of woodland regeneration and renewal. The Woodland Trust's newly funded Forth climate forest is also worth highlighting. It is a 10-year landscape-scale project that harnesses communities' enthusiasm for tree planting, and it is set to deliver a similar range of objectives around wellbeing, climate and ecological benefits.

At the heart of those projects is a balanced approach to tree planting that takes careful consideration of our precious soil carbon and delivers a diverse mix of woodland cover, with a focus on native species. It is worth reflecting that half the carbon in our woodlands is actually below the ground, so we need to manage woodlands and their soils as a long-term, nature-rich carbon sink, and avoid the costly mistakes of the past, such as when deep peatlands were planted with commercial forestry—a point that was well made

by Fiona Hyslop in relation to her recent visit to the Arctic Circle assembly.

There is also a need to proactively tackle threats from overgrazing, muirburn, invasive species and—I say to Mr Whittle—plant diseases, which could undermine the role of woodlands in meeting net zero. Again, I highlight the work of the John Muir Trust: it has been working in Perthshire to progress its montane woodland project to restore native specialist tree species such as juniper and montane willows as well as oak and pines, which have long been threatened by overgrazing and muirburn practices. It is vital that we protect tree planting, woodland generation and peatland restoration from further damage if we are to meet our climate and nature commitments.

Delivering on the deer management group's recommendations to prevent overgrazing and the trampling of young trees is vital to achieving those efforts, but that point has not yet been mentioned in the debate. Is it the elephant in the room? I do not know, but we have to tackle the issue of deer management in order to make progress.

In addition, national parks need to refocus on the nature and climate emergencies, and learn from the mistakes of the past, in order to deliver multiple benefits at a scale that can make a difference. Every day, I see the Sitka plantations in the core areas of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park; those are a legacy from the past and are not delivering the multiple benefits that we demand from forestry today. Landowners, including Forestry and Land Scotland, need to plan for regeneration and restoration, while the Government's commitment to create new national parks must accelerate efforts to increase native woodland cover.

Through the Bute house agreement, we have been able to not only deliver but surpass the target of 4,000 hectares of native woodland creation in 2021 and set an annual woodland creation target rising to 18,000 hectares by 2024-25. In addition, the nature restoration fund has already been instrumental in helping more than 100 projects to take root, restoring Scotland's natural environment on land and sea. I welcome the new threads of funding that the minister announced today, in particular for riparian woodlands, and the important points that Mr Ewing made with regard to ensuring that tenant farmers can also be part of the picture.

We have to build on those achievements and commitments to shape the next chapter in the story of Scotland's woods and forests. I look forward to seeing the Government work on that in the months and years to come.

16:13

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I very much welcome the debate. As I learn more about the industry, I am beginning to see far more of its value than I previously did. However, there is no doubt that the Scottish Government's policy on tree planting has not been met with the same level of enthusiasm across all sectors. There are tensions that need to be addressed so that the environmental, economic and social benefits of forestry and tree planting can be agreed and shared across our communities.

The thing about land is that they are not making any it more. I do not believe that it is the case that folk do not want more trees—NFU Scotland has stated on more than one occasion that it is happy to see trees being planted. However, there is a level of disagreement as to what constitutes the right tree in the right place, because the right tree for some people is the wrong tree for others, and the right place for some people is wrong for others. That means that we cannot simply talk about tree planting in general—the discussion needs to be more specific, and the balance needs to be right.

The wood-panel industry in Scotland and the Confederation of Forest Industries tell us that they have an insatiable need for timber right now and that they will need even more wood in the next 25 to 30 years just to satisfy current demand.

The UK currently imports 80 per cent of its timber, as the minister mentioned earlier, and the Scottish Government's target of building at least 100,000 more houses over the next decade will increase the demand for timber frame kits. Where will those thousands of tonnes of timber come from?

I am sure that our Scandinavian neighbours will be chuckling away to themselves at the prospect of that long-term market being filled by Scandinavian timber. I think that we need to scupper the Scandinavian plans and turn them into Scottish plans for Scottish businesses that will create Scottish jobs.

There are arguments about whether tree planting, in and of itself, is the carbon sink that some people say that it is. That feeds back into the debate about having the right trees in the right place, and about the purpose of planting them in the first place. I suggest that no single argument on tree planting is a zero-sum game, but this is an area of contention so clarity is needed in the messaging about what we are trying to achieve. I am reliably told that conifer carbon sequestration is far greater, for the shorter growing period, than carbon sequestration by broad-leaf trees and that, as long as the product is then used constructively,

we can add at least another 20 to 30 years of carbon sequestration. I hope that the minister will address such tensions in her closing speech.

There is demand for good-quality commercially productive planting at the current 60:40 split—I dispute the comment that Mr Whittle made earlier; Confor wants the 60:40 split—to build a sustainable and renewable source of timber for a thriving timber-based industry that will satisfy the growing demand for building.

That has the potential to rebuild a sector that has been lost over the years in Scotland. I am sure that many of my rural colleagues will well remember that every estate used to have a thriving local sawmill that made fence posts, sleepers and rails for the local market—those were circular economy products from a circular saw, if you like. Why not rebuild that sector right here when we have so much demand? A sector that is already worth more than £1 billion to our economy has the potential to provide tens of thousands of jobs. In my view, we need to pursue that economic potential with some vigour.

As for the climate crisis, the arguments have been made; it is imperative that we all play our part with regard to trees' ability to sequester carbon and with regard to the crisis that we are facing.

I have seen how little is left of the glacier fields on top of Kilimanjaro, and I can tell members that it is sobering to see in real life the direct effects that our actions have had south of the equator. However, it is not necessary to go to such heights to see the effects. Closer to home, last year's floods in the German town of Schuld resulted in nearly half of the village being lost.

Even closer still, two weeks ago, more than 100 people attended in my constituency a meeting that was organised by the member of the United Kingdom Parliament, Pete Wishart, to demand action from the local authority and the Scottish Government to stop major floodwaters running right through the housing development in Craigie.

Those people are scared and angry, and they believe that their houses have been flooded as a result of more houses being built higher up the hill. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency told the meeting that the cause of the latest flood was a month's worth of rain falling in just over two hours. We all know that, unfortunately, those kind of freak downpours are becoming less freakish and far more common, and that that is likely to get worse as time goes on.

There are communities across every one of our constituencies that have that same fear and anger, so as the Parliament of the people and the Government of Scotland, we have no choice but to do all that we can to stop the climate emergency.

I have often heard it asked what difference tiny Scotland can make to the worldwide problem. I say that we can make a world of difference. Our First Minister has been criticised for attending COP27. I am glad that we have serious thinkers such as Alex Rowley in the chamber, because we have for centuries been making a world of difference with so many things that have made the world better.

Brian Whittle: Will the member give way?

Jim Fairlie: The punishment for the quality of Brian Whittle's contribution is that I will take no interventions from him.

However, we have also added to the crisis through our inventions, so our imperative to act now is every bit as important: the First Minister acting on that world stage is vital, in that regard.

Our actions alone will not save the planet for humanity, but our example will set a benchmark for others to follow—not least our neighbours down south, who could learn a bit from what the Scottish Government is doing.

Farmers are feeling justifiably angry about the fact that they are being blamed incessantly for all the ills of our climate and nature problems, whereas, in fact, they are undoubtedly a major part of the solution. They will help us to restore the balance between nature and climate and quality food production, but they are frustrated to see huge tracts of quality land going under trees.

The messaging has simply not been heard enough from the Government or the forestry sector about how farmers can be the co-beneficiaries of the new potential diversification. I go back to the point that my colleague Fergus Ewing made earlier: secure tenants must have a part of that, too.

We still have work to do in working out what the balance is and how to ensure that local communities, farmers and forestry co-exist and thrive, but I am confident that we can find the balance that everyone wants.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fairlie, could you please conclude?

Jim Fairlie: Yes. I will finish there.

16:20

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Jim Fairlie just said that we need serious thinkers in the chamber. It is long past time that we had a serious debate on forestry and net zero, but the evidence suggests that the Government is not taking the issue sufficiently seriously—evidence such as the fact that the minister who lodged the motion will leave this chamber to fly 4,000 miles to Egypt. Although we do not know the financial cost

of that, because the Scottish Government prefers to keep secret both the cost and the number of people going, the environmental cost must be considerable. And we have heard nary a peep from the Green Party. What a misnomer.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Liam Kerr: I will do so very briefly.

Fiona Hyslop: When the Prime Minister of Barbados is praising Scotland and the work that we are doing—she knows what she is talking about—Scotland has the right to be at COP2017, and it is right that our First Minister will be there.

Liam Kerr: It is COP27 and, of course, the UK is the representative party.

On the point about what everyone is at COP27 for, the minister's motion notes

“the essential contribution to net zero that trees, woods and forests make, tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss”,

but not enough is being done to promote that essential contribution. In April 2021, the Government pledged to plant 18,000 hectares of new woodland per year by 2025. Earlier today, the minister stated that she thinks that more than 10,000 hectares were planted. According to a response to a freedom of information request that I have received, Scottish Forestry, the forestry arm of the Government, has, through the forestry grant scheme, created only 9,414 hectares between September 2021 and August 2022.

Fergus Ewing: Will Mr Kerr give way?

Liam Kerr: There is more. My FOI tells me not only that the Government failed to hit the planting target, but that 54 per cent of what was planted—5,052 hectares—is non-native woodland. That is important, because television naturalist Chris Packham has warned that non-native species aggravate the biodiversity crisis, and the Woodland Trust has said that native trees are more effective at capturing carbon when planted at scale and over a long period. The Government is just not serious enough.

That is further evidenced by recalling how Lorna Slater proudly announced, in mid-October, £1.3 million to promote recovery of the fragile forest ecosystem. However, only four days later the Woodland Trust told her that it will cost about £500 million to properly create more woodland.

Interestingly, it was reported earlier this week that whereas the Scottish Government offered £1.3 million, the Irish Government is putting €1.3 billion into Irish forestry and tree planting. That is taking forestry seriously.

Fergus Ewing: Will Mr Kerr give way?

Liam Kerr: There is something else here that is just not right. It is just not right to tell farmers and so-called green lairds to take large tracts of land and stick trees on them. That is not sympathetic to neighbouring farmers or local people. It is imperative that communities be brought along in the debate, and that everyone is open and transparent.

Fergus Ewing: Mr Kerr is not really engaging in a “serious debate”, then.

Liam Kerr: I beg your pardon?

Fergus Ewing: Will Mr Kerr give way?

Liam Kerr: I really do not have any time, I am afraid—much as I would like to give way.

The minister, therefore, should perhaps be commended for her promises last summer to take action to avoid cases of large land holdings being sold behind closed doors, without going on the open market. That was, as I understand it, with the goal of creating a more diverse pattern of land ownership and to ensure that farmers and local communities could bid. Indeed, I think that I am right in saying—although, strangely, I was not invited—that at the most recent SNP conference, delegates called for the party to stop secret land deals.

That is why I was so surprised to learn that Government-owned agency Forestry and Land Scotland recently purchased the 16,500-acre Glen Prosen estate in my region off-market, to turn it into land for woodlands creation, thereby costing several rural workers’ jobs. When the agency was asked how much it bought the estate for, answer came there none. Given its likely impact on land price inflation, which Colin Smyth mentioned, I think that we can comfortably describe the rumoured purchase price of £25 million as seriously concerning.

Màiri McAllan: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: Presiding Officer, do I have time?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is not really any time in hand. It is up to you whether to take an intervention.

Liam Kerr: Then I cannot.

Members will well remember Storms Arwen, Malik and Corrie last year. As we have heard, at a basic level, forestry locks up carbon through growth of trees and using the wood that is cut, processed and employed in the construction or refurbishment of buildings—I note Confor’s helpful note about productive wood in that regard. Storms create carbon losses through tree falls, the opportunity cost of those trees not growing and, perhaps, release from the soil. They also reduce the quality of some of the wood.

We need to minimise the carbon losses as much as we need to focus on planting trees. That means that there must be much greater focus on mitigation, adaptation and resilience and ensuring that, as Scottish Land & Estates says, we put the right tree in the right place. Therefore, careful design and management are critical.

A Government that was serious about the matter would be on top of that, but I understand from speaking to industry that it took the Government until March to quantify how much damage had been done by the storms and that it then had to revise the estimate from 4,000 hectares to 8,000 hectares. The windblow action committee was eventually established but had still not been called by 3 December, despite storm Arwen hitting on 25 November. There are few and limited substantive estimates for the economic damage, carbon losses and longer-term impact of the storms.

We have a Government that talks the talk on forestry and net zero but is found wanting in delivery. That is epitomised by the fact that, following the conclusion of the debate, the minister charged with sorting it all will be found at the end of a 4,000-mile flight in Egypt.

16:26

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I acknowledge that Scotland is the leader in tree planting in the UK. That is a real positive but, as others have said, the rate of growth in tree planting has slowed. We can be satisfied that good progress is being made, but we can also stress the need to make more progress moving forward.

I note that Confor, representing the forestry and wood-using industry, has written to MSPs setting out its asks for the Government. It asks that we keep up with the targets. It also asks for productive forestry for a just transition. It states that it is vital that the split between productive and native planting continues at 60:40 and that 95 per cent of wood production is softwood. Confor also wants Government backing for research and development. It stresses that tree breeding will ensure an improvement in the tree stock’s productivity and resilience as well as its adaptability to climate change, pests and diseases. I hope that ministers will respond to those asks and take them on board.

Confor also speaks about the importance of productive trees. Productive forests produce softwood, which is the most widely used wood in house building and in the movement of food and goods using pallets. Therefore, it is important that the right choices are made on the types of planting that are done. Getting that right also means

avoiding deforestation abroad, because more productive forests at home will help to reduce the reliance on wood imports and help protect habitats that are at risk of deforestation abroad. It is important that we get that right.

It is estimated that the industry contributes more than £1 billion to the Scottish economy and supports 250,000 full-time jobs. Therefore, we would want the sector to succeed on economic terms as well as in terms of improving the environment.

However, I will raise an issue that Jim Fairlie touched on and that was raised with me when I met farmers recently. They said that they had concerns that good land that would grow food is being taken up for tree planting, sometimes because of the profits that people can make out of planting trees. That led me to ask the Scottish Government how much agricultural land in Scotland has been lost to tree planting in the past decade.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Rowley: No.

This is the answer that I got from the Government:

“Tree Planting is a critical element of the Scottish Government’s plans to tackle the climate emergency and help achieve a net-zero Scotland.

Although data on land use prior to woodland establishment is not available”—

I suggest that the minister picks that up because it should be available—

“tree planting takes place on a range of land types”.—
[*Written Answers*, 18 August 2022; S6W-10430.]

The answer then outlines that some of those land types are golf courses and agricultural, sporting and conservation land.

With the food crisis that we have, it is key that the Government sits down, works with NFU Scotland and ensures that we get it right. It is crazy to use land that we could be growing food on to plant trees when there is land that would be suitable for planting trees that is not being used. It all comes down to profit and the profiteering of those who are using the scheme to make money.

It would be remiss of me not to mention an often overlooked yet vital element of forestry and its ability to contribute to net zero targets, which is the role that fungi play in our forest ecosystems. Fungal networks play a critical role in helping to absorb carbon from the environment and can also slow down the speed at which carbon returns from forest soils into the atmosphere, helping forests to keep carbon locked up in trees and soils for longer.

Billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide flow from plants into those fungal networks each year. Those carbon flows help make soils the second largest carbon sink, after oceans. However, in developing forest landscapes, we must be aware of the role that fungi play in benefiting the trees as well as the wider benefits to our environment. That means encouraging increased biodiversity and a wider understanding of the benefits that this entire kingdom of life brings to our world.

Further to that point, research from the University of Stirling, in my region, has made a breakthrough in resolving a key conflict in the world’s quest for net zero, which is how to reconcile tree planting and food production. Dr Paul Thomas’s research in Mexico has found that

“inoculating native trees with an edible mushroom can produce more protein per hectare than pasture-raised beef, while reforesting areas, storing carbon and restoring biodiversity at the same time ... This study presents a whole new way of looking at land use, making it possible to combine food production ... with the carbon sequestration, biodiversity and conservation goals that forestry achieves.”

That work has been pioneered from here in Scotland, at the University of Stirling.

Good progress has been made, but it is clear that we can make a lot more progress and we should be involving everyone—every stakeholder and every key player—if we are to get this right.

16:32

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): I learned last week that a new word had been added to the Collins dictionary: permacrisis. Permactrisis is an extended period in which people live through crises including war, inflation, climate change and political instability. In recent years, we have all been living through permactrisis—crisis upon crisis.

Although war, inflation and political instability are generally temporary, we know that climate change is not temporary and, if action is not taken, it will cause permanent damage to our planet for our future generations. We heard from my colleague Jim Fairlie about the stark realities of climate change in the examples that he gave.

We all have a moral responsibility to do what we can to tackle the climate crisis and we are all aware that world leaders are currently meeting at COP27 in Egypt to take action. My colleague Fiona Hyslop has mentioned some of the commitments at COP27 this week. I would also like to highlight that our First Minister has confirmed another £5 million this week for loss and damage at COP27 and has urged other countries to follow suit. Last year, Scotland became the first developed nation to pledge finance to address loss and damage and now other countries have followed suit, including Denmark. Professor

Saleemul Huq, who is the director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development, said:

“The Scottish Government’s leadership in this area, including the latest funding pledge, is welcome and I hope it will prove an inspiration to other countries to take action to provide funding for loss and damage with urgency at COP27.”

Moving on to the debate on forestry, I will quote environmentalist George Monbiot:

“There is a magic machine that sucks carbon out of the air, costs very little, and builds itself. It’s called ... a tree.”

Tree planting is a critical element of the Scottish Government’s plan to tackle the climate emergency and to help achieve a net zero Scotland. Although we are doing well, we need to do more to support the timber industry in Scotland. I think that it is unacceptable that the UK is the second largest net importer of timber in the world, China being the first. I welcome the fact that Scotland has planted 80 per cent of all new woodland in the UK for the past four years, and that the Scottish Government understands the vital importance of tree planting and home-grown wood use to its net zero ambitions and its economy.

We all know that the Scottish Government has an ambitious commitment to reach net zero by 2045, and expanding our forests and woodlands is key to achieving that, as our trees will soak up harmful CO₂ from the atmosphere. Currently, Scotland’s trees are sequestering 7.6 million tonnes of CO₂ each year, which is the equivalent of 14 per cent of our gross greenhouse gas emissions. That demonstrates how important the Scottish Government’s woodland expansion plans are in fighting climate change.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government will soon publish a new biodiversity strategy for Scotland, which will set out what our natural environment needs to look like by 2045 in order to reverse biodiversity decline and protect our environment. The Government’s motion also reiterates a commitment to increase the use of domestic timber.

Glennon Brothers is a large business that is based in Troon, in my constituency. I have had the pleasure of visiting it several times, and I thank the minister for joining me earlier this year on a visit to see the great work that the company does, as it plays a crucial role in the local economy. It sustainably produces timber from Scottish spruce—I know that Fergus Ewing has mentioned the importance of Scottish spruce—to make Scottish homes, among other products. It then uses the by-products of that process to generate all its own heat and energy. The business is in part supported by the Scottish Government’s fantastic timberlink initiative. In 2021, that initiative saw 52,500 tonnes of timber shipped into Troon

harbour—in context, that is about five Eiffel towers’ worth—which takes more than 2,000 lorry movements off the roads between Argyll and Ayrshire, cutting congestion and emissions.

I will take the opportunity to highlight to the minister that businesses such as Glennon Brothers want to grow and expand capacity, and to do that, further investment is required in timberlink. With fuel costs rising and economic uncertainty, there has been an increase in operational costs to run the vessels, which means that there has been a reduction in the tonnage that can be delivered by timberlink into Troon. I highlight that pressing issue of concern to the minister.

The interlinked crises of nature loss and climate change need urgent action across government and society. We have a moral obligation to protect nature and the climate for our future generations. I said at the beginning of my speech that the destruction of the environment and climate change are the biggest threats to our future generations. Woodland expansion is a priority for the Scottish Government, but it is vital that it is carefully planned—and that has been highlighted in a lot of the contributions to the debate. As at 31 March 2022, it is estimated that the area of woodland in the UK is 3.24 million hectares, which represents 13 per cent of the total land area of the whole of the UK, and the percentage of land that is woodland is 19 per cent in Scotland, 15 per cent in Wales, 10 per cent in England and 9 per cent in Northern Ireland.

Scotland, as a small country, is doing really well in this area and we are punching well above our weight. The Scottish Government acknowledges the importance of forestry’s contribution to net zero in Scotland, with new packages such as the £60m nature restoration fund, which supports projects across Scotland that address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. I also welcome the minister’s funding announcements this afternoon.

We all want to play our part in achieving net zero. That simple magic machine—a tree—will not solve all our problems on its own, but it will make a fair dent in them.

16:38

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): The debate could not have been timelier as COP27 continues in Egypt. If we are to become a truly net zero Scotland, we have to ensure that forestry makes a significant contribution in delivering that. That is why there is much in the Scottish Government’s motion that we welcome, particularly the renewed commitment to increase the annual woodland creation target to 18,000

hectares by 2025. However, members have been right to note the need for us to increase our use of domestic timber and to make commercial forestry more sustainable.

Members have also stressed the need to maintain and develop a highly skilled workforce to ensure that forestry can make a significant contribution to Scotland's transition to net zero, and we have heard about the continuing injustice of Scotland's land ownership from Richard Leonard, including how that impacts on our efforts to achieve net zero.

Mark Ruskell: As a member for North East Scotland and a member of the Labour and Co-operative Party, does the member back the Scottish Government's move to take the Glenprosen estate into public ownership?

Mercedes Villalba: I would like to see a lot more of Scotland's land in public and community ownership.

The Conservative amendment refers to commercial forestry, which is an issue that I want to address. We have to recognise that the land use sector, which includes forestry, is a major contributor to net emissions. In order to reduce emissions, we have to consider ways to make forest management more sustainable. Currently, commercial forestry is managed largely through the use of the clear fell model, with most or all trees in an area being cut down. The alternative approach would be to manage commercial forestry through the continuous cover model. That would help us to develop structurally, visually and biologically diverse forests, while lessening the impact on soil carbon stocks, which clearly has benefits for our transition to net zero.

Edward Mountain: Will the member give way on that point?

Mercedes Villalba: I do not think that I have time, sorry.

The Scottish Government's commitment to increase the use of domestic timber is welcome, because the current situation is unacceptable. Forestry and Land Scotland has highlighted that the UK imports 80 per cent of our annual timber requirement, leaving us in the position of often having to rely on imported wood for house building and other infrastructure projects. The Scottish Government should seek to learn from the example set in countries such as Sweden and Australia, where publicly owned timber companies ensure that a greater proportion of domestic timber is used for domestic house building and infrastructure development.

The Labour amendment emphasises the need to ensure that forestry plans increase biodiversity as well as meet woodland creation targets. We are

calling for at least 50 per cent of tree cover expansion in Scotland to comprise native species, given that native tree species provide habitats for our native wildlife. Planting trees on land that is made up of deep peat leads to significant soil carbon losses. That is why England has adopted a 30cm definition of deep peat, which prevents tree cover expansion and limits restocking. Given that Scotland's current deep peat definition remains at 50cm, I hope to hear from the minister what consideration she has given to adopting the 30cm definition.

Members have already noted the importance of a skilled forestry workforce, which is vital if we are to maximise forestry's contribution to net zero. Labour has previously called for the creation of a Scottish conservation corps, modelled on the Civilian Conservation Corps of Roosevelt's new deal. It would help to deliver green jobs and provide a workforce that is dedicated to restoring and preserving Scotland's natural environment, including our forests.

The Scottish Government has also recently conducted a consultation on proposals for its land reform bill. As other members have highlighted, Scotland's land ownership is heavily concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few. The emergence of green lairds is a sign of those wealthy few continuing to use Scotland's land for their own interests, namely, to offset their emissions. The Scottish Government must be bolder and deliver a cap on land ownership. A cap would help to end the injustice of Scotland's current land ownership, empowering communities and public bodies to acquire land for the common good.

Although today's debate has, rightly, seen the Scottish Government held to account over missed targets, I believe that many positive proposals have been put forward on the issue. I hope that the Scottish Government will reflect on some of those proposals, to ensure that we have the skilled workforce that we need, that biodiversity is improved and that the use of domestic timber is increased. If we are serious about maximising forestry's contribution to net zero, the Scottish Government will need to work with all parties, with trade unions and with campaigners to make that a reality.

16:43

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

I am delighted to close this debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives because achieving our net zero targets is one of the biggest challenges that this country faces. If we get it right, we tackle

the climate change emergency; if we get it wrong, future generations will have to pay for a long time.

Forestry will play a key role in delivering those ambitions, and that begs the question: is the Government doing enough in Scotland? I am afraid that the facts speak for themselves, and Mr Ewing will not be surprised to hear me say that, since 2016, the Scottish Government has only twice met its annual forestry planting targets. The new targets of 12,000 hectares in 2020 and 13,500 hectares in 2021 have also failed to be met. Over the past five years, this Government has overseen tree planting on 10,000 hectares fewer than it should have done. That is a huge amount of catching up to do, and we should seriously question whether the Government will be able to make up for lost time.

As we have heard, perhaps the off-market, secret purchase of the 16,500-acre Glenprosen estate in Angus—at a reported cost of £25 million—will help. Perhaps when the Government fails to meet its annual targets, it will just need to grab a few acres from that land bank, to make up for areas where the targets are being missed, and it will then meet its headline targets.

When done by private individuals, off-market deals have always been criticised by the Government, but it appears to be fine for the Government to do such a deal. Most people would view that as double standards, which perhaps epitomises this Government's dealings with forestry.

Biodiversity and food security are great straplines, but actions need to speak louder than words. If we are trying to achieve net zero, it does not make sense to fail planting targets and take good, food-producing land out of production. Planting trees so that we have to import more food means that we are offshoring our carbon footprint. When the minister goes to Egypt, she will see food, not trees, being grown on the fertile plains of the Nile, which makes eminent sense. We need to be smarter by planting trees where they do not interrupt food production and it is sensible to provide funds to encourage the achievement of planting targets.

What is more, if we plant the right tree in the right place, we do not create monocultures, which is an absolutely vital point. In that way, we will increase our biodiversity and protect species such as capercaillie and goshawks. Capercaillie are on the verge of extinction, and most of that comes down to the fact that the wrong trees have been planted in the wrong places. In addition, we should never forget that it was Forestry Commission policy to shoot capercaillies on sight and destroy their nests.

I turn to some of the points that were made in the debate. I agree with the minister that there is a strategic need for forestry. It is therefore sad that, by 2035, we will have such a dip that we will not have enough trees in Scotland for our timber industry to use.

I agree with what Brian Whittle said about planting the right trees in the right place; we have heard that a lot this afternoon. We also need to make sure that we grow our seedlings in this country, in order to prevent the import of disease.

I also think that Colin Smyth was right to promote timber production, which is really important. His question about green lairds was also important, and this Government and Parliament need to look at that, to work out whether we are getting it right.

I liked Willie Rennie's comment about Tarzan. I am not sure whether he will take me to meet Tarzan. If he offers to do so, perhaps I should take that up. He was right in what he said about the fact that we cannot eat trees, so we also need to grow food.

Jenni Minto said that there was a need to promote the rainforest. I believe that she was entirely right and that we should encourage its promotion.

Rachael Hamilton stressed the importance of timber production being complementary to food production. She also rightly stressed the importance of deer control. Getting deer under control is absolutely right, but we need to make sure that deer control is not deer eradication. I am often sad to see the cull targets in forests around me, because the average age of the roe deer that are culled is under a year old. That is no life. That is not management; it is extermination.

I do not always say that he is right, but this afternoon, Fergus Ewing was right to talk about speeding up the process of planting and making it easier for planting to be undertaken. We all know and have heard about how difficult it can be.

Fiona Hyslop pointed out the importance of biodiversity, on which I agree with her. Funnily enough, I agree with what Mark Ruskell said about overgrazing, but he fundamentally failed to mention the problems of overgrazing on riparian woodlands where beavers are to be introduced or the fact that there are very few means of controlling them.

On Jim Fairlie's comment, there is no punishment from me for anything that he said about needing a circular economy in which timber will play a part. Liam Kerr's comment about failing to achieve planting targets was very true, as was his comment about doing secret land deals: in one

breath, the Government is doing that, but in the next breath it criticises it.

Scotland's forestry sector has a key role to play in combating climate change, but the Government's forestry strategy needs to be far cleverer and involve more than just growing monoculture trees, which results in good farmland being lost to those trees.

We need to protect biodiversity, and we need to protect our food security. Those two factors are just as important as trees—the Government must see that, because if it does not, it is not seeing the wood for the trees that it so desperately wants to plant at the expense of everything else.

16:51

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): There is no doubt that expanding, restoring and improving our forests and woodlands have a key role in achieving net zero and restoring Scotland's natural environment. I want to help to grow and sustain the great contribution that forestry in all its guises can make to the environment, people and economy of Scotland.

I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate. It has been very content heavy, so I will try to pick out some key themes. Unfortunately, I will not be able to come back to every member who spoke.

I can see some top themes of discussion. There are different views in the chamber about what the mix of planting should be in terms of native woodlands and commercial plantations. That is definitely the subject of an on-going conversation, but I am sure that we all agree that that needs to end up with the right tree—

Colin Smyth: Will the minister take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: I am sorry; I am really short on time and I have a lot of content to cover.

That needs to end up with the right tree in the right place. Unfortunately, that can make it challenging to speed up the planning, because getting the right tree in the right place means having consultations, doing the science and doing the right work behind it.

We have some opportunities coming up in the agriculture bill. I hear much concern in the chamber about potential conflicts between food production and forestry. I do not see that there are conflicts here. Although we have some good projects for trees on farms and agroforestry, we also have the agriculture bill—

Brian Whittle: Will the minister take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: I have a lot to get through, so I am trying to cover everything that was covered in the debate in a great hurry.

We all agree that we need to ensure that we have sustainable food production in Scotland at the same time as we expand our forestry. Therefore, I think that we can all agree that that is something that we will work on, and the agriculture bill is our opportunity to do so.

Another key issue that was brought up is the challenge of publicly funding our natural environment restoration. We will definitely have to have private finance involved, but we need to manage that correctly so that we do not have the situation with green lairds in the future.

There has been a recognition of the skills that are needed and the forestry employment opportunities, as well as the thriving growth industry that forestry presents for Scotland. I was also very enthused by hearing many members speak about the biodiversity elements of forestry, including riparian planting, which is so important to wild salmon—as colleagues noted—and beavers.

I was very interested in Alex Rowley's comments on alternative food production in forestry, and several colleagues mentioned soils as well.

I will come back to Rachael Hamilton and Liam Kerr on the matter of Glenprosen estate. The estate had been offered to a limited number of prospective buyers on a competitive tender basis, and prospective purchasers were bound by a confidentiality agreement. Forestry and Land Scotland's bid was accepted by the seller. For the information of members, I can say that the seller had previously run Glenprosen as a sporting estate and was in the process of winding down their business. The acquisition offers exciting opportunities for land use change, community and partnership working, woodland creation, biodiversity and peatland restoration, which are consistent with the Scottish Government's climate objectives and in line with the Bute house agreement.

There are currently five employees at Glenprosen, and FLS engaged with them as soon as it was legally able to do so. Three have been offered tenancies with FLS, one already resides on a neighbouring estate and will continue to do so, and the fifth has found employment elsewhere.

Several members mentioned land reform. Colin Smyth, Richard Leonard and, unusually, Liam Kerr, are very keen on land reform in Scotland. Màiri McAllan, who is sitting beside me, is the minister for land reform, and she will be introducing an ambitious bill that aims to tackle the exact issue that Richard Leonard has raised—the concentration of land ownership in Scotland. I

noticed that Mercedes Villalba also referenced that work. I hope that she has input into the consultation on land reform.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: I have got to get through quite a lot of material—sorry.

It is wrong to suggest that the forestry grant scheme supports only large-scale woodland creation projects. Around 50 per cent of recent applications to that scheme are for projects that are less than 20 hectares in size. Those are mostly from farmers, crofters and small woodland owners.

Our starting point for forestry must be protecting and restoring what we have. A particular priority for this Government is safeguarding Scotland's rainforests on the western seaboard, where high levels of rainfall and relatively mild year-round temperatures provide just the right conditions for an abundance of wildlife, including some of the world's rarest bryophytes and lichens. Forestry and Land Scotland manages a third of Scotland's rainforest. Recently, I announced £1.3 million of additional funding to support rainforest conservation.

I noticed that Liam Kerr made a comparison with Ireland. He will recall that Ireland is an independent country. That shows how a small independent country that has more powers can do more for its economy and for its forestry department.

In Scotland, we undertake rhododendron management, the removal and introduction of tree species and effective deer management. Some colleagues spoke about overgrazing. Effective deer management is critical to managing that issue.

All that is part of a wider effort to rapidly expand our native woodlands and deliver landscape-scale restoration. That will be further supported through the refresh of the forestry grant scheme that my colleague Màiri McAllan announced today, meaning that we can deliver even more for our environment through that essential scheme.

Last year, we surpassed our native woodland target. I put on record my thanks to all who were involved in that enormous effort.

Fergus Ewing: Will the minister give way on that point?

Lorna Slater: No. I am sorry, but I have a lot to get through in the time available to me.

We need to do more and we will be looking at how we can do that as part of the development of the Scottish biodiversity strategy and delivery plan, as well as at what we can do to improve the

biodiversity and resilience of our whole forest resource.

I cannot overstate the importance of building resilience. Diversification of our forests is key to making them more resilient to environmental changes as a result of climate change. Extreme droughts and storms, such as last year's storm Arwen, which toppled 2,000,000m³ of timber, can cause widespread damage to forests and impact on the forest industry and the stored carbon in the forest.

The positive environmental perspective of multipurpose forestry has come about in recent decades through ensuring that there is support for afforestation. Forest management and harvesting is linked to the UK forestry standard, which underpins the delivery of forestry policy across Scotland. All forestry plans and woodland creation targets must meet the requirement of the standard.

As minister for tree health, I am acutely aware of the impact that pests and diseases already have on our forests. In recent years, the phytophthora infection of larch and ash dieback have had a dramatic and on-going impact on landscapes and forests, reducing the palette of species that we can work with. There are also costs to local authorities and other land managers.

Edward Mountain: Will the minister give way on that point?

Lorna Slater: Sorry, but I have to get through my material and I am short on time.

Protecting Scotland's forests from damage or destruction that is caused by tree pests and diseases is a key part of ensuring that they reach their full potential in terms of carbon storage and climate change mitigation.

Our policy is to encourage good plant health and biosecurity practices. Scottish Forestry staff are actively monitoring pests and diseases within and beyond our borders.

Several members talked about the importing of saplings. We are very stretched on resource to properly inspect—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Minister, could you give me one moment?

I ask members to be aware that there is a lot of background noise.

Minister, please continue.

Lorna Slater: The inspection of imported saplings has been greatly inconvenienced by Brexit, which means that our resources in plant health to ensure that we are actively preventing the importation of diseases with saplings are very stretched.

All that highlights the risk of single-species plantations: an industry that is dependent on single species is much more vulnerable to diseases.

I thank Brian Whittle for alerting us all to the importance of biodiversity. He will be grateful to know that there is a Scottish Government minister for that—it is me. The Conservative amendment in the name of Brian Whittle does make some important points. I particularly welcome the recognition of the importance of—

The Presiding Officer: If you could, please conclude, minister.

Lorna Slater: —the biodiversity strategy that I am currently developing. Unfortunately, the amendment does not recognise the achievements of our own forestry sector or the challenges that we have faced in the past year because of Covid, so we will not be able to support it.

We will accept the Labour amendment in Colin Smyth's name, which makes some valuable additional points—

The Presiding Officer: Minister, you must conclude.

Lorna Slater: —about the important contributions that have been made by forestry workers in Scotland. Thank you.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on forestry's contribution to a net zero Scotland.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-06687, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 15 November 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Future of Gaelic and Scots

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 16 November 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;
Justice and Veterans

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Improving Care and Services for People with Chronic Pain

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 17 November 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Debate: The Impact of Brexit on Devolution

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
 Tuesday 22 November 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 followed by Topical Questions (If selected)
 followed by Scottish Government Business
 followed by Committee Announcements
 followed by Business Motions
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business
 Wednesday 23 November 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Covid Recovery and Parliamentary
 Business;
 Finance and Economy
 followed by Scottish Labour Party Business
 followed by Business Motions
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business
 Thursday 24 November 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body
 Questions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Net Zero, Energy and Transport
 followed by Scottish Government Business
 followed by Business Motions
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 14 November 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-06688, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 2 timetable.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 23 November 2022.—[George Adam]

The Presiding Officer: I call Alexander Burnett to speak to and move amendment S6M-06688.1. You have up to five minutes, Mr Burnett.

17:01

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): The convener of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee imposed an unnecessarily short amendment deadline on the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 2. I am told that there are around 100 amendments and that more would have been submitted had the deadline not been so restrictive.

The motion sets a deadline for finishing stage 2 on 23 November. That has already caused the convener of the committee to inform members that consideration will be completed in just two sittings and that a two-tiered speaking allocation system will be in place, dividing those who have amendments in their name and those who do not. That is clearly a restriction on scrutiny.

Imposing the short deadline is utterly needless. It just creates the prospect of getting things wrong.

My amendment would allow for two more sittings to consider the proposed amendments properly. That should not be controversial, because we have plenty of time in hand to do so. However, when I suggested that to the Parliamentary Bureau, I was battered down by the Government. The Scottish National Party wants to rush the bill through before Christmas.

I have tried to get to the bottom of why it might be doing that, and I have received increasingly unconvincing answers from the Minister for Parliamentary Business. For example, last week I was told that there was a programme of legislation to get through, so we needed to get this bill out of the way quickly. However, the Parliament's legislation tracker shows that, other than the GRR Bill, there are just two bills with a deadline approaching in the next four months. That leaves plenty of time to consider the bill properly.

This week, the minister suggested that, because the bill deals with vulnerable groups, we must get it passed as soon as possible. However, those groups have been waiting for years for reform. I am sure that they will be the first to say that a couple of weeks extra, to make sure that we get the bill right, is more than worth it.

We must strive for high-quality legislation. We do not want this Parliament to become an embarrassing case, studied at universities worldwide, of how not to do gender reform legislation.

So, why the rush? The reasons that have been given do not make sense, and I am not sure that even the minister believes them.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am not sure that the Government even believes its own reasons, either. Just this week, in the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, we were given to understand that our deadline for the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill will be extended because Màiri McAllan is jetting off to Egypt.

Does the member agree that, if deadline extensions can be made at the drop of a hat for some bills, there is no justifiable reason why this very sensible extension should not be made for the GRR Bill?

Alexander Burnett: I thank the member for the intervention, and I completely agree with her. That information dismantles Mr Adam's initial argument about the volume of upcoming legislation. It seems that there is time to extend some bills.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): As somebody who very much hopes to be able to support the bill at stage 3, I say that that becomes more difficult if the discussion of the amendments that some of us feel are reasonable is curtailed. We are discussing some of those amendments with Government ministers in the hope that we can get to a point at which the bill can be supported. It is really rather alarming to those of us who desperately want to find a way to support the bill in its final form if we cannot have that proper discussion.

Alexander Burnett: I thank the member for that intervention. Others have mentioned that it is extremely unfortunate that the process is becoming part of the politics.

The only conclusion that I am left with is that there is some hidden reason for the haste on the bill. I have my suspicions that the reason is political in nature. I really hope that I am wrong about that, but more and more evidence suggests that I am not.

Regardless of members' position on the bill, it is common sense to dedicate the proper time to getting it right. A wise MSP recently said that we cannot let the process become part of the politics, and I agree with that. Therefore, let us extend the stage 2 deadline by two weeks and let us not have a repeat of this nonsense at stage 3.

I move amendment S6M-06688.1, to leave out "23 November" and insert "7 December".

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

17:06

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I cannot be held accountable for Mr Burnett's lack of recall of what was discussed in the Parliamentary Bureau. He has taken little snippets of the conversation that we had, as opposed to the whole discussion. However, he was correct to say that we must get legislation correct and that we should take the time to do that.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Scottish Labour is focused on the substance of our amendments rather than timetabling. We are therefore prepared to support the Government's timetabling proposal to finish stage 2 by 23 November, if the minister can give a guarantee that, if the committee requires more time for parliamentary scrutiny, it will get that extra time. Can the minister give us that guarantee?

George Adam: To reassure Mr Bibby, I point out that, as he is well aware, it would be up to the convener of the committee to approach the Parliamentary Bureau and say that the committee needed extra time. The bureau has discussed the point and has agreed that we will review the matter weekly during stage 2 to see whether we are working within the guidelines. I hope that that makes Mr Bibby feel a lot better.

The bureau has discussed the matter and, following the discussion that I had with the committee's convener and clerk last week, we propose a stage 2 deadline of 23 November. The bill is not a large and complex one. As I said, I agree that we must get legislation correct. We have proposed that timescale because of the size of the bill. There is no hastening of the process or rushing through of the bill. The bill will go through the process for a bill of its size.

As we have heard from Jackson Carlaw, the cabinet secretary, Shona Robison, has said that the door is open to members to discuss reasonable amendments to the bill, and that will be the case throughout the process. The timeline has been agreed by the convener and the majority of the committee members, and they are content to work to that. As I said, the bureau agreed yesterday to review the outcome of stage 2 on a weekly basis. The deadline will enable the committee to have two regular sessions to consider amendments, which is not unusual for a bill of this size. If the convener considers that a third session is required, he will raise that with the bureau, which can consider that during our weekly review.

Those arrangements meet the requirements that are set out in the Parliament's standing orders. The purpose and aims of the bill are clear and are not wide ranging, so the timescale that is proposed is wholly appropriate.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-06688.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06688, in the name of George Adam, on a stage 2 timetable, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:09

Meeting suspended.

17:11

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-06688.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work, but I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to access the app in time to vote. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

I can confirm to Carol Mochan that her vote was recorded.

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)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 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, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06688.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett, is: For 30, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-06688, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 2 timetable, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is now closed.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app was not working. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)

Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

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)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (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-06688, in the name of George Adam, on a stage 2 timetable, is: For 90, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 23 November 2022.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:17

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S6M-06689, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, motion S6M-06690, on the office of the clerk, and motion S6M-06710, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on—

(a) Wednesday 28, Thursday 29 and Friday 30 December 2022, and

(b) further to motion S6M-01333, Friday 23 December 2022 (pm).

That the Parliament agrees that—

Ash Regan be appointed to replace Natalie Don as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

James Dornan be appointed to replace Elena Whitham as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:17

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-06658.1, in the name of Brian Whittle, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06658, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on forestry's contribution to net zero Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)

(SNP)

Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06658.1, in the name of Brian Whittle, is: For 53, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-06658.2, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06658, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on forestry's contribution to net zero Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-06658, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on forestry's contribution to net zero Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is closed.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app was not working. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you; we will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

Lauderdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

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)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (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-06658, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on forestry's contribution to net zero Scotland, as amended, is: For 90, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the essential contribution to net zero that trees, woods and forests make, tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, especially ahead of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP27; notes the importance of growing and maintaining a resilient forest resource to sustain its economic, social and environmental contribution; welcomes the achievements made in implementing Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029; further welcomes the creation of 4,362 hectares of native woodland in 2021, delivering the target agreed in the Bute House Agreement, which will be reviewed in the forthcoming biodiversity strategy, and reiterates the commitment to increase the use of domestic timber, and the Scottish Government's annual woodland creation target, which increases to 18,000 hectares by 2025; recognises that the rate of growth in tree planting in Scotland slowed in recent years; calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that forestry plans deliver its tree planting targets, increase biodiversity and tackle climate change; celebrates the contribution of Scotland's forestry workers and their trade unions, and recognises the importance of maintaining and increasing a highly skilled workforce, and contributing to a low carbon Just Transition.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on the three Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object? As no member has objected, the question is, that motion S6M-06689, on approval of an SSI, motion S6M-06690, on the office of the clerk, and motion S6M-06710, on committee membership, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on—

(a) Wednesday 28, Thursday 29 and Friday 30 December 2022, and

(b) further to motion S6M-01333, Friday 23 December 2022 (pm).

That the Parliament agrees that—

Ash Regan be appointed to replace Natalie Don as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

James Dornan be appointed to replace Elena Whitham as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Petrol and Diesel Prices (Inverclyde)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-05607, in the name of Stuart McMillan, on Greenock and Inverclyde faced with higher forecourt prices than the rest of Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament rejects what it sees as the unfair fuel-pricing policy reportedly facing the people of Greenock and Inverclyde; understands that reports from BBC Scotland and the *Greenock Telegraph* suggest that forecourt prices in the area are significantly higher than in other parts of Scotland, including in more rural constituencies; believes that fuel retailers operating in Inverclyde have failed to acknowledge the impact of what it sees as a localised approach to pricing on people and businesses in the area, which, based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), ranks highest in Scotland for levels of deprivation; welcomes the announcement that the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will conduct a market study into the supply of road fuel in the UK; notes the view that changes are needed to prevent fuel retailers from charging significantly higher prices in one area compared to nearby locations; believes that reducing reliance on petrol and diesel vehicles is crucial, in light of the climate emergency; considers, however, that some people rely on their car for work or health reasons, and that purchasing a hybrid or electric vehicle, or using public transport, is not always an option; highlights what it sees as the vast profits being made by big businesses, including oil and gas companies; believes that this is in sharp contradiction to the cost of living crisis facing society that is plunging more households into poverty; notes the view that the UK Government must extend measures to help households, including through a cut in VAT and reduction in fuel duty; further notes the calls on the UK Government to act immediately, before autumn and winter 2022; notes the view that, if immediate action is not taken, the oil and gas sector in Scotland will carry a disproportionate burden of funding a UK-wide response to the cost of living crisis; notes calls on fuel retailers to reduce forecourt prices in Greenock and Inverclyde so that they are in line with the rest of Scotland, and looks forward to the CMA's report into the supply of road fuel across the UK being published later in 2022.

17:24

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I am pleased to have secured this members' business debate, and I thank colleagues on all sides of the chamber for supporting my motion to allow it to happen. I also thank Daniella Theis from the *Greenock Telegraph* and India Grant from BBC Scotland's "The Nine" programme for reporting on the campaign to get local fuel retailers to stop ripping off the people of Inverclyde.

Oil prices can be volatile and will always go up and down, and they have become even more unpredictable since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

However, Tesco, Morrisons and BP have been ripping off my constituents since long before the war in Ukraine. The three companies continually claim that "local competition" is the driver for local fuel prices. Using their logic, it would seem that if one of them were to choose to drop its prices, its competitors would surely follow suit, and yet they do not.

The "greed is good" mantra clearly exists for Tesco, Morrisons and BP when it comes to the swindling of my community. I have attempted to engage with all three suppliers over many years. I acknowledge that, a few years ago, Morrisons accepted that its prices were too high and it reduced them, but that decrease has long since evaporated. I asked representatives from all three companies to come to Inverclyde to take part in a round-table discussion with interested organisations, including the local chamber of commerce, but all three refused. I have also written to the Competition and Markets Authority, and I welcome its market study, which is currently under way. It is a pity, however, that the CMA did not initiate such a review when I first wrote to it a few years ago.

I launched my #fairfuel watch campaign to highlight the cheapest garage locally in comparison with the cheapest garages in surrounding areas. The campaign generated a huge amount of discussion on social media, and people took photos of the cheaper prices at other garages to emphasise the extent of the unfairness. My constituents are furious, knowing that petrol at forecourts in Dunoon tends to be significantly cheaper than it is in Inverclyde, despite the fact that the tankers have to drive through my constituency and go on a ferry to cross the Clyde in order to service those forecourts. Fuel is cheaper even in Fairlie in North Ayrshire—once again, tankers have to drive through Inverclyde to supply those garages.

Since the launch of the campaign, it has become clear that garages in Inverclyde are consistently around 5p to 10p per litre more expensive than those in nearby areas. Recent figures from the Petrol Map website indicate that Inverclyde's forecourts are now the most expensive in Scotland.

Most colleagues would normally consider that petrol stations in the Highlands and Islands—including in your constituency of Orkney, Presiding Officer—would be more expensive. The proof is there, however: Inverclyde is now the most expensive place for fuel in Scotland. When we consider that Inverclyde has the second highest local share of data zones among the 15 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland, and the highest local share of data zones among the 5 per cent

most deprived areas, the situation becomes even more scandalous.

We can then add in the enormous profits that the oil companies are making. Between April and June this year, the world's five biggest oil companies shared bumper global profits of nearly £50 billion, with BP reporting a global profit of £6.9 billion—its biggest quarterly profit in 14 years. Those eye-watering profits come as households face unmanageable energy bills, and reports from the BBC suggest that weekly road fuel prices in the United Kingdom have almost doubled since 2016.

It is not just fossil fuel companies that are profiting during the cost of living crisis. Tesco reported profits of £2.56 billion for 2021-22, which is up by 65.5 per cent in comparison with the previous year. For 2022-23, Tesco expects its retail-adjusted operating profit to be between £2.4 billion and £2.6 billion. Morrisons has reported a decline in profits, but it still managed to make £254 million in operating profits in 2020-21. Interestingly, Asda reported profits of £693.1 million for 2021—up by 42 per cent in comparison with 2020—and its forecourts are typically the cheapest of all of the supermarkets in Scotland. Although I do not wish to simplify the financial accounts of those big supermarkets, I believe that those figures show that they can offer lower fuel prices and continue to make profits—they just need the will to do so.

Many of my constituents travel to Govan or Linwood to fuel up at Asda, or to the Jet garage in Renfrew, because those garages are so much cheaper, and many also decide to do their weekly shop while they are outside Inverclyde. That highlights how cheaper fuel prices also translate into customer loyalty and decisions on where to buy groceries. Who knows: if the Tesco and Morrisons stores in my constituency reduced their fuel prices to make them more competitive, they might actually have more customer loyalty when it comes to grocery shopping.

I highlight the experiences of two of my constituents. A lady who has received a terminal cancer diagnosis contacted me recently about the cost of fuel. She is filling up outside Inverclyde when she attends specialist appointments in Glasgow. She wants to remain independent and travel to and from appointments herself. Furthermore, with her condition, it makes sense for her, where possible, to travel in isolation, as Covid-19 is still here. She went on to tell me about her friend, who is in a similar situation but has already cancelled her appointments as she cannot always afford to put fuel in her car.

How can it be right that cancer patients are cancelling appointments because they cannot afford the rip-off petrol prices that Tesco,

Morrisons and BP are charging in Inverclyde? The stock answer—that they are being competitive locally—did not wash with people before, and it is viewed with even more disdain with every single passing day. Those companies have the power to help those two women, and many other people locally. They can keep people fuelling up in Inverclyde, rather than folk going 15 miles up the road to put fuel in their cars.

I have previously raised the issue of how social care workers and social workers rely on their own transport to visit people in their homes, and how rising fuel costs are eating into their already squeezed incomes. That is why I am calling on fuel retailers in Inverclyde to cut their forecourt prices immediately. Tesco says that “Every little helps”, and its current Christmas campaign says that it will “stand for joy” this Christmas. Meanwhile, customers can apparently find “More ways to save with Morrisons.” Why, then, will those companies not stop ripping off Inverclyde, and not lower their pump prices in my constituency?

I use the duck test: if it acts like a cartel, talks like a cartel and rips off my constituents like a cartel, I think that that says it all.

17:31

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank Stuart McMillan for his fervent efforts to stand up for his constituents. I share the ethos behind a huge amount of what he had to say today in relation to the prices of petrol in our shared local area. I should declare an interest, not only as a diesel driver but as someone who fills up his car in Greenock quite regularly. In fact, Stuart McMillan makes a very good point—it is cheaper and easier for me to fill up my car in Edinburgh before I drive back to Greenock, and in doing so, I spend more money in that economic area than I do when I get back home. He makes a perfectly valid point in that regard.

I have done some research for the debate, and I will share feedback from some of the retailers that Stuart McMillan talked about. It is important to give them their say, so I will do so; that is not to say that I will not give them some criticism while I am at it.

It is up to individual retailers, knowing the market as it is, to set prices, based on a host of factors. Back in May this year, the then Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—I am sure that there have been a couple of them since then, but nonetheless—asked the chief executive of the Competition and Markets Authority to conduct an urgent review of the fuel market. Some of the findings that will come out of that review will be welcome, whereas some of the

initial findings from the CMA have been more perplexing. It found that the wholesale price of petrol and diesel versus the retail prices had not actually contributed very much to the overall rise in prices; the so-called “retailer spread” was marginal. Indeed, over the years, we have heard many complaints that there is no money to be made in petrol, but that is clearly not the case in Inverclyde.

The CMA also reached the unusual conclusion that it believes that the supply of retail fuel—the differential in prices between rural and urban areas, for example—is relatively competitive, and that variations in the price of fuel, including pricing disparities, simply reflect the higher transportation costs and the lower volumes of petrol being sold: that is, supply and demand. I am not sure that I buy that entirely, but I hope that that piece of work continues and that some good comes out of it.

Of course, it is always very welcome when the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes his statement and there is any freeze in or cut to fuel duty; I think that consumers largely welcome that. The spring statement this year included a 5p cut to fuel duty across all rates, although I am not aware of any plans to change the rate of VAT on fuel. Nonetheless, it is clear from the most recent evidence that I have that things are not good. Let us look at some comparisons, starting with Tesco. To be fair to Morrisons and Tesco, they both responded to me when I asked for comment on today’s debate, whereas none of the other supermarkets did—if they have now done so, they are too late.

Tesco said to me that its policy is

“to be competitive on price locally”.

I think that we need to be very careful about what that actually means. Tesco says that it means that

“there can be a small price variance”

between two petrol stations when compared,

“if one is outside this local area.”

That concept of local price competitiveness is one that will crop up. Morrisons said exactly the same.

Stuart McMillan: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: Yes, if I can get my time back.

Stuart McMillan: I think that we would all accept that small price variations can happen across any particular market. However, when price variations can range between 5p and 10p per litre with the same company, albeit in different local authority areas, that is clearly not a small differentiation.

Jamie Greene: Stuart McMillan is absolutely right. In fact, Tesco is a little bit misleading in

saying that there can be “a small price variance” in its formal comment. I would like Tesco to listen carefully to the debate, because this difference is not small. Today, petrol in Kilbirnie’s Tesco costs 157.9p a litre. I do not begrudge the great people of North Ayrshire getting cheap petrol, but in Greenock a litre costs 172.9p.

The same goes for Morrisons, which said to me that it operates

“a local pricing policy on fuel and we aim to be competitive in each area we operate.”

That may mean that, in some cases, Morrisons is cheaper than Tesco in the competitive market in that localised area, but it does not explain in any way, shape or form the difference in prices between towns. Morrisons in Greenock was charging 172.9p a litre for petrol today, but Morrisons in Kilwinning was charging 161.9p a litre. That is a difference of more than 10p and the variance can be up to 20p.

We do not have a lot of time so I cannot go into the detail that I wanted to, but it is very clear that no one has offered any explanation. None of the retailers that responded to me, which I thank for responding, offered up the rationale behind those huge price disparities between one local area and another. North Ayrshire and Inverclyde are very close to each other. There is no good reason why the prices should be so hugely variable.

I conclude with the plight for island communities. The price of diesel on Arran today is nearly £2 and the price of petrol is in the high £1.70s. There are many issues around getting the supply of petrol to Arran. Cumbrae does not even have a petrol station; people have to get the ferry to the nearest petrol station. It is utterly bonkers.

We can criticise all Governments for not doing enough, but what we could do with seeing on our islands is more charging points for electric vehicles. We are absolutely failing both Arran and Cumbrae in the debate if we do not highlight that there are very few electric charging points in our island communities and that the charging point infrastructure is extremely poor. If we want to get people out of their diesel and petrol cars, surely we have to provide the infrastructure that is required to make that move to greener modes of travel.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Greene. It is always worth giving additional time for a plea for island communities.

17:37

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Stuart McMillan for bringing the debate to the chamber and acknowledge his work on the issue.

The cost of living crisis and, in particular, the rising cost of energy is having a real impact on working people. There is no doubt that the rising cost of filling up a car is impacting on households across the country, but few more so than those living in the towns and villages of Inverclyde. They are paying, on average, the highest fuel costs in Scotland.

The petrol map website that Stuart McMillan referenced earlier tells us that, today, the average price of petrol in Greenock sits at nearly 175p per litre, which is almost 10p higher than the UK average last week and 22p more than in a petrol station in Kilmarnock. That might not seem a lot for 1 litre, but, over time, it adds up to significant extra costs for local residents.

There are clearly global factors causing the increase in fuel prices, particularly the war in Ukraine, which will continue to result in relatively higher fuel prices for people around the globe. However, it is clear that there are substantial price differences within the country, too.

Of course, this debate is taking place during the 27th conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—COP27—and we must not forget the action that we need to take to tackle the climate emergency, which has been referenced in the motion. However, as I have said before in the chamber, in the context of the workplace parking levy debate, owning a car is not a luxury for many of our constituents; it is a necessity. Stuart McMillan made some really important points in that regard. There simply is not the integrated, affordable, accessible and reliable public transport that people need to get to and from their work and for other essential travel. Put simply, for many people in Inverclyde as well as other parts of Scotland, there is no public transport alternative to the car.

We must also recognise that we cannot wish for people to transition to electric vehicles. They are cheaper to run, but the initial costs are too high for many people on middle and modest incomes, and the electric vehicle infrastructure is currently not adequate. It is clear that there are issues there that we need to address.

As Stuart McMillan has said, in the here and now, petrol station operators could and should commit to bringing local petrol prices in line with those in neighbouring local areas. People in Inverclyde should not be faced with localised rip-off fuel costs.

Like Stuart McMillan, I welcome the Competition and Markets Authority's investigation. I also think that we need greater transparency on how operators decide their pricing and that we need to ensure that people across Scotland can get

access to online fuel price checkers and are encouraged to do so so that they can get the best possible deals and are aware of exploitative pricing policies. We cannot take it for granted that people are aware of those.

People face higher fuel prices on top of rising home energy costs, rising costs of the weekly shop and now, for many, rising mortgage costs. We need both Governments to deliver real help to support people with the cost of living crisis.

The Labour Party will continue to put forward credible solutions for how to do that. That is why we continue to call for a proper and meaningful windfall tax on oil and gas companies. That would force energy companies such as Shell, which recently posted an eye-watering profit of £8.2 billion in the past quarter, to pay their fair share. The inaction on that means that billions of pounds of taxpayers' money are going back into the pockets of oil and gas giants. That must change if people in Inverclyde and across Scotland are to get help with fuel costs and the cost of living, and a fairer deal from oil and gas companies.

17:42

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To be transparent, I should probably say that, in a former life, I was the manager of a petrol station. Once I had the bairn, I went to work for Tesco in a petrol station. I still have some shares with Tesco.

I congratulate my colleague Stuart McMillan on securing this timely debate, and I agree that his constituents in Greenock and Inverclyde must not be disproportionately impacted by forecourt prices. However, I do not quite agree that that is entirely down to the forecourt owners. Some of the blame must lie with the UK Government's lack of action on combating skyrocketing fuel prices combined with the abysmal action that it has taken to combat the cost crisis. That is scandalous. While the Scottish Government continues to take all the action that it can within its powers and the financial constraints in which it operates, we need more action from the UK Government.

The steps that would help include a cut in the rate of VAT and a reduction in fuel duty. I will join Stuart McMillan if he writes to the chancellor with those urgent requests, if he wants me to.

Some folk do not realise that the current fuel duty is 57.95p per litre. Although a 5p cut is welcome, we are still paying fuel duty of 57.95p per litre and, on top of that, there is 20 per cent VAT. That pushes up the consumer price of fuel by offsetting tax to increase the wholesale profit. The UK Government holds the levers to change that, but it has not done so yet.

As a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, I of course support a move away from fossil fuels to greener alternatives. However, I acknowledge that getting a hybrid or electric car is not an option for aabodie. Folk still rely on their petrol and diesel cars to get to and from work, to see their family, to get their shopping, to carry out their caring responsibilities, and for a whole raft of other reasons. Diesel and petrol vehicles are still essential, and folk need to be supported and not penalised for using them.

How can tangible and urgent support be implemented to bring down fuel costs and, indeed, other soaring costs? We must extend the windfall tax and increase the percentage of tax, but, crucially, we must also address the loophole that undermines the levy by enabling companies to pay the bare minimum by offsetting profits to investments.

On Thursday last week, it was reported that the UK Government is currently considering an extension to the UK windfall tax, from the current rate of 25 per cent to 30 per cent, until 2028. It is understood that that could raise around £40 billion of additional UK Government revenue over a five-year period, with the possibility of the scheme being expanded to cover electricity generation firms. That is not just a good suggestion; it is crucial and a no-brainer.

Fundamentally, as the Tory-made cost of living crisis ravages households across the country, the UK Government must look at ways of supporting people financially and should not construct more barriers and take money out of their pockets. The UK Government holds the levers to address many of the issues that we are debating. It could help the most vulnerable, including my constituents of Aberdeen Donside, and it could bring real change, yet we are seeing little action—only a talking shop—from UK ministers.

In Scotland, the Scottish National Party Government is taking the steps that it can to help the affected families, but it should not have to mitigate the damaging Tory austerity, nor should its efforts in tackling poverty be dragged backwards. With the full powers of independence, the Scottish Government could get on with the job of supporting Scottish folk through tough times, without the need to continually clean up after the Tories and their dangerous attempts to turn their backs on the most vulnerable folk by refusing to deal properly with the cost of living crisis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Dunbar—although I think that you might have strayed a little, at times, from the topic of the debate.

17:46

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Following Jackie Dunbar’s revelation about her previous life in a petrol station, I look forward to future stories of who she met on the forecourts.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate and am grateful to Stuart McMillan for securing cross-party support to bring to the chamber such an important issue. It has been increasing in public awareness and concern for some time, and has been raised by constituents, businesses and community organisations across Inverclyde, as we have heard.

Inverclyde Council has been vocal about and critical of the great disparity in petrol prices between Inverclyde and other areas of Scotland, since the issue first arose. I have had a conversation with my colleague Councillor Martin McCluskey, who represents Gourock and has been working to shine a light on this important issue, which affects not just his constituents in Gourock, at the western end of the area, but all people across Inverclyde. His efforts have included writing, as many of us have done, to the Competition and Markets Authority about that proposed road fuel market study.

However, he and others have suggested that there has to be a more robust analysis of the issue at local level. In correspondence with the CMA, he has urged it to expand its investigation beyond the rural-urban divide of petrol prices, by pointing out that Inverclyde does not fall neatly into the category of being exclusively rural or exclusively urban, and to consider Inverclyde on its own merits as a potential case study, because the area has been at the sharp end of higher fuel prices for years and, as I have said, does not neatly fit within some of the criteria. I echo those calls again and ask the Government to urge the CMA to act in that way.

The current situation is unfair and unsustainable. There is no valid justification as to why people in Inverclyde have to pay significantly more to fuel their cars than people across the rest of Scotland, including their near neighbours in places such as Renfrewshire.

As we have heard and understand, international pressures affect fuel prices, but that does not explain why prices have risen more quickly and have remained higher at forecourts across Inverclyde. I, too, have had the sort of response from the supermarkets that Jamie Greene has mentioned, about local price comparison and competitiveness, and, to be honest, it does not cut the mustard in explaining exactly what is going on.

It makes no sense that someone from Greenock or Port Glasgow has to drive 10 or 15 miles into

Renfrewshire so that they can fuel up their cars for significantly less in Bishopton, Erskine or Paisley. Just the other day, I had a conversation with my office manager, who lives in Port Glasgow and works in Paisley. She tries to ensure that she fills up the car only when she comes to work, having left the Inverclyde boundary.

In the summer, the average price of petrol was £1.85 per litre in Inverclyde, compared with £1.77 per litre in Renfrewshire and £1.74 per litre in East Renfrewshire. That is almost the equivalent of a £5 tax every time someone fills their car with petrol in Inverclyde. Although it is encouraging that recent data has shown that a litre of petrol now costs, on average, £1.65, which is 24p less than the peak price in August, it is clear that prices in Inverclyde are still far too high, and higher than anywhere else in Scotland, with fuel costing 6p more per litre.

We must ask ourselves how it can be justified that people who fuel up in Inverclyde are faced with the biggest bills in the country while—as we have heard—companies such as BP report eye-watering, and frankly immoral, profits, with BP reporting a profit of £7 billion for the quarter between April and June. I also agree with what Stuart McMillan has said about the profits of supermarkets and their duty to act in this space.

Faced with growing energy bills, rising food prices and stagnant wages, people in Inverclyde should not also be faced with an extra fuel tax for filling up their car at the forecourt that is closest to their home. In the midst of the cost of living crisis, multinational companies should be doing whatever they can to support people, not ripping them off based on where they live. The postcode lottery for fuel costs is simply ridiculous.

It is important to state that the debate, and the entire argument, is not about party politics—it must be about the people of Inverclyde. It is incumbent on us all, therefore, as Inverclyde's elected representatives, to work together to get to the bottom of why these fuel prices are so high, bring about action that will lead to a reduction in fuel prices and deliver a fair deal for Inverclyde.

17:51

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): I commend Stuart McMillan for bringing the debate, which I welcome, to Parliament. Fuel costs are a critical issue and it is right that we spend time in Parliament debating the impacts that they are having on thousands of individuals, families, businesses and communities in Inverclyde and, as we have heard, in many other parts of Scotland.

I also commend Stuart McMillan for his #fairfuel watch campaign, which has sought to reduce

inequalities in the market and increase the transparency of the fuel prices that his constituents face. In that context, I join colleagues in welcoming the Competition and Markets Authority's decision to undertake a market study on the road fuel market in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government has formally indicated its support for that review and I assure colleagues that we have asked to be kept informed on matters relating to Scottish interests in particular. I also confirm that the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland officials have been in touch with the CMA to offer their services where required.

The Competition and Markets Authority's initial findings, which were published in July, were that the main causes of the rising price of fuel include increased crude oil prices, the worsening pound-to-dollar exchange rate and an increase in the margin between wholesale and retailers.

Stuart McMillan: I have read the document that contains the CMA's initial findings and I would highlight one point to the CMA. If those aspects were accurate, the petrol prices across all fuel courts would be similar to the prices in Inverclyde, rather than Inverclyde being an outlier where fuel is far more expensive than it is in other parts of Scotland and people are being ripped off.

Tom Arthur: The member makes a powerful point with regard to the variation in the retail spread. I very much hope that that will be recognised as part of the CMA's consideration of the matter.

We know that we have to end our society's reliance on fossil fuels in order to secure our future, and the Scottish Government is already supporting the just transition that is needed from the production of oil and gas to renewable resources. However, until we get there, we need to consider that there is currently a dichotomy between the value of production in Scotland's economy and the price that we pay at the fuel pumps for heating fuels and for goods and services that are dependent on being shipped and transported across Scotland.

The current situation is entirely unfair for people both in Inverclyde and across Scotland. It has, unfortunately, been exacerbated by political decisions, and particularly those that have had a material impact on the depreciation of the pound against the dollar—namely, Brexit and the recent volatility that has followed in the wake of the mini-budget.

Notwithstanding that backdrop, however, the initial findings of the Competition and Markets Authority are welcome, and we will particularly welcome it if its work leads eventually to a fairer outcome for Scottish interests. It has found that

the retail market seems to be competitive, although it acknowledges that the gap between retail and wholesale prices has been volatile. The authority states that it will investigate the retail market further, including the issue of whether disparities between local areas are justified.

As a key issue for the investigation, the Scottish Government has raised with the Competition and Markets Authority the fact that pricing is inconsistent between urban and rural areas and in particular areas of Scotland such as Inverclyde. The authority has acknowledged that the reasons for local variations in fuel prices are among the issues that it is considering. The market study will also investigate the relationship between the wholesale and retail prices of fuel, and it will look at the role of supermarkets in the retail fuel market.

We understand that the Competition and Markets Authority will publish a report shortly to update its initial findings, but the final conclusion of the study and recommendations for the UK Government will not be published until next year. Although I acknowledge that the authority needs to be allowed to do its work, people simply cannot wait for that length of time over a winter with huge cost pressures on household finances. We expect the UK Government to take appropriate actions to implement the recommendations of the market study once it is published. However, that should not preclude the UK Government from taking action now to protect households and businesses from the impact of high fuel prices.

As Jackie Dunbar highlighted, the UK Government holds the powers that can directly influence road fuel costs, including those over VAT, the taxation of windfall profits and the regulation of the energy market. As at 3 November, 49 per cent of the cost of petrol per litre at the pumps was made up of fuel duty and VAT. It should be noted that the main policy lever to disincentivise car use—fuel duty—is also reserved to the UK Government. Despite approaches from the Scottish ministers, no meaningful dialogue on that issue has been forthcoming.

As part of its net zero review, the UK Government has acknowledged that, as we transition away from fossil fuels and the taxes that are based on them, structural changes to our tax system will be required. Despite our seeking engagement at ministerial and official level on that issue, the UK Government has yet to give the devolved nations clarity on whether—and, if so, when—it plans to replace motoring taxes.

The Scottish Government welcomed the temporary 5p reduction in fuel duty when it was announced earlier this year, but it feels like a

missed opportunity to target support at increasing incomes rather than cutting costs.

We have been clear in our communication with the UK Government that any new support should be funded by an enhanced windfall tax to target the excess profits that are being made in the energy sector, rather than by passing all the cost to households through even higher borrowing.

Our programme for government sets out the Scottish Government's immediate response to the cost of living crisis as well as outlining our ambition to create a better future in the longer term. Within a limited budget and the restrictions of devolution, we have provided significant support for families and the most vulnerable, which will also indirectly support communities and local businesses. By April 2023, we will have invested around £3 billion in a range of measures for households to support energy bills, childcare, health, social security and travel.

For businesses, our package of rates relief is worth more than £800 million, and we have established a joint task force with business, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, agencies and local authorities to consider the differing impacts of regulation on businesses and extending energy advice to businesses. We continue to do all that we can to ensure that people, communities and businesses are given as much support as possible to deal with the rising cost of living.

I acknowledge that, as members have touched on, it might seem incongruous that we are debating the subject during COP27 and arguing for fairer treatment of people in Inverclyde and elsewhere in Scotland in relation to fuel prices for vehicle use. However, this debate highlights why we need things to be different in the future. The recent rises in the cost of motoring underline the unfairness of the current, regressive motoring tax regime.

The Scottish Government wants a fair and progressive future transport tax system that reduces unnecessary journeys, raises revenues to fund policies to support a shift to more sustainable travel, and better incentivises the transition to zero-emission vehicles for those who need them.

Until such times as the relevant powers are exercised by this Parliament, we will continue to urge the UK Government to use the levers at its disposal to address the gaps in support for the people and businesses of Scotland. In the meantime, we are doing everything that we can with the powers that we have to grow and transform Scotland's economy in order to deliver a fairer, greener country for people in Inverclyde and across Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: On reviewing the text of the motion, I note that I might have

done a disservice to Jackie Dunbar earlier, for which I apologise.

Meeting closed at 18:00.

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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