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Wednesday 3 May 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 3 May 2023

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

Portfolio Question Time

Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions on the wellbeing economy, fair work and energy. As ever, I invite members who wish to ask a supplementary to press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant questions and I ask for brevity in questions and responses.

Energy Skills Passport

1. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made on the energy skills passport for offshore energy workers. (S6O-02164)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): The energy skills passport project, for which we have committed nearly £5 million from the just transition fund, reached a key milestone at the end of 2022 in the development of a prototype that will be tested with workers and employees in the next phase.

I am pleased that trade unions have been engaging their workforces in the design of the passport solution, and unions are representing workers directly as part of the project review group for the passport.

The Scottish Government supports delivery of a skills passport that will work for the different offshore energy industry sectors, recognising the cross-sector skills of workers and supporting a fair and managed transition. The offshore industries, including wind, have also demonstrated clear support for a solution that works for all and promotes a fairer transition in offshore energy.

Mercedes Villalba: As the minister will know, the energy skills passport was due to launch in the first quarter of this year. We are now in May. The unexplained delays are reportedly due to opposition from the Global Wind Organisation—GWO—which is the offshore wind standards body. In the meantime, offshore workers continue to face barriers to transition.

Will the minister use her role and position to intervene and chair a crisis summit, which would include the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation, the GWO and the offshore trade unions—the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and Unite—to resolve that crisis, end the delay and give offshore energy workers the certainty that they need in order to transition?

Lorna Slater: I support Mercedes Villalba's call for the skills passport to be delivered in a timely fashion because we all want to support workers in a just transition.

Excellent progress is being made on that project. As I said in my first answer, the proof of concept and prototype of the skills passport was completed and signed off by union reps in December. We are progressing with a mapping exercise—mapping the alignment of standards—which is a big piece of work that will bring together in one place the standards from multiple offshore sectors. Currently, we are looking at the mapped equivalent of about 75 per cent of the core crew for an offshore installation, so that work is progressing well.

The project is moving into preparations for beta testing of the prototype, with the intention being to deliver the skills passport to end users in quarter 3 of this year.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Offshore wind was mentioned as a possible transition route for offshore energy workers. Ten years ago, the Government promised to deliver 28,000 jobs in offshore wind; by 2021, it had delivered just over 3,000. What action has the Government taken to examine the reasons why it has failed so badly, and to ensure that the promise of 28,000 jobs can be delivered?

Lorna Slater: We are all keen for the offshore energy sector to have a just transition away from oil and gas to renewable energy, in which Scotland has so much potential. The creation of the offshore skills passport is a key part of that process because it will, as it reduces the time and costs that are required for training, remove barriers so that workers can make the transfer between the sectors more simply and efficiently to allow the just transition.

The added benefit is that the passport tool will, when in use, give good visibility of potential career pathways and training needs, which relates to the desired goals in the sector to help businesses to plan their workforces and workforces to plan for the roles that they want.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Renewables is an important and growing sector, but some uncertainty remains for workers who have the desired skills because equivalent

certification can be expensive. What support is available to offshore workers who are looking to transfer their skills?

Lorna Slater: As I have just outlined, that is the whole purpose of the offshore skills passport, which means that various offshore sectors have agreed to align their standards. The passport will show the standards to which the worker can adhere in order for them to transition and move back and forth between different offshore energy sectors. That is exactly the purpose of the passport.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 has been withdrawn, so I call question 3.

Women in Entrepreneurship

3. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to the recommendations of the independent review into women in entrepreneurship in Scotland. (S6O-02166)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): We welcome the recommendations of “Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship”—Ana Stewart and Mark Logan’s review on supporting women in entrepreneurship. The challenge is clear: there remains an unacceptable gap in participation in entrepreneurship. The report offers a clear path to closing that gap and supporting women to achieve their business ambitions, by opening up economic opportunities for women and contributing to building a fairer and more prosperous wellbeing economy for Scotland.

We are assessing and prioritising the report’s proposals and preparing our response, which I hope to publish in due course.

Claire Baker: Thank you. The “Pathways” report was published in February, and it identified 31 ways to dramatically increase female participation. The then First Minister said that the Government would respond quickly to those recommendations, yet when the new First Minister spoke about his Government’s priorities, he did not mention the review at all. Although the cabinet secretary has indicated that we can expect a response soon, I would like to know when we can expect it and when the recommendations will be taken forward, including with regard to the need for a women’s business centre.

Neil Gray: I thank Claire Baker for that question and for her work on the committee and the cross-party group for women in enterprise. We have a huge economic opportunity before us, if we can close not just the gender pay gap and the gender employment gap but the gender gap that exists in

new enterprises being established in Scotland, which is pertinent to the question.

Of course, we will respond to the report as quickly as possible. We also have a commitment to the women’s business centre, so I am very excited about the opportunity for us, if we can close the gap and ensure that we are giving women the opportunity to get on in business.

Household Energy Costs

4. Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I welcome the minister to her new role.

To ask the Scottish Government what its latest engagement has been with the United Kingdom Government regarding financial pressures that households in Scotland are facing as a result of energy costs. (S6O-02167)

The Minister for Energy (Gillian Martin): The disproportionate impact of high energy prices on fuel-poor households across Scotland is something that I am raising as a matter of urgency with the United Kingdom Government. Although I am disappointed that earlier requests from Scottish ministers to meet the secretary of state were not answered, I aim to meet the Minister for Energy Consumers and Affordability soon to seek action from them on issues including support for those who have been most affected by the ending of the energy bills support scheme, and the introduction of a much-needed social tariff for energy consumers.

Jim Fairlie: I thank the minister for that answer. According to the Office for Budget Responsibility, the UK is expected to suffer the biggest fall in living standards since records began in 1950, with real household disposable income being expected to fall by 5.7 per cent over 2022-23 and 2023-24. Last week, I held an energy summit in Perth, at which experts from Citizens Advice Scotland, Home Energy Scotland, Scarf and Perth and Kinross Council shared information on and solutions for saving money on fuel bills and cost of living pressures.

What else can the Scottish Government do to press the UK Government to relieve the pressures that its economic mismanagement has introduced for far too many of my constituents?

Gillian Martin: I thank Jim Fairlie for his supplementary question, and I commend him for the work that he is doing to help his constituents.

As I said, we have called repeatedly for action from the UK Government—including ahead of the spring budget review, when a real difference could have been made—but it has failed to deliver. In addition to the meeting that I hope to have with the UK Minister for Energy Consumers and

Affordability, I will be progressing work that was delivered as a result of the Scottish Government's energy summit last year. I intend to give us and our partners in Scotland a stronger combined voice, which we will continue to use to challenge the UK Government on the need for more action to support those who are most in need.

I recommend that Mr Fairlie and all MSPs signpost any constituents who are having real difficulty paying their bills to Advice Direct Scotland, which is administering the Scottish Government's home heating support and whose offices I visited yesterday.

We have tripled our fuel insecurity fund, but as Mr Fairlie alludes to, the core cost that is affecting families needs to be tackled by the UK Government, which has the powers to make a real difference in that area.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Has the Scottish Government discussed the potential for a UK windfall tax—given the unprecedented energy profits that are being made—and the Scottish Government's plans for the energy company that it was proposing to establish? Will that be on the agenda with the UK minister, because we need to accelerate plans to invest in energy-efficient homes in Scotland in order to eradicate fuel poverty, to lower bills, to create jobs and to deliver on net zero. Would not that be a practical way to get going on that?

Gillian Martin: A lot practical things could be done by the United Kingdom Government a lot sooner than some of the things that Sarah Boyack mentioned. Given that we in the Scottish Government really have powers only with regard to helping people to make their homes more energy efficient, that is where we are directing a lot of our powers and funding.

As I mentioned, we have built on the commitment to double the fuel insecurity fund. Our winter heating payment replaces the Department for Work and Pensions' cold weather payment with a reliable annual £550 payment that is helping around 400,000 low-income individuals with their heating expenses.

Many of the powers that are required for a lot of the things that Sarah Boyack mentioned in relation to energy companies sit, at the moment, with the UK Government. Last week, I had a meeting with Andrew Bowie, who is the UK Minister for Nuclear and Networks at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, about some very small constitutional issues that might be able to help us to do a lot more in this area, but which need to be devolved to this Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Willie Rennie.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): In Scotland, 600,000 homes are in extreme fuel poverty—but last year only just more than 5,000 households were helped by the Government with the insulation programme. This year's warmer homes scheme will not even open again until October. Why is the Scottish National Party-Green Government so slow on insulating people's homes?

Gillian Martin: Our national fuel poverty scheme, warmer homes Scotland, is designed to help those who are living in or are at risk of fuel poverty. Unfortunately, in the past year or so, many people who were not in fuel poverty have been plunged into it—not because of the actions of the Scottish Government but because of increasing fuel costs and the increasing cost of people's energy bills. We are ploughing in money to mitigate somewhat the crisis, but if we had some real action on bringing down the cost of people's fuel in the first place, we would not be in this situation.

Tayside Aviation (Closure)

5. Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what impact it anticipates that the reported closure of Tayside Aviation will have on the financial sustainability of Dundee airport and associated Tay cities deal funding. (S6O-02168)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade (Richard Lochhead): I say at the outset that I am very concerned to hear of the job losses at Tayside Aviation. My thoughts are with the workers affected and their families.

The Scottish Government remains committed to providing Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd with sufficient support to maintain operations at all 11 of its airports, including Dundee. Scottish Government officials will discuss the implications for the Tay cities region deal with both local partners and the United Kingdom Government.

Michael Marra: That the closure of Tayside Aviation does not threaten the future of the airport is of vital importance to Dundee, and I thank the minister for his assurance. Of course, it will be cold comfort to the 22 people who have lost their jobs.

Will the minister update Parliament on what the Government is doing to support the aviation academy for Scotland project and the Tay cities region deal project? What actions has he taken? Most important today, what assurances can he give those people who have paid money as students and who have lost the future that was in front of them? Has he had discussions with the Royal Air Force about the crucial contract that was in place—or which should have been in place—

with the aviation academy? Will he meet me to discuss those really important issues?

Richard Lochhead: I would be happy to meet Michael Marra to discuss those issues. I will also certainly check out his point about the RAF.

On his other two more general questions, it is important to say that no Scottish Government funding went directly to Tayside Aviation in support of students. University students should have been contacted directly by their own universities. Scottish Government officials have been engaging with Middlesex University and the University of Central Lancashire, in particular, as delivery partners for the courses to understand what contingencies are in place to support those students who are most affected.

The wider aviation academy project, which is part of the local region deal, is a UK project of £8.1 million. Although the unfortunate business closure that we are talking about in Parliament today will certainly impact on the project's future development, we want to continue to work with regional partners on exploring alternative viable delivery options.

As Michael Marra confirmed in his own remarks, we can confirm that funding will not be lost to the region and that we will continue to do what we can to support the airport.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): At last week's First Minister's question time, I raised the issue that Michael Marra has just referred to about students, many of whom have paid large sums in fees up front for degree courses that were being partly delivered by Tayside Aviation. That is a huge financial issue for them, but the other question is how they can complete their degree courses without the provision of training local to their home base in Scotland. Does the minister have any suggestions as to what alternative provision might be made available to students caught in that situation?

Richard Lochhead: I recognise the member's interest in the issue. As I indicated in my previous answer, officials are in contact with the relevant universities to look at what alternative plans will be put in place and to discuss the wider implications of what has happened. I think that the best thing for me to do would be to speak to my colleagues and to drop a note to those local members who have an interest in the issue and its implications for the students concerned. We will provide an update as soon as we can.

Disabled People (Employment)

6. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its interim goals of reaching 50 per cent of disabled people in

employment by 2023 and 60 per cent in employment by 2030. (S6O-02169)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): The latest available Office for National Statistics annual population survey data indicates that, in the year from January to December 2022, the employment rate for disabled people in Scotland had increased to 50.7 per cent, from the previous year's figure of 49.6 per cent. That means that we have achieved one year early our first interim target of 50 per cent of disabled people being in employment, and we are currently on track to achieve the subsequent target of 60 per cent by 2030. The refreshed fair work action plan that was published last December sets out the further actions that we will take to meet our aim of halving the disability employment gap by 2038.

Stephanie Callaghan: ACS Clothing in my constituency has recognised that standard interview processes often exclude disabled people from securing jobs right at the outset, and the company's inclusive approach has helped earn it disability confident leader accreditation. What further action will the Scottish Government take to support an increase in the number of employers practising inclusive and accessible interview processes, with a view to more local employers recognising and benefiting from the talents that disabled people bring to our workplaces?

Neil Gray: I thank Stephanie Callaghan for her question and, indeed, for her work through the cross-party groups on autism and learning disability to support the improvement of disabled people's lives. I also congratulate ACS on the work that it is doing to create an environment in which disabled people can partake in and benefit from inclusive and accessible interviews.

The Scottish Government believes that a culture change is required for employers to have the competency and confidence to offer appropriate support to disabled people in order to access work. To date, we have invested close to £1 million in a public social partnership that is working to improve recruitment and retention rates for disabled people by developing and testing different types of support for employers. Through that partnership, ACS was supported to attain the accreditation that Stephanie Callaghan has referred to.

Last year, we commissioned a disabled people's organisation to deliver a programme of training and development on disability inclusion and, equally, to do so on a test-and-learn basis in two fair start Scotland contract areas. The programme includes development of accessible interviews.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Does the Government plan to produce a refreshed

employment action plan that will reduce the disability employment gap and address the challenges of the post-Covid labour market?

Neil Gray: I am certainly happy to consider that. We must recognise the impact that Covid has had on disabled people entering the employment market.

I am also happy to work with Jeremy Balfour and others to ensure that the United Kingdom Government is living up to its responsibilities in this area. I am old enough to remember the UK Government having a target to halve the disability employment gap. Sadly, that is no longer the case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Granton Waterfront

8. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the regeneration and development of Granton waterfront. (S6O-02171)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): The Scottish Government is represented on the Granton waterfront strategic partnership, which enables regular engagement with the City of Edinburgh Council and partners on the development and delivery of their plans for the regeneration of the Granton waterfront area. Through the partnership, we are able to discuss ways in which collaborative cross-portfolio support can be provided for the on-going development and delivery of the place-based vision for Granton. That support has included investment of more than £9 million in the early phases of the development, to help unlock sites and support development of the Western Villages demonstrator project.

Ben Macpherson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and for the funding that the Scottish Government has committed to and the engagement that it has taken part in so far.

As the regeneration of Granton waterfront has remarkable further potential to deliver on multiple wellbeing, economy and social justice policy objectives, I ask the Scottish Government to consider how it could further support that nationally significant development project in a holistic way. As part of that, I ask it to consider how a process could be developed to allow a multiyear package of Government funding to be secured in order to meet the multiple policy objectives and deliver new housing, facilities and opportunities for the benefit of north Edinburgh, visitors and our capital city as a whole.

Neil Gray: I thank Ben Macpherson for his diligence as the local MSP for Edinburgh Northern

and Leith and for bringing this important issue to the chamber. The Scottish Government is working with the Granton waterfront strategic partnership and providing support from the range of portfolios involved in delivering a place-based approach to the regeneration of Granton. That includes support for and advice on the completion of robust business plans by the partnership to identify the funding that will be required from a range of sources, including private investment. I would, of course, be happy to meet Ben Macpherson to discuss his suggestion and any further ideas that he might have.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that the United Kingdom Government's levelling up funding of more than £16 million to restore and reopen the B-listed Granton gas holder is a welcome investment and can act as a catalyst to support the regeneration and redevelopment of Granton and the whole city waterfront. What work is the cabinet secretary doing to help with the next set of levelling up funding projects and make sure that every part of Scotland, especially Edinburgh's waterfront, realises that potential?

Neil Gray: Of course I welcome that funding. Miles Briggs would, of course, expect me to challenge the levelling up fund on the basis that it has not been as targeted as I think that it could be, nor has it matched the levels of expenditure of the predecessor funding that came through our membership of the European Union. I will be looking to meet the UK Government to discuss the next phase of the levelling up fund, to challenge it to go further, to ensure that investment meets devolved priorities and to ensure that we are no longer cut out of the decision-making process.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on wellbeing economy, fair work and energy. Before we move to the next portfolio, there will be a brief pause to allow front-bench members to change places.

Finance and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is finance and parliamentary business. I invite members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question, and I again make the usual appeal for brevity in questions and responses.

Section 35 Order (Costs of Legal Challenge)

1. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much it has allocated from its budget to cover the costs of its challenge of the decision of the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Scotland to issue an order under section

35 of the Scotland Act 1998 in respect of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill. (S6O-02172)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): We consider that challenging the UK Government's use of section 35 is the only option for a Government that wants to uphold and defend the democratic will and devolved powers of this Parliament. At this stage, it would be entirely speculative to comment on what the costs of the challenge would be or who would meet them. Any costs that are incurred by the Scottish Government will be published in due course.

Annie Wells: Most of the Scottish public remain opposed to the GRR bill. The wider gender self-identification policy contributed to the downfall of Nicola Sturgeon when she housed a male double rapist in a women's prison. It is a deeply flawed policy, and many Scots supported the UK Government's blocking of the bill. It appears that the sole reason why the Scottish National Party Government is sticking with it is to pick a fight with the UK Government, alongside keeping the extremist Green Party happy.

Is it truly worth wasting hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money on something that is likely to be defeated in the courts and that most Scots, including one quarter of SNP voters, oppose?

Shona Robison: Let me remind Annie Wells that the bill was passed by an overwhelming majority of the Scottish Parliament, with support from members of all parties. The use of section 35 is an unprecedented challenge to the Scottish Parliament's ability to legislate on devolved matters and risks setting a dangerous constitutional precedent by allowing a veto on this Parliament's democratic decisions. It is absolutely important to have clarity on the interpretation and scope of the UK Government's section 35 power and its impact on devolution. Those matters and the use of the powers should be legally tested in the courts.

The mention of taxpayers' money is a bit ironic in a week when the head of the United Kingdom's Debt Management Office has said that the mini-budget cost the UK an eye-watering £74 billion, of which Scotland's share would be more than £6 billion. Of course, that was through a Government that was supported and enabled by Annie Wells and her colleagues.

I will not take any lessons from Annie Wells or the Tories about the use of taxpayers' money in the face of the eye-watering amount that was wasted by the UK Government.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Despite the UK

Government's claim to have concerns about the bill, it is my understanding that it has, as yet, refused to engage with the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament to attempt to resolve those concerns. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if the Conservatives have concerns about the costs of challenging the section 35 order, they could start to address them by pressing their colleagues at Westminster to actually engage with the Scottish Government on the bill, rather than undemocratically attempting to block it?

Shona Robison: That is correct. After the Secretary of State for Scotland made the section 35 order, I met him and proposed that our Governments work together to clarify and seek to address any specific concerns. He refused any further engagement and offered only three options: we could drop the bill; address his concerns in an amended bill, but with no indication of which areas the UK Government would want to be amended; or pursue legal action.

The legal challenge is not what we wanted to happen with the bill, after it was passed—as I said earlier—by an overwhelming majority of the Parliament, but we have been left with absolutely no choice in the matter. Of course, the UK Government could avoid those legal costs by revoking the section 35 order; we would then gladly resume dialogue with it on the issue.

Capital Budget (Impact of Infrastructure Project Delays)

2. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what financial assessment has been made of any impact on the capital budget of delays in delivering infrastructure projects. (S6O-02173)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government continuously reviews the impact that factors such as project delays, inflationary pressures and market conditions have on our capital programme in order to ensure that Scotland's money is being spent in the right places. That is done through the annual budget process, and periodically with our six-monthly reporting on the infrastructure investment plan.

The "Scottish Budget: 2023-24" set out over £6.3 billion of capital spending to support employment and the economy through our large-scale infrastructure plans to move us along the path to net zero carbon emissions and underpin the provision of quality public services.

Jackie Baillie: We know that the cost of infrastructure projects has risen, partly due to inflation, partly due to the availability of materials, and partly due to not having enough construction workers. That will lead to cost overruns and

delays. We are already seeing that with the national treatment centres and projects such as the replacement St Brendan's hospital on Barra, which was promised by Nicola Sturgeon in 2007 and has now been completely cancelled. Will the cabinet secretary commit to publishing a list of all capital projects, with revised costs and timelines, before the start of the summer recess?

Shona Robison: Jackie Baillie is quite right to point to all the pressures that are impacting on capital budgets. She mentioned inflation, labour costs and the cost of materials, all of which are absolutely factors. In addition, we have the combined effects of Covid, Brexit and the war in Ukraine, and the flat and falling capital grant allocation that Scotland has received from the United Kingdom Government. That is all putting pressure on our capital programme.

We will continue to work through the capital projects, many of which—as Jackie Baillie will understand—are at different stages. Many are well advanced and some are at an early stage. We will of course inform Parliament of any major changes to the capital programme.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of brief—I hope—supplementaries. The first is from John Mason.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned inflation. Can she say anything more about that? It seems that the UK, with 10.1 per cent inflation, has a higher rate of inflation than Italy, at 8.3 per cent; Germany, at 7.2 per cent; and France, at 5.9 per cent. What is different about the UK?

Shona Robison: John Mason makes an important point. One of the key differences is the issue of Brexit, which has exacerbated all the global factors. There are also the UK Government's economic policies, such as the mini-budget to which I referred earlier, which is costing the UK £74 billion. Those issues will impact on our budgets. Building materials were increasingly hard to source last year, and price inflation in the sector peaked at around 25 per cent last summer.

All those issues will impact on our capital budget, but we will ensure, through the difficult choices that we will inevitably have to make, that we prioritise our capital budget according to the clear priorities that have been set out. The prospectus that was launched by the First Minister reiterates what those priorities are.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In relation to Jackie Baillie's question, is the cabinet secretary aware of concerns that have been raised at the Finance and Public Administration Committee by former ministers and former civil servants that when it comes to financial decision

making, financial rules have sometimes been seen as "optional"? I ask that when she looks at infrastructure projects, that matter is also addressed so that we clearly see what the rules are supposed to be.

Shona Robison: I look forward to giving evidence, along with the permanent secretary, on matters relating to decision making for ministers and the advice that is given by the civil service.

I do not recognise some of the characterisation in Liz Smith's comments. In my experience as a minister for more than 15 years, decision making is very robust, not least because the advice that we commission and receive is the best advice available to ministers.

Does that mean that decisions are always correct in light of things that later occur? Of course any Government will face issues when decisions are made on the basis of the best available advice at the time but circumstances change thereafter. I look forward to getting into more of the detail of that at the committee's evidence session.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Last year, the Auditor General, talking about the late ferries, said that there had been

"A lack of transparent decision making, a lack of project oversight and no clear understanding of what significant sums of public money have achieved."

This year, the Government has admitted that the bosses were paid big bonuses that the Government had no clue about, and that the crew has been paid £1.6 million for ferries that cannot sail. Has the Government learned a single thing in the past year?

Shona Robison: Yes, we have, and ministers have apologised for the delay to the ferries and for the distress and difficulties that have been caused. The delivery of six new major vessels to serve Scotland's ferry network by 2026 is of course a key priority for the Government.

The issue of bonuses has been gone over in fine detail. I wrote to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on the latest issue. On remuneration packages, the new chair of Ferguson Marine has been very clear that, going forward, bonuses will not feature in those packages, but those legacy bonuses could unfortunately not be avoided, due to contractual issues.

I am happy to write to Willie Rennie with more detail on the issue of the payment of crew for non-sailing vessels. Transport Scotland continues to work closely with CalMac Ferries, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd and Ferguson's to align the recruitment of crew with vessel deployment plans. If the member wants more information on that, I

will make sure that I or the appropriate minister write to him.

Deposit Return Scheme (Costs of Delay)

3. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much it has allocated from its budget to cover any additional costs resulting from the delay to the deposit return scheme. (S6O-02174)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): Scotland's deposit return scheme is an industry-led scheme, in line with the principles of producer responsibility. The investments that have been made by businesses to date will be important for the success of the scheme when it launches on 1 March 2024. Accordingly, the Scottish Government has not allocated additional funding to cover industry costs due to a delay.

A wide range of businesses have welcomed the delay of Scotland's DRS, and the Scottish Government, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and Circularity Scotland are working intensely so that we are ready for the launch in March next year. However, that will only be achievable if the United Kingdom Government urgently issues an exclusion for the scheme from the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, giving businesses the certainty that they deserve and need.

Meghan Gallacher: That is a concerning answer from the minister. The Federation of Independent Retailers has called on the Scottish National Party to compensate retailers who have already signed contracts for reverse vending machines due to the recently announced delay. What is the Government doing to support those who have entered into expensive contracts for RVMs who now might not need to provide RVMs as a result of the changes to the detail of the scheme?

Joe FitzPatrick: Meghan Gallacher will be aware that the contracts to which she referred are a matter for the contract between Circularity Scotland and the producers. Members can be assured that only the largest producers are making those contributions. Retailers are now able to register, and smaller retailers in particular are able to apply for an exemption. However, many retailers are keen to be part of the scheme because it will attract footfall to their stores.

If Meghan Gallacher is concerned about further delay, I ask her to urge her colleagues at Westminster to ensure that the exclusion that we need to get the scheme up and running is in place as quickly as possible.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): A multinational company with a dubious

environmental record is the sole logistics partner for the deposit return scheme, which should cause concern about the potential to distort competition in the waste management sector. The final business regulatory impact assessment—released in late 2021—does not look at that, but we expect a new assessment to be released when the regulations are amended. Will the new assessment examine the logistics contract? If not, will the minister ask the Competition and Markets Authority to do so?

Joe FitzPatrick: It would be best if the minister who is responsible for the scheme contacted Meghan Gallacher about that matter; I will ensure that she is aware of the member's question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4 was not lodged.

Tax (Responsible and Ethical Collection Practices)

5. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support responsible and ethical tax collection practices. (S6O-02176)

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of ensuring that responsible and ethical tax collection practices are in place and the role of the tax collection agencies in that regard.

Robust governance arrangements are in place with HM Revenue and Customs and Revenue Scotland, which both have a statutory function to protect revenue against fraud and tax avoidance. Local authorities are responsible for the collection of council tax and non-domestic rates. The Scottish Government has empowered them to tackle avoidance loopholes and encourage them to share good practice on debt assistance and collection.

Richard Leonard: Paragraph 28 of the fair work agreement between Scottish ministers and civil service trade unions states:

"Scottish ministers are committed to publicly run, publicly delivered public services and are committed against the outsourcing of public services."

The outsourcing of tax collection is a test of that commitment.

Last year, a new contract was signed by HMRC with private debt collection agencies. Will the Scottish Government, which has a service-level agreement with HMRC, rule out the deployment of private debt collection agencies for the collection of Scottish income tax? Will the minister write into the agreement that income tax compliance in Scotland will be undertaken only by workers in the public sector, and does he accept that this is a

question of moral responsibility and ethical standards and not simply an operational matter?

Tom Arthur: I thank Mr Leonard for his supplementary question. He raises very significant points, and I know that he does so from a place of genuine moral and ethical concern. As he will appreciate, HMRC operates UK-wide, and, with regard to its debt collection practices in Scotland, it partakes in debt collection relating not only to the devolved aspects of Scottish income tax but to reserved taxes. One of those reserved taxes is national insurance, which could potentially be interlinked with debt pertaining to income tax.

Mr Leonard raised a lot of points. I will take them away and consider what further action can be taken, but I reiterate that HMRC operates UK-wide. Notwithstanding that, I will take the points away, and I will be happy to update him by correspondence in due course.

Budget (Third Sector Organisations)

6. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact assessment it has undertaken regarding any reductions to core funding allocations in its budget for third sector organisations. (S6O-02177)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): Scottish Government grant making is allocated across portfolios to various parts of the third sector to improve a wide range of outcomes. Some Scottish Government funding is issued through third sector intermediary organisations. Any assessments on funding levels will have been taken by individual policy areas.

Miles Briggs: I wrote to the former Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy over a month ago with regard to the future of Bridgend Farmhouse in Edinburgh, which has received Scottish Government investing in communities funding for the past four years.

On 15 February, the organisation received notification that it would not continue to receive that funding. It is a fantastic organisation, a host of more than three social enterprises and a place where the community can come together. Does the cabinet secretary agree that Bridgend Farmhouse no longer being able to operate would have a significant impact in the south of the city, and will she agree to visit Bridgend Farmhouse and review the cut to core funding?

Shona Robison: First, I say to Miles Briggs that I will look out that correspondence—it is not something that I am familiar with, but I will have a look for it.

Clearly, these are difficult decisions. Grant funding to third sector organisations is always

oversubscribed—it is the same for social enterprise funding. Therefore, that grant funding is prioritised in a way that aligns with the clear priorities that the Government has set out on reducing poverty, net zero ambitions and sustainable public services, so it is not possible to fund every organisation that applies for funding.

However, as I said at the beginning of my response, I am happy to have a look at the correspondence about Bridgend Farmhouse, and I will write back to Miles Briggs once I have managed to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 was not lodged and question 8 has been withdrawn, so that concludes portfolio questions on finance and parliamentary business. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business.

Governing Party (Transparency)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08764, in the name of Douglas Ross, on the transparency of Scotland's governing party. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

14:42

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I hope that, with the early start, we have a bit more flexibility in some of the timings this afternoon, because I am keen that this is a proper debate and that we interact with each other. I am looking forward to interventions from members on the Government benches, who I am sure have a lot to say on this topic, because transparency at the heart of Government and indeed at the heart of the governing party is crucial. It is important to each and every one of us.

However, the fact is that we should not need this debate to get that transparency from the First Minister or from the Scottish Government, because I made a very open offer just a couple of weeks ago for the First Minister to come to the chamber and give a statement to the Parliament on the issues engulfing his party—the party of government here in Scotland. It was a genuine offer at First Minister's question time for the First Minister to put on record his point of view and his responses to crucial questions that remain unanswered weeks into this sorry saga.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The member says that he is genuine—could he expand on that by telling us the membership of the Conservative Party in Scotland? Is it 6,500, which is the number of people who voted in the last leadership election?

Douglas Ross: That is the most predictable intervention of the afternoon, which will probably be repeated by several others—I thought that such a question might have come from the minister, but maybe he has got it later on in his script.

The point is that the Scottish Conservatives announce their membership numbers during a leadership election. That has always been how we have approached this issue. [*Interruption.*] The message from Scottish National Party members, and the noise from members on the front benches, seems to be that the Scottish Conservatives and other parties in Scotland should change their approach because the nationalists lied to the press and to the public across Scotland about the party's membership numbers. I will take no lectures from the SNP, which wants to see other parties change their approach in order to cover up for the lies that those in the SNP told about its

membership numbers. That is a serious allegation—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, please resume your seat. At this stage in the debate, it might be instructive if I remind members that there are certain expectations about language in the chamber. We know that the chair will not tolerate an accusation that, for example, a fellow member has been deliberately untruthful. I remind members of a statement that was made by the previous Presiding Officer, the late Sir Alex Ferguson, who reminded members that the words

“lies’, ‘lying’ or ‘liar’ should not be used in the chamber in relation to other members—and preferably not at all.” — [*Official Report*, 7 May 2009, c 17290.]

Douglas Ross: We clarified that through the Presiding Officer's office this morning. I am not saying that any individual member in the Parliament lied; I am saying that, clearly, there were actions by the SNP on misleading claims about its membership numbers that led to the resignation of the SNP's head of media and the resignation of the former chief executive of the SNP. Just days before he was arrested by the police, he resigned from the role that he had held for years because of the SNP's conduct on its membership numbers. That is why I am saying that I will take no lectures from the SNP on the issue.

The fact is that there remain serious questions to be answered. The First Minister seems quite happy to answer the questions outside the chamber—he always stops to speak to the press to give his views on a host of issues. As an Opposition leader, I want to see that continue, because he has only been beaten by Colin Beattie in his attempts to provide no more press stories but subsequently answering the press and providing us with plenty of nuggets. If the First Minister is happy to give those answers to the press just a few metres from the chamber, why is he not happy to come here to answer those questions? Not only is he unwilling to answer the questions in the chamber, he is unwilling even to attend this debate to respond.

There are so many questions, Deputy Presiding Officer. For example, how were the supposedly ring-fenced indyref2 funds that were raised through yes.scot and ref.scot spent? How was that money spent? Why did the party's former chief executive Peter Murrell give the SNP a six figure loan, and when will that loan be repaid? Was the loan a consideration in any decision not to suspend Peter Murrell, Colin Beattie or, potentially, any other MSP currently serving in the Parliament who may find themselves arrested by the police? Why was the unused motorhome kept at the home of the former First Minister's mother-in-law? Why were members of the SNP's finance

and audit committee refused information about the party's accounts?

We have several senior members of the Government and the SNP in the chamber for this debate. That is a flavour of some of the questions that we would like to put to the First Minister. In his absence, can any SNP MSP answer those questions?

Silence. We have the Deputy First Minister of the Government and the deputy leader of the party in Scotland in the chamber, but there are no answers to very basic questions. These are basic questions that are being asked by our constituents and members of the public across the country.

It is important that we have transparency at the heart of Government and that we have a governing party that is willing to answer those questions. Sadly, we do not. In the time that I have left, I want to look at the amendments that will be moved by the parliamentary business manager for the Scottish Government. Incredibly, the amendment deletes massive amounts of the motion that I lodged, including some of the key lines.

George Adam wants SNP MSPs to vote for an amendment that deletes a statement allowing them to agree that the scandal engulfing the party of government in Scotland should be properly scrutinised and debated. Why would anyone not want the situation to be properly scrutinised and debated?

Mr Adam's amendment deletes the line that calls for

"a more transparent budget process".

Why would anyone not want that? It deletes a line saying that we should

"give arm's-length bodies control over information publication".

Why would we not want to give them more control over that? Further, it also deletes a line that calls on the Scottish Government to

"improve scrutiny of breaches of the ministerial code".

Why would any MSP representing the governing parties in Scotland vote for an amendment that takes out those key lines on transparency and openness?

Today marks 16 years since the SNP was elected to government. During that time, we have seen secrecy, spin and cover-ups at the heart of the Government. Today is an opportunity for SNP members to say that enough is enough, and that it has been happening for too long. They can do that by voting for the Scottish Conservative motion, by supporting the Labour amendment, which adds to the scrutiny that we seek and by voting down the shameful amendment from the Scottish

Government, which wants to delete much of the transparency that this Parliament and the people of Scotland deserve.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the First Minister, as leader of the governing party of Scotland, should make a statement to the chamber of the Scottish Parliament about the governance of the Scottish National Party (SNP); agrees that these are matters of public interest and should be properly scrutinised and debated in the national parliament; notes that the Scottish Government has lacked transparency and openness in its administration of government across Scotland; calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to end its pre-release access of statistics, deliver a more transparent budget process, give arm's-length bodies control over information publication, publish a transparency list of public sector officials who earn more than the First Minister, set swifter publication dates for ministerial expenses and transport dates and improve scrutiny of breaches of the ministerial code, and condemns the SNP for its lack of candour about its membership and governance, and for its abject failure to concentrate on the priorities of the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call George Adam, to speak to and move amendment S6M—

14:51

The Minister for Cabinet and Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Thank you, Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I have to read out my bit first.

I call George Adam, to speak to and move amendment S6M-08764.2.

George Adam: I was just so keen to get involved in this debate, Presiding Officer.

That was definitely a thing from Douglas Ross—I am not sure what it was and I am not sure what relevance much of it had to what we are talking about today. However, right from the start, let me tell him that transparency and scrutiny of the Government is important, and that is why those things are in our amendment.

I will say one thing to start with: on 1 April—many people might find that date ironic—Douglas Ross was in the great town of Paisley, doing one of his many jobs. In this case, he was being a football referee at an important game between St Mirren and Livingston. Mr Ross had a terrible game, as he failed to spot a stonewall penalty in the first four minutes—luckily, that was corrected by VAR. However—this is the relevant and interesting point, Presiding Officer—there was a crowd of 5,894 people attending. Many contemplated the suggestion that that may or may not be the membership of the Scottish Tory party, but we will never know, because the Conservatives will not publish that figure. They will

not be transparent and they will not practise what they are preaching here today.

Douglas Ross: Will the member take an intervention?

George Adam: No, we have heard enough from Mr Ross.

The absolute hypocrisy from the Conservatives is almost laughable. We have to admire someone who has the brass neck to complain about transparency when they lead the Scottish Conservatives. Mr Ross's political party illegally prorogued the United Kingdom Parliament to avoid debate and scrutiny and is the party of a Prime Minister who would agree to speak to the Scottish press only if he could hand pick the media and the questions. It is the party that packs the House of Lords with donors such as Scotland Office minister Lord Offord, who was appointed to the House of Lords for life and given a place on the Government payroll after giving the Tories £150,000, yet the Tories come to the Scottish Parliament and talk about our integrity.

The Conservatives have received hundreds of thousands of pounds from unincorporated associations that do not reveal the origin of their funding, yet they have questioned the integrity of others. We just cannot take the Tories seriously on this issue. They refuse to say how many members they have while criticising those that do. There is a word for a person who does that: hypocrite.

I am not going to stand here and claim that there are not issues in the SNP that need to be addressed, but I can stand here and say that they are being addressed.

Douglas Ross: Ah! Tell us about them!

George Adam: Mr Ross is having a lot of fun and games over there in the corner, shouting from the sidelines. It must be from his time as a referee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We cannot have two members standing at the same time. Mr Ross, by not taking your intervention requests, the minister indicated that he is probably not planning to take your intervention. Minister, please resume.

George Adam: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I have said that we are dealing with that. Within days of his election as leader, the First Minister announced an urgent review of internal party governance and, as our amendment makes clear, this Government places a great importance on openness and transparency. We are fully committed to meeting the standards of open Government that our public rightly expects of us. I will give just a few examples of that: ministerial engagements and travel are published monthly; we also aim to proactively publish minutes of Government meetings on our website, so that

people can see who their Government is meeting and what we are discussing, and understand how decisions are made. In addition, we are focused on making the necessary improvements in handling freedom of information requests, as set out in our published improvement plan, which was agreed with the Scottish Information Commissioner. At around 86 per cent, our performance on responding to requests within the set time is comparable with the wider public sector in Scotland, but it is important to note that we are now responding to significantly more requests for information—the number has risen by more than 50 per cent in the past three years. We also recently enhanced transparency to Parliament and the public on Scottish Government finances, including through the provision of more detailed outturn reporting and more detailed material to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, which all members of that committee have welcomed. In his closing statement here today, Mr Arthur will provide more detail on the steps that we have taken to improve engagement on budget.

I will come back to the issue of party membership. Much has been said, but it is not enough.

Douglas Ross: Will the minister give way on that point?

George Adam: We are not hearing what the Conservatives' membership numbers are; of the five parties that are represented in the chamber, only two—the SNP and the Scottish Greens—have published up-to-date figures of their party membership.

Douglas Ross: Will the minister give way on that point?

George Adam: I am quite happy if Douglas Ross wants to say the membership number now.

Douglas Ross: I am grateful that the minister has finally taken an intervention. Will he accept that his party lied about its figures, and that led to the resignation in this Parliament of the head of the party's media and then that of its chief executive? Will he apologise to the press and public for that?

George Adam: My goodness—I gave Douglas Ross the opportunity to build himself up into a frenzy, and that was a bit of a damp squib from him. That comes from the party of Boris Johnson and all the nonsense that is going on in Westminster.

Douglas Ross has refused to publish his party's membership numbers. He says that he has nothing to hide, yet he continues to hide it. In an interview with ITV Border, his defence was that the party publishes its membership figures only during a leadership election. Given Douglas Ross's

performance today and in recent weeks, I do not think that we will wait too long for those figures to be published.

I move amendment S6M-08764.2, to leave out from “believes” to end and insert:

“agrees that good governance and transparency are matters of the utmost importance; believes that democracy is best served when all political parties are transparent on their party membership and sources of income; recognises the improvements made to the transparency and openness of the Scottish budget process as a result of cooperation between the Scottish Government and parliamentary committees; welcomes the upcoming review of the Chief Executive Pay Framework and encourages all parties to clearly lay out their position on public sector pay policy ahead of the annual budget process; calls on all political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament to refuse and return any donations from unincorporated associations that do not publish their sources of funding in full; believes that all political parties should refuse to nominate their donors for any form of honour bestowed by the Crown, including membership of the House of Lords; recognises that the only parties represented in the Scottish Parliament to have published up-to-date membership numbers are the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party, and calls on the leaders of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Scottish Labour Party and Scottish Liberal Democrats, in the interests of democracy and transparency, to publish their membership numbers as a matter of urgency.”

14:58

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): With the recent revelations about its finances, the culture of secrecy, spin and cover-up at the heart of the SNP has been laid bare for all to see. I find it extraordinary that, when it is being investigated by Police Scotland, the SNP’s sole defence is to demand membership numbers from the Opposition. The investigation is serious and it is not about the SNP’s membership numbers. Because it is a live police inquiry, we cannot comment on the substance of the investigation, but suffice it to say that, if someone had told me 10 weeks ago that I would witness the resignation of the First Minister; the arrest under caution of her husband, Peter Murrell, who is the SNP’s former chief executive; the arrest of Colin Beattie, the former SNP treasurer; and a blue forensic tent on the front lawn of Nicola Sturgeon’s home, I would have said that they were delusional. However, all those things happened.

It is a shameful episode in Scottish politics. People who believed in the SNP have been badly let down, but so have the people of Scotland. The governing party is mired in scandal, which is a complete distraction from focusing on the people’s priorities. We are now witnessing the arrogance of members of a party that has been in power for too long, so they think that they are untouchable and treat the Parliament and the public with contempt.

I know that many people will say that the party and the Government are two separate things, but

that is simply not true in this case. The culture that pervades the SNP as a party pervades the SNP-led Scottish Government, too. They are inextricably linked. That is no wonder when we consider that the two top positions were occupied by a husband-and-wife team.

I will illustrate that point by taking us back to the inquiry into the Scottish Government’s handling of harassment complaints—otherwise known as the Salmond inquiry. I start by reminding members of Nicola Sturgeon’s words:

“The inquiries will be able to request whatever material they want, and I undertake today that we will provide whatever material they request ... My commitment is that the Government and I will co-operate fully”.—[*Official Report*, 17 January 2019; c 14.]

What hollow words.

The SNP, in the guise of Nicola Sturgeon, John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon’s chief of staff, Liz Lloyd, blocked every attempt by the committee to get information. The situation dragged on for months, if not a full year, as they defied the will of the committee and of Parliament at every turn. Letters from the Parliament’s lawyers were in effect ignored, and it took the threat of a successful vote of no confidence in John Swinney to get the material released.

Evading scrutiny and accountability underpinned much of the SNP’s approach to the Salmond inquiry. The use of SNP emails and WhatsApp groups by Cabinet ministers, the former FM and special advisers was widespread to avoid formally recording ministerial discussions and decisions.

The dissembling, the dishonesty and the duplicitous behaviour on the part of Government was routine. Then there were the memory lapses—the inability to recall or remember from people who up to that point had had the sharpest of memories for details, it has to be said.

Then there was the incompetence and a new low—the leaking of material by the then Deputy First Minister and his special advisers to journalists who were writing a book about the inquiry, after the inquiry, which had not even been shared with the inquiry in the first place. Although that breached the ministerial code of conduct and the special advisers code of conduct, the then First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, chose to do nothing about it—such contempt for Parliament.

It is time for an overhaul of the Parliament’s ability to hold this Government to account. Scottish Labour has a plan for doing just that. Let us start by seeing fewer cabinet secretaries and ministers; let us see binding sanctions for breaches of the ministerial code; let us see more power for committees to compel witnesses and evidence; and let us see less tribalism from members who try to deny the evidence that is presented to

committees before their very eyes. Let us have a right of recall for MSPs who break the law, whoever they are.

The SNP is tarnishing the reputation of the Parliament and the Government. It is mired in scandal and it is divided, and its members are fighting like ferrets in a sack. The SNP is contemptuous of the Scottish people and has completely lost focus on the people's priorities. It is time that it was held to account, it is time for a Scottish election and it is most certainly time for change.

I move amendment S6M-08764.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that the culture of secrecy, spin and cover-up has no place in good government; considers that there is a need to strengthen the ability of the Parliament to hold the governing party to account, and so calls for a limit on the number of MSPs who can take up cabinet secretary or ministerial roles in government and the creation of binding sanctions for breaches of the Ministerial Code, and supports the introduction of parliamentary privilege for MSPs, the election of committee conveners by the whole Parliament, stronger powers for parliamentary committees to compel the provision of evidence and the appearance of witnesses, and a right of recall for MSPs who have been convicted of a crime or face serious sanction by the Scottish Parliament.”

15:03

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It has been a painful few weeks for the SNP—a party that has seemed impregnable for the past 16 years is now shambling, anarchic and quarrelling. I almost—almost—feel sorry for it, but we must all feel sorry for Mike Russell, the modest, self-effacing president of the SNP. At the most recent election, for four whole weeks, he was forced to live in a smelly old horse-box. If only he had known, poor president Mike could have been chauffeured in that executive motorhome. I can almost see it; in fact, I cannot get the image out of my head—president Mike, thrust atop the luxury motorhome, draped over his chaise longue, dressed in his satin robe and addressing his adoring crowds at Dunoon pier. What a glorious sight that would have been but, like everyone else, he was kept in the dark, so we do need transparency.

The current troubles in the SNP have further undermined faith in the governing party's ability to look after the public finances. That is on top of the waste of millions of pounds of hard-earned public money: £50 million to save 1,500 jobs at Burntisland Fabrications; £586 million to create 2,000 jobs at Lochaber, which are nowhere to be seen; and £300 million to build two new ferries, which are over budget and overdue.

The SNP has been boosting its public image by wasting public money. All that waste is happening

when people are struggling to make ends meet; when people are desperate for a decent home; when the national health service is on its knees; when schools are struggling; and when the climate is in crisis. It is no wonder that people have had enough as the SNP Government spaffs their money up against the wall when the country and the people must count every penny.

However—I must get this off my chest—the Conservatives have got a nerve to talk about standards. No party has done more to damage faith in politics than the Conservatives. This is the party that gave us Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. With Boris Johnson, there were issues to do with parties during Covid, loans, the decor in the number 10 flat, personal protective equipment contracts for friends and the defence of friends who breached the rules. With Liz Truss, we had a reckless budget. That and the cavalier dismissal of the so-called blob cost billions, which ramped up the cost of mortgages and rents and the cost of living.

What about Douglas Ross? Some call him dithering Douglas. He could not even make up his mind about the blundering Boris Johnson and gormless Liz Truss. He condemned them one minute, then hailed them the next. We need change in politics, but it will not come from the Conservatives or the SNP.

We need change, such as Katy Clark's proposed member's bill for extending freedom of information powers, because being able to follow the money will give us greater understanding of how it is spent. We need to deal with the pre-release of statistics, so that the Government cannot spend hours and days manipulating the facts before statistics are published. We must have a recall system like the one at Westminster, but such a system evades the Scottish Parliament and our ability to throw out recalcitrant MSPs. We need to have all those powers in this Parliament so that we can get change.

We agree with the elements of the motion about the ministerial code and transparency, but I must say that the rest of the motion is utter tosh. The Scottish Parliament is not the SNP conference, nor is it the SNP national executive committee. Our job in this Parliament is to run the country; our job is not to run the SNP.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches will be of four minutes' length.

15:07

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It was only last Wednesday when the Parliament debated transparency, and we—all of us in that debate, including SNP members—agreed in

principle that the Parliament has a primary duty to the public to be as open and transparent as possible when accounting for public money. Ministers have such a duty too. Surely taxpayers have a right to know exactly what their money is being spent on and, just as important, why elected members in this place make certain choices. As politicians, we need to be held fully accountable for every single decision that we make, most especially when it comes to spending other people's money.

I completely understand that a police inquiry about current events inside the SNP is on-going and that it is not appropriate to comment on those recent events. However, as Douglas Ross rightly said, that should not overshadow the important issue of the lack of transparency inside the Government and inside Scotland's ruling party, because that is interlinked. The Parliament has a clear interest in establishing probity, so we will not shy away from asking important questions of the First Minister.

Auditors general round the world acknowledge that there are five principles of good governance: accountability, leadership, integrity, stewardship and transparency. Personally, I do not see how anyone could argue otherwise or seek to undermine those principles. However, that is exactly what we see in the SNP currently, and that is a matter of public interest.

Just yesterday, *The Times* reported on the Finance and Public Administration Committee's inquiry into the efficacy of Scottish Government decision making. It does not make good reading for the Scottish Government, not just because too much decision making has been seen by senior civil servants and former senior ministers to be "rushed, unclear and unstructured" but because some financial rules have, on occasion, been found to be optional.

That must be a concern for us all, yet the Scottish Government seems to be rubbishing the report, although the committee's inquiry is not yet concluded. That is just not acceptable.

As a member of that committee, I am very clear that all is not well when it comes to Government openness, transparency and accountability. It is true that Audit Scotland and the Scottish Fiscal Commission have welcomed efforts to improve transparency in the Scottish budget, but they have also warned strongly that that simply is not good enough. We have heard so much about the profligate waste of failed Scottish Government projects, which have cost in the region of £350 million. The committee has been told that we have to start thinking about serious reforms so that we get much better transparency.

The named person legislation, the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021, the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, gender recognition reform, the deposit return scheme and the highly protected marine areas programme—which we will debate later today—are all examples of Scottish Government failures when it comes to good governance.

On top of all that, and worst of all, we have the murky and disreputable goings-on inside the party of government. Not only are openness and transparency good practice for measuring best value for taxpayers' money, but they are essential if there is to be renewed trust between Government and the public. The loss of that trust currently is very serious, and it is particularly serious for this country. Therefore, I support the motion in the name of Douglas Ross.

15:11

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

There is certainly a lot in the motion and the amendments, so I will not try to cover everything in four minutes.

First, on the SNP accounts, I understand that a police investigation is under way, and we need to let that take its course. No one has been charged yet, and we have a system that says that a person is innocent until proven guilty, so it seems to be far too soon to be having statements or debates about that in Parliament.

The last published accounts of the SNP, which were for the year to 31 December 2021, show net assets of £610,000. They also report that the referendum appeal raised £740,000, of which £253,000 had been used. The balance in the referendum fund of £487,000 is therefore covered by the assets on the balance sheet.

On current membership of UK political parties, the House of Commons library makes it clear that parties do not need to publish numbers. However, it also shows that last September the Conservatives had 172,000 members. If we are generous and give the Scottish Tories 9 per cent of that figure, that means that they had some 16,000 members, although only 6,500 of them voted in 2020. In any case, they are way behind the SNP.

Labour was reported to have 432,000 members at December 2021; taking 9 per cent of that would give that party about 39,000 members in Scotland. However, the *Daily Record* reported that the figure was only 16,000—

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: No—I am afraid that I have only four minutes.

With 74,000 members, the SNP is clearly well ahead of both those parties. As a percentage of the relevant electorate, SNP membership is about 1.7 per cent, Labour is at 0.9 per cent and the Conservatives are at 0.4 per cent. It is pretty clear which party has the most members, is the most popular with the public and wins the most elections.

Transparency about budgets is a serious point: I am not quite clear what practical differences the Conservatives want. For example, both the SNP and the Greens have been open and clear that, if we want better public services, we need to consider raising taxes. By contrast, the Conservatives have called for lower taxes but simultaneously asked for extra spending on a range of areas. That is neither honest nor transparent—in fact, it is impossible. The Tories might set an example in transparency by saying where they would cut public services to match tax cuts.

When it comes to transparency in political parties, we could do no worse than look at the House of Lords. As members know, the SNP does not take seats there because the lords are unelected, which is an affront to democracy. Britain cannot be considered a true democracy as long as one half of its Parliament is appointed and not elected.

How do those people get appointed? Some may be there on merit but, for others, it seems that they just pay money to the Conservative Party. I understand that about £3 million is the going rate. We are told that 15 of the past 16 Conservative Party treasurers have been offered a seat in the House of Lords, having each donated more than £3 million to the party.

It is not only party treasurers; it has been reported that, since 2010, 22 of the Tories' main financial backers have been given peerages, having donated at least £54 million to the party. Other nominations have been blocked by the House of Lords Appointments Commission; it tried to block Peter Cruddas in 2020, but Boris Johnson overruled it and Peter Cruddas got his peerage.

OpenDemocracy and Brunel University London have said that the chances of

“so many ... Tory donors ... ending up in the ... Lords is equivalent to entering the National Lottery 12 times in a row—and winning the jackpot every time.”

To be clear, it is illegal to sell titles for money, but that rule has been enforced only once—in 1933.

I mention in passing that Labour seeks the right of recall for MSPs. We should not forget that, although Labour's Mike Watson had to resign after he got a 16-month sentence for trying to set fire to a hotel, he still sits as a Labour member in the

House of Lords. Maybe Labour should clean up its own act first.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Mason.

John Mason: In conclusion, politics can be a dirty business and no party is completely squeaky clean. However, if we are looking for a party that is heavily engaged in sleaze and underhand deals, which lacks transparency and which sells seats in the House of Lords, it is the Conservative Party.

15:16

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow John Mason, although I am not sure that the concept of squeaky clean parties will resonate with our constituents. This has already been a rambunctious debate, which was to be expected, but there are very important questions at its heart that Parliament needs to ask itself and that the people of Scotland need to ask themselves. It is about understanding the difference between political parties, the Scottish Government and the Parliament, and it is about where the Parliament's powers should lie in order for it to hold the Scottish Government to account.

It is right that any party, member or, indeed, citizen of Scotland should be interested in upholding the basic democratic principles that we have here and should look to strengthen Parliament, and it is right that the Parliament should be able to properly hold to account the Scottish Government, irrespective of the party membership that makes up the chamber. That is the role that constituents send us, who are not in the majority party that then forms the Government, here to do.

It is fair to say that there has been an increasing lack of transparency, over 16 years, as to how the Scottish Government operates. We have already heard discussions over the budget, and there are calls in the motion and the Labour amendment to make that process more transparent.

However, I would like to use the short time that I have to draw attention to other matters that the motion and the Labour amendment address. The first matter is in respect to the size of the Government in Scotland, which, bar one position, can be drawn only from members of the chamber. We have seen an increase in the size of the Government in both the number of cabinet secretaries and the number of ministers who support them.

Those increases clearly cause challenges when it comes to supplying members for committees. Given that we are a unicameral Parliament, the responsibility on committees to hold the Government to account is enormous, and the pool

that can be drawn from to make up those committees is reduced when the number of ministers is increased.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I sympathise with much in the Labour amendment, but that is the line that I have a problem with. Would Mr Whitfield acknowledge that, although the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government are far more powerful than they were in 1999, the number of members remains unchanged? Instead of the number of members in the Government, is the issue not the number of members in the Parliament?

Martin Whitfield: I welcome the recognition of the increased powers that devolution has given to the Government and Parliament in Scotland, and I agree that a challenge exists around striking that balance. Looking at the D'Hondt calculation, I wonder whether a more balanced approach could be achieved by reducing or deducting from that calculation those members of the predominant party who are in Government, which would then balance speeches and debates across the Parliament.

I am conscious that there will be many positive contributions, but I want to mention my colleague Katy Clark's proposed member's bill—the proposed freedom of information reform (Scotland) bill. I look forward to seeing that come forward.

The final issue that I ask the cabinet secretary or minister to address at the end of the debate relates to breaches of the ministerial code. The ministerial code is not overseen by the Parliament or by any committees within it, and we have a situation in which, in essence, the judge is judging itself. We have seen the problems with that down south, at Westminster, and I invite ideas as to how that can improve under the current Scottish Government.

15:20

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The SNP is engulfed in scandal. Police Scotland is following the money, arrests have been made, resignations have been rapid, front pages have been lurid and the wheels of justice are turning.

However, that is actually a familiar story. For decades, the Scottish Labour Party arrogantly viewed Scotland as its fiefdom—its iron grip unbreakable, no matter how badly it behaved or how poorly it performed. We know what happened: people grew sick of being taken for granted, they finally rejected the sleaze and corruption, and Labour went the way of the dinosaurs.

Self-righteous SNP politicians such as Nicola Sturgeon were the noisiest critics.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Russell Findlay: I will not, as, unfortunately, I have only four minutes. I am sorry.

Their party would be different—that Scottish politics would be cleansed was their pious pitch. Honesty, integrity and transparency were the buzzwords. Dear, dear me—look at where we are now. These past 16 years of SNP rule have been a disaster for our country. The SNP is a single-issue party that is perpetually distracted by its incoherent obsession with breaking up the United Kingdom. It is a party with all the power in the hands of Nicola Sturgeon and her husband. It is a party that does not tolerate reasonable questions from its own people. It is a party that thinks nothing of destroying those who do not toe the line.

In recent weeks, I have seen SNP members in a state of shock. Party unity is shattered as they have been put on the spot and forced to pick a team. One newspaper identified the following seven factions:

“The Yousaf loyalists, the Forbes followers, the Sturgeon establishment, the Westminster wing, the rebel alliance”,

who, I believe, sit up at the back,

“the watchers ... and the sheep.”

Many in the SNP are trying to tell us that that is private party business—that it has nothing to do with Parliament or Government. Well, they are wrong, because the toxic culture of the SNP has been allowed to infect St Andrew's house and Holyrood. We have a Government that operates by three main principles: secrecy, spin and self-preservation. It deprives the public of information while preaching about transparency. It misleads the public while preaching about integrity. When cornered, when evidence of wrongdoing and corruption are laid bare, it responds with aggressive deflection and deception.

Let us talk about accountability. This Government acts as if it answers to no one. Even the Auditor General for Scotland is impeded in his work, unable to access critical yet basic financial data. Everyone else is blamed. Colossal and costly failures usually result in promotion, not the sack—we need look no further than Humza Yousaf. The SNP has forgotten that principles matter. Values of honesty and integrity are gone from this Government. The only values that it is interested in are the ministerial salaries of Humza Yousaf's continuity cronies.

What is now clear is that SNP politicians have absolutely no right to wag their fingers at anybody else. Just like the pigs in George Orwell's “Animal Farm”, the SNP now looks no different from

Labour. These scandals have exposed an out-of-touch governing class of careerists and chancers. They could travel Scotland in their mysterious motorhome, but they will never find the moral high ground. They are as transparent as the painted windows of the ferry that was launched by Nicola Sturgeon. They have lost their way, and, if political justice is done, they will also lose the power that they take for granted.

15:25

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, for coming in slightly late at the beginning of the debate.

At the outset, I will concede one point to the Tories with regard to the motion that we are debating today: it is abundantly clear that my party faces a range of issues at present. It is a party that has had stability for 19 years, a party that has been the party of choice for the electorate in this Parliament since 2007, and a party that has been the party of choice at Westminster for Scots since 2015. The issues are certainly not of my choosing, but I am convinced that we will get through them—and, with a huge amount of work, I believe that the electorate will continue to place their trust in us to deliver for the people of Scotland.

Many aspects of the motion surprise me. For example, I am pleased that the Tories seem now to accept that Westminster does not speak for Scotland, as their motion speaks of

“the governing party of Scotland”.

The Tories continually proclaim that Scotland has two Governments. Does that mean that the Tories are about to give up on the long-discredited union and the absolute shambles of a Government down the road at Westminster?

Ultimately, nobody in Scotland will be fooled by this debate. It is the Tories who are playing cheap party-political games, chasing headlines with absolutely zero credibility. Describing last week’s debate on the abhorrent and inhumane Illegal Migration Bill, Brian Whittle said:

“We could have had a constructive debate this afternoon, but we have instead had an exercise in performative anger.”

Brian Whittle also described that debate as

“an exercise in posturing in the absence of policy.”

Later, he described it as

“a point-scoring exercise and nothing more.”—[*Official Report*, 25 April 2023; c 56, 54, 56.]

I genuinely had no idea that Brian Whittle is the Scottish Parliament’s very own Nostradamus, but his predictions are so very apt for today’s debate.

The Tories talk about transparency as if they actually care about it. This from the party that has been up to its eyeballs in scandals, including cash for honours, cash for contracts, texts for tax breaks and even cash for curtains. In the eyes of the public, it is a UK Government that has normalised sleaze.

Let us take one example of that abuse of power: the cash-for-honours scandal. Fifteen of the Tory party’s main treasurers, who happened to hand over £3 million to the party, were coincidentally given life peerages in the House of Lords. Twenty-two of the Tory party’s top financial backers have all coincidentally been given peerages since 2010. In total, this group has stuffed the Tory party coffers with £54 million—yes, £54 million. We even have a situation whereby the former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, tried to give his dad a peerage. Come on—what was all that about? Stephen Kerr is laughing, but Boris Johnson even tried tae gie his dad a peerage.

The Tories’ claims about transparency indicate the parallel universe in which the Tories live. Only last week, it was the Tories who wanted to shut out the press from asking their Prime Minister questions at their Scottish conference. The economic lessons that we were supposed to take from Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng’s time in charge were much lauded by Mr Ross before he quickly realised that he had backed the wrong horse. That is on top of the lying and scheming of the Brexit campaign led by Boris Johnson, which is estimated to have made the UK economy 5.5 per cent poorer than it would have been if we had stayed in the European Union, with UK imports and exports expected to be 15 per cent lower. It is no wonder that the International Monetary Fund predicts that the UK is set to be the worst-performing economy in the G20.

The Tories want transparency. Maybe they can respond to the following questions. Do they agree with the £8.7 billion wasted on unused or unusable personal protective equipment, storing it and prematurely cancelling PPE contracts? Do they agree with the Commons Public Accounts Committee report that found “no clear evidence” that the £29.5 billion spent on test and trace had any impact on reducing Covid infections? Do they agree that a firm owned by an ex-Conservative councillor and Conservative donor was awarded contracts worth £275 million for the supply of masks and gowns?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr McMillan.

Stuart McMillan: I could go on, but I am conscious of the time. The public know, and they will not be fooled by today’s debate.

15:29

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Believe it or not, buried under the hypocrisy and the double standards in the motion, there are a few points that are actually issues for which the Scottish Government has responsibility. Believe it or not, I even agree with one of the points that the motion makes. The First Minister's salary is an entirely reasonable level at which to set a threshold for proactive publication of the list of posts in the public sector whose holders are in receipt of high levels of pay.

However, I would go further than what the Conservatives propose. Significant services are delivered by the private sector on the public sector's behalf, and high levels of pay inequality are certainly far more prevalent in the private sector. Therefore, if the aim is to reduce pay inequality and ensure best value for money for the public purse, I would not only support regular publication of those public sector posts the salaries for which are at or above that of the First Minister, as the Conservative motion proposes; I would want grants and procurement contracts that are awarded to the private and third sectors to be conditional on the receiving organisations opting in to that transparency mechanism. Regardless of who receives it, it is public money, and we should set high standards.

Given that the initial proposal is included in the Conservative motion, I would appreciate hearing the thoughts of Conservative members on expanding it in that manner. It is a timely suggestion, given that the Scottish Greens' suggestion about a review of chief executives' pay was accepted by the Scottish Government earlier this year. I hope that all parties engage with that review and with wider public sector pay policy at budget time.

One policy that I would like to put on the record now is that the salaries of college principals be brought into the pay framework for chief executives. They are the heads of large public bodies in Scotland, and some principals are—completely unjustifiably, in my view—on salaries larger than that of the First Minister. Indeed, the growth in principals' pay over the past 30 years has massively outstripped that in the pay of college teaching and support staff. If the newfound enthusiasm in some quarters for good governance could extend to greater scrutiny of the governance of our colleges, that would have far more positive outcomes for the public than the partisan opportunism that motivated the choice of this afternoon's debate.

If the Conservatives are interested in good party governance, they need to look much closer to home. According to the Good Law Project, since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year

ago, the Tory party has accepted at least £243,000 from donors associated with Russia. Much of that—£175,000—came from Lubov Chernukhin. Her husband is a former deputy finance minister under Putin and a former chairman of the state corporation VEB.RF, which is rightly subject to sanctions in the UK.

If that name is familiar here, that is because the same Lubov Chernukhin also paid £20,000 for a meal with Ruth Davidson. That meal did not go ahead, but the cheque was certainly cashed. The Tory party is awash with dodgy Kremlin-linked cash, and it has been for years, so I suppose that we should be grateful to the Tories for giving us the opportunity to put that on the parliamentary record.

There is a clear conflict of interests in political parties nominating their donors for awards and privileges, but it is particularly outrageous for donors to be nominated for lifetime appointments to Parliament via the House of Lords. As the Minister for Parliamentary Business mentioned, the Tories took that one step further when they appointed the party donor Malcolm Offord not just to the House of Lords, but to the Government, as a minister in the Scotland Office. This is a man who has never been elected to any office, who is not accountable to voters and who will have the power to influence the laws of the UK for the rest of his life. Why is he in that position? He donated £150,000 to the Tory party in the years leading up to his appointment.

Even other Tory party members have described the support that Mr Offord has received from their party leadership as cronyism. Talking about the endorsement that he received ahead of candidate selection for the 2021 Scottish Parliament election—this comment was made anonymously, so it might even have been made by someone who is in the room today—one Tory said:

"It seems all you need to get an endorsement is to have deep pockets."

That is a pretty damning indictment from a member of Mr Offord's own party.

There are, of course, only two parties in the Scottish Parliament that will not nominate to the House of Lords: the Scottish Greens and the SNP. I challenge those Opposition members who extol the virtues of transparency and accountability in government to reconcile that with their parties' role in maintaining the undemocratic outrage of the House of Lords and the arcane mechanisms that, for example, allow the royal family to amend draft legislation in secret.

The Conservatives demand transparency and accountability from everyone but themselves. Today's debate is not motivated by a principled belief in good governance; it is pure opportunism.

However, it has spectacularly backfired for a party that has so much baggage of its own that we have barely scratched the surface this afternoon. Therefore, I finish by asking Douglas Ross if he would not mind bringing back a similar motion in the future. There is so much more rot at the heart of the Tory party, which we could do with putting on the parliamentary record.

15:34

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I am delighted to take part in this debate, and I am grateful for the opportunity to provide some balance for the benefit of Conservative colleagues. I can hear Douglas Ross muttering away. I welcome the motion in the same way that the Hibs fans welcomed Douglas Ross at McDiarmid park two weeks ago, although I will not use the same language that they used.

The motion talks about “the governing party” but, as the Tories never tire of saying—often tiresomely—as Stuart McMillan mentioned, Scotland has two Governments, and their party is also a governing party.

Yes, the Tories are transparent—so transparent that it is crystal clear to everyone that the motion is nothing more than an attempt to grab some headlines and deflect from the failures of their own Government at Westminster. Last week, for example, the Tories did not seem to think that debating the UK Government’s abhorrent anti-immigration bill was a good use of their time. So transparent was their discomfort that we could see only one or two of the back benchers—the others were completely transparent.

However, this week, the Tories are here aplenty for a debate about party-political matters. Let us play their game and do a wee test of transparency here. I am happy to give way to any Tory member who can and will tell us how many members the Tories have in Scotland. Anyone?

Douglas Ross: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: Before I take the intervention, will the member say whether he is going to answer the question? *[Interruption.]* No, I will not take the intervention. He is not going to answer the question. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat, Mr Brown. As members know, it is up to each individual member whether they take an intervention.

Keith Brown: I could not hear much of that exchange. I have obviously touched a raw nerve with the Conservatives. It was a simple question, but Douglas Ross has failed to answer it so many times. *[Interruption.]* I am struggling to hear myself

speak, Deputy Presiding Officer. Is it possible to get some quiet, as Conservative members were given when they made their speeches?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There has been quite a lot of sedentary chitchat throughout the debate, and all speakers have probably had to put up with a bit of that. However, I invite members to listen to Mr Brown, please.

Keith Brown: According to the Conservatives’ chairman, Craig Hoy,

“there is a number, but”

they

“don’t disclose it”.

Demanding that the SNP does something that we have already done while refusing to do it themselves seems to be the Tory way.

I would also be happy to give way to any Tory who can tell us, to the nearest £1 billion—to make this as easy as possible—how much the Truss-Kwarteng economic experiment cost the people of Scotland.

Douglas Ross: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: If Douglas Ross will answer the question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that Keith Brown is giving way, Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: I am grateful, because I want to go back to the last time that he said he would give way to any member. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, we cannot have—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, members. I think that Mr Brown said that he would give way to Douglas Ross. Am I wrong in that, Mr Brown?

Keith Brown: Will he answer the question now? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not in charge—*[Interruption.]* Mr Brown, please resume your seat.

As members well know, I am not in charge of the answers that are given. Could Mr Brown please clarify whether he is giving way to Mr Ross?

Keith Brown: No. I was happy to give way to any Tory—*[Interruption.]* I was happy to give way to any Tory who could actually tell us—*[Interruption.]* I cannot hear what is being said. I was happy to give way to any Tory who could tell us not just how many members the Tory party has, but whether they actually know how many members they have, because that seems to be a moot point as well.

How can we expect—[*Interruption.*] As Russell Findlay had, I have only four minutes, most of which have been wasted already, so I am not giving way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members.

Keith Brown: When can we expect the publication of the Russia report? No answer there. The motion talks about transparency in Government—

Douglas Ross rose—

Keith Brown: I have said three times that I am not giving way, Deputy Presiding Officer. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members! Mr Ross, I think that Mr Brown is indicating that he is not giving way.

Keith Brown: The motion talks about transparency in Government. We have no transparency whatsoever—

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. I wonder whether Keith Brown, the SNP's deputy leader, might like to clarify whether his questions are rhetorical or genuine.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is a debating point and not a point of order for the chair, Mr Halcro Johnston.

Keith Brown: As ever, that was not a point of order.

Should we really expect that Scotland's other Government—the Conservative Government—will release the polling evidence that it collected, at taxpayers' expense, on support for Scottish independence? How about an arithmetical question? How much more is high speed 2 costing compared with its original estimate of around £30 billion? It is now over £100 billion.

Douglas Ross: Will the member give way on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that Mr Brown has indicated that he is not giving way. Mr Brown, your time is coming to a close fairly soon.

Keith Brown: How much is the £3.5 billion aircraft carrier the Prince of Wales worth now that it has been stripped for parts for its sister ship? How much of the European Union structural funds that used to come to Scotland and other parts of the UK have been cut from Scotland?

Let us have no more pious lectures from the Tories on transparency. After all, in 2021, during the current Prime Minister's tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer, it was revealed that the Treasury refused to comply with more freedom of

information requests than any other department in Whitehall.

Members on our side have repeatedly called for a full public inquiry into the revelation that the UK Government used funds for Covid contracts to conduct research into constitutional issues—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brown, you will need to conclude.

Keith Brown: Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Brown.

We move to closing speeches. I call Michael Marra to wind up on behalf of Scottish Labour.

15:39

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am happy to support the amendment in Jackie Baillie's name on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party.

The SNP's descent into chaos in recent months has certainly brought the dark underbelly of the party management into the light of day, but the culture of secrecy, spin and cover-up has been far reaching and—as Jackie Baillie rightly pointed out—has stretched the gap between party and Government. That requires remedy and scrutiny, and the implementation of the measures that are outlined in Labour's amendment.

The debate has been of a rather dubious standard. The issues are incredibly serious, but there has been, I am afraid, no shortage of audacity from Tory members, in particular from Russell Findlay in citing Orwell. I am reminded that George Orwell also said:

"I enjoy talking to you. Your mind appeals to me. It resembles my own except that you happen to be insane."

We heard Willie Rennie and Ross Greer recounting the VIP lane stuffed with Kremlin money. I think that it is right that those points are made in riposte to where the Tory motion is coming from today.

However, it is fair to say that the SNP back benchers, and the minister in his opening speech, have been rather remiss in their lack of recognition of the lack of transparency from the Government over many years. There was the surprisingly thin paper trail on the decision to award ferry contracts to Ferguson's shipyard. There were reports from Audit Scotland—by now almost too numerous to mention—calling on the Scottish Government to improve transparency, in particular with regard to how it spends taxpayers' money. There was a paucity of data on how nearly £5 billion of Covid-19 funding to support businesses was actually spent. There was also—again, as my colleague

Jackie Baillie highlighted—the SNP Government's dissembling, dishonest and duplicitous approach to the provision of documentation in the Salmond inquiry, with that committee facing obstruction at every turn.

I turn to the exploitation of lobbying register loopholes. In 2020 alone, hundreds of meetings between Scottish Government ministers and lobbyists were not registered. There is also a fully contemptuous approach to freedom of information requests—

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: Not at this moment, thank you.

There is a contemptuous approach to FOI requests, culminating most shamefully in the Government's failure to disclose Covid-19 data modelling. That cover-up was then challenged by the Scottish Information Commissioner, who said that there was a lack of compliance and found that there was a "strong public interest" in publishing that data.

Turning to warnings about patient safety from staff and patients at Queen Elizabeth university hospital that were covered up in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, it is absolutely clear that the board was aided and abetted by the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Humza Yousaf. He failed to remove those who were responsible, backing that culture of secrecy, cover-up and incompetence. Although, to most, that behaviour showed Mr Yousaf to be unworthy of his position, in the eyes of the SNP high command, it proved that he was the ideal candidate—the continuity candidate—who was capable of ascending to the highest office in the land.

However, the people of Scotland are not fooled by any of that. The SNP is led by that continuity candidate, and it is infected by the same culture of secrecy, spin and cover-up that has festered at the heart of the party for too long. Again, as Orwell said,

"The end was contained in the beginning."

Labour's amendment calls for serious measures and actions that can improve transparency on behalf of the people of Scotland. The good governance of our country and of the public services on which we all rely needs to see the restoration of integrity and transparency to the heart of Government. Scottish Labour's "Stronger Holyrood" paper sets out how we would do that, as is contained in our amendment. I hope that members are able to back it in that spirit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Tom Arthur to wind up on behalf of the Scottish Government.

15:43

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): I thank members on all sides of the chamber for their contributions. It is important that we, as a Parliament, consider how we can enhance scrutiny and transparency of not only the work of the Government more generally but the activities of Parliament, which have also been touched on.

It is important to recognise that we operate in a devolved context, so the way in which this Parliament and this Government interact with the UK Government, and the way in which processes are conducted by the UK Government and the UK Parliament impact on the processes that we undertake. That is quite clear when it comes to the matter of public finances and budgeting.

Of course, we operate under a fiscal framework that is, as I think we all recognise, one of the most complex sets of arrangements between a state level Government and a sub-state level Government to be found anywhere in the world. If I recall correctly, an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report a few years ago highlighted that point.

That can create genuine challenges in presenting information transparently and clearly; indeed, it can also present challenges for the Government, particularly when we consider—members who have served in the House of Commons will be aware of this—the rather esoteric approach to finance that Westminster has, through votes on confidence, main estimates and supplementary estimates. That approach can mean that we discover changes to our budget only late on in the financial year.

We have, in the Scottish Parliament, a well-established process in relation to public finances. We have the annual budget statement, followed by the three-stage budget bill process and, routinely, two budget-revision processes in the financial year. During the Covid pandemic, we took the extraordinary step of having an additional budget-revision process.

Along with all that, we have statements on provisional outturn, a rates resolution, as is required under statute, and the local government finance order, which provides multiple parliamentary opportunities for engagement.

Jackie Baillie: I am grateful to the minister for laying out the budget process, but will he, in the interests of transparency, encourage cessation of use of SNP emails and WhatsApp messages to avoid scrutiny of ministerial discussions and decision making?

Tom Arthur: Everything that we undertake in the Government, and all decisions that we take

around the budget process, are taken through Scottish Government systems. The information exists, and I certainly assure members that I and my colleagues undertake that process.

I want to come back to—

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister give way?

Tom Arthur: I have already given way, and I barely have a minute remaining.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, are you making a point of order?

Jackie Baillie: I am happy to make a point of order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was not inviting you to do so: I was just asking you whether you are.

Jackie Baillie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I wonder whether the minister heard my question, because he certainly did not answer it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, as you know, that is not a point of order.

Minister—over to you.

Tom Arthur: In relation to the processes that I was setting out, I made reference to the on-going work around the budget process, but I recognise that there is a desire to do more. I have certainly seen that through engagement with the Finance and Public Administration Committee. There has been constructive engagement with Liz Smith and with Daniel Johnson, in his former role, and I look forward to constructive engagement with Mr Marra about ways in which we can provide additional information, particularly around the budget-revision processes, which can be quite fluid and dynamic, especially in relation to the challenges that we face around supplementary estimates.

Willie Rennie: With his making this calm and intelligent contribution, I do not think that the minister was here earlier in the debate. Nevertheless, would he be in favour of freedom of information reform along lines that Katy Clark proposes, which would allow us to scrutinise the public finances in public bodies?

Tom Arthur: I know that the Government will be consulting on matters pertaining to FOI. I do not have lead responsibility on FOI, but Willie Rennie has made his point, and the Minister for Cabinet and Parliamentary Business will have heard it.

The point that I want to come to is that our consolidated accounts have had unqualified clean audits for the past 17 years. However, I recognise nonetheless that there will always be challenges around ensuring that information is accessible and as transparent as possible. It is also absolutely

vital that the work that we undertake in the Scottish Parliament is as accessible and transparent as possible to the people who vote for us. That will always be challenging for any state.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I fear that the minister is probably bringing his remarks to a close.

Tom Arthur: That will be challenging with regard to the devolved context in which we operate.

As I have said previously, I make an open offer; I want to ensure that everyone we are so privileged and honoured to serve has as much information as possible, and that that information is presented in a way that is transparent, inherently discernible and easy to grasp.

I very much want to have those discussions and conversations with any members who have a desire, beyond the theatrics of today, to engage constructively on something that is of such vital importance. I look forward to conversations with Opposition finance spokespeople and, as I said, I extend the offer to all members, because we have a shared interest and a shared responsibility.

15:49

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank all the participants in this afternoon's debate. There are many issues that we would prefer to have been debating this afternoon. Indeed, we will shortly be moving on to the vital subject of highly protected marine areas. However, the debate was, sadly, necessary, because the whole issue of SNP party finances—the scandal, and perhaps even criminality—has become a distraction from the business of Government.

We called for the First Minister to come clean and make a statement to Parliament on his party's finances so that we can all move on, but he refused to do so and sent George Adam to do his dirty work for him. At least Mr Adam has a sense of humour. He read out with a straight face the line in the amendment that says

“good governance and transparency are matters of the utmost importance”.

I commend him for that. At this rate, he will be making a bid to fill the vacancy that has appeared at the Stand Comedy Club following the removal of Joanna Cherry, who has been cancelled by it. Incidentally, nobody in her party seems to be prepared to speak up for Joanna Cherry—not the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, nor Shirley-Anne Somerville when she was on the radio this morning, and not even

the First Minister. The SNP has left Conservative members to defend free speech and Joanna Cherry.

During the debate, we have learned that there only seems to be one line of defence from the SNP. Its members have kept on repeating, parrot-like, “How many members do you have?” One would think that an entire army of special advisers, advisers, spin doctors and press officers could have dreamed up one other attack line. Even poor Keith Brown was exhausted by the end of the debate.

There are legitimate questions that need to be answered, and it is simply not enough to say that answers cannot be provided because there is a police inquiry. What has happened to the £600,000 of ring-fenced funds that were raised for another independence referendum? What is the real position of the SNP party’s finances? Is the party on the brink of financial collapse, as some people have suggested? Why did its auditors resign? Why did the former chief executive grant a substantial personal loan that has been only partly repaid? Why on earth did it purchase, as a campaign vehicle, a camper van—one that seems not to have moved for the past two years? None of that makes sense.

We learned today that the SNP has now appointed new auditors—AMS Accountants Group Ltd of Manchester. Perhaps it is not the greatest start to learn that that business is already late in filing necessary paperwork with Companies House. I hope that it will attend to the SNP’s documentation better than it seems to be handling its own. What we see in the SNP’s finances is all too typical of the way that the Government conducts its business—as a number of members from around the chamber have made clear.

Last week, during the finance debate, I identified concerns that have been raised about lack of transparency across a range of Government decisions, including investment in private companies such as Burntisland Fabrications Ltd, or BiFab, Glasgow Prestwick Airport Ltd and GFG Alliance. Those issues have been identified by the former Auditor General, the current Auditor General and even by the Parliament’s Finance and Public Administration Committee. We learned this week, from evidence sessions at the finance committee, that former ministers, senior civil servants and special advisors have denounced Scottish Government decision making as “rushed ... unclear and unstructured”. Even those who have been at the heart of the Government know that it is getting this badly wrong.

Liz Smith reminded us of the need for transparency in Government.

Fulton MacGregor: Do Murdo Fraser and his party have any self-awareness, at all? I have been sitting listening to the debate. His party took us all for mugs during the pandemic with contracts for its cronies—as the UK Labour Party has pointed out—and they partied the whole time. This is absolutely shameful.

Murdo Fraser: What a bizarre intervention, which has nothing to do with the debate. I say to Fulton MacGregor that when we shine a light on the Scottish Government’s track record on procurement of PPE and other matters we will find that the choices that it made were not dissimilar to those that were made by the UK Government at the time, so he needs to be very careful about what he says.

Like Jackie Baillie, I recall sitting two years ago on the committee of this Parliament that looked at the handling of harassment complaints against the former First Minister, Alex Salmond, and I recall the deplorable attempts at a cover-up that we saw from the SNP Government, the refusal to release vital documentation that that committee needed and the unwillingness to co-operate with a cross-party inquiry. It took the threat of a vote of no confidence in John Swinney, the then Deputy First Minister, to get the documentation that that parliamentary committee required. Nothing, it seems, has got any better in the interim.

Today, we have a motion that notes the lack of transparency in the Government and gives a range of positive proposals on how to make matters better. It also calls for a statement to Parliament on the governance of the Scottish National Party—the party of government here.

Those are all matters of legitimate public interest. We know that there are SNP members in this Parliament who share our concerns; they agree with us that something has gone far wrong with SNP finances. They are as appalled as we are at what has been going on and they, as we do, want answers.

We have already seen within the SNP a willingness among some back benchers to stand up to their leadership. We have seen that in respect of issues such as the A9 and the deposit return scheme. We might also be about to see it in relation to marine protected areas. We saw it in relation to the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, on which there was an unprecedented rebellion. I call on SNP back benchers to show the same resilience today.

I am not a supporter of independence, but if I was trying to make the case for independence, I would want to demonstrate that the Scottish Government is as effective and transparent as possible. Immense damage is being done to the body politic in Scotland by the culture of secrecy

and cover-up. I hope that all members from all parties will be prepared to join us in voting for the motion, and I hope in particular that SNP members with conscience and a backbone will be prepared to join us, because that is the least that Scotland will expect.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the transparency of Scotland's governing party. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business, to allow front-bench teams to change positions, should they wish to do so.

Highly Protected Marine Areas

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08766, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on reconsidering highly protected marine areas. I would be grateful if members who wish to speak were to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:58

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Today's debate on highly protected marine areas is a rare opportunity for the Parliament to agree on something. We should all agree on standing up for coastal and fishing communities.

Last month, the First Minister outlined his priorities for Scotland. He spoke for almost half an hour. He failed to mention fishing or farming once. However, it is never too late to start listening, admit your mistakes and go back to the drawing board. In opening this debate, I appeal directly to Scottish National Party members of the Scottish Parliament representing coastal communities and to other colleagues who want Scottish fishing to thrive in the future.

Anyone who rigidly follows the party line when they know the damage that these plans could do will owe their constituents, Scotland's fishing industry and coastal and rural communities an explanation. This is not about siding with me and my colleagues on the Conservative benches; it is about siding with the Scottish fishing industry. We should be proud of that industry, which contributes over £0.5 billion to our economy each year.

On top of the challenges that those in the industry are already facing with spatial squeeze, they are contending with a fishing ban that threatens to destroy their livelihoods for good. It is clear to them, as it is to us, that the proposed fishing ban goes too far with too little evidence. We know how that came about: on a dark day, in a dishonourable agreement that was signed in August 2021.

Màiri McAllan's amendment shows that the Government is not only failing to listen to the concerns of our fishermen and our coastal communities but that it has turned its back on science and certainty. It makes a mockery of the consultation process by taking for granted the fact that highly protected marine areas will be designated. Popeye Ewing must have fisherman's forearms to have ripped the document apart last night—believe me, I have tried.

The SNP amendment potentially misleads the Parliament in suggesting that the plans are in line with the European Union's, when, in fact, Scotland

has already gone over and above its marine protected area targets. It cites evidence from one area and entirely ignores contradictory evidence from another. The Bute house agreement has much to answer for. It rides roughshod over the livelihoods of hard-working fishermen, with a blatant disregard for the communities that they support and the science around the matter that we are discussing.

The arbitrary figure of 10 per cent of Scottish waters being designated as highly protected marine areas has been plucked from the sky with no scientific backing or ecological justification to underpin it. The First Minister insisted that the Government would not impose those policies on communities that do not want them. Now, the line in the SNP's amendment has changed to refer to vehement opposition. Even if it could be defined or measured, it is evident that the Government is moving the goalposts. There has been no explanation of the problem that those proposals are trying to address or the goal that they are trying to achieve. We do not even know how effective the existing marine protected area network is in supporting and maintaining biodiversity in our waters. There has been no impact assessment of how those plans would affect our coastal communities and no feasibility study into how they could be implemented and enforced.

My colleague Murdo Fraser has just discussed a recent inquiry in which we learnt that former ministers, senior civil servants and special advisers believe that Scottish Government decision making is rushed, unclear and unstructured, as we saw with the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill. We are here again. To describe the policy as rushed, unclear and unstructured would be far too generous. On the other side of the conversation, the fishing sector has taken its time to construct clear, coherent arguments against the proposals.

Nonetheless, it is important to say that I absolutely understand the need to protect our marine environment. I am certain that that is another point on which we can all agree.

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): In March, Rachael Hamilton's colleague Thérèse Coffey, the Conservative Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, called HPMA's a vital way forward, and she subsequently introduced them in England. How does the member reconcile that with her remarks?

Rachael Hamilton: The difference with the Scottish Government's approach is that it is not bringing the coastal communities with it. The document is a paper exercise and an online process that has had no consultation with any

coastal communities at all. The difference between that and the United Kingdom Government's approach is that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs consulted coastal communities. The fishermen even agreed on the sites that were proposed.

No one gets this more than fishermen, because without good fish stocks, their businesses would struggle. As the former finance secretary said, if we

"sever the lifeline with fishing, we will undermine the wider economy"—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2023; c 92.]

of coastal communities. She is right. That is a clear sign of the need to work with fishermen on those issues instead of imposing arbitrary, un evidenced restrictions on their activities. With sustainable fishing practices, our fleet has seen fish stocks rebound over the past 20 years. Plaice, hake and haddock have all seen their populations grow considerably during that time because of sustainable practices, which is down to the hard work of the fishermen who know our seas best, not the result of top-down desktop policies, as we heard during Beatrice Wishart's members' business debate on highly protected marine areas.

Our coastal communities have asked the Scottish Government to reconsider these plans. The fishermen in those vulnerable, fragile, rural, coastal communities need to be heard.

Today, the motion presents the Scottish Parliament with a clear choice: we can stand behind these communities, go back to the drawing board and work with them, rather than against them, to protect our seas; or we can press ahead with these un evidenced, unwanted and hugely damaging plans.

We should be under no illusion: these communities are clear that a fishing ban is an existential threat not only to their jobs but to their way of life. We have an opportunity to send them a message that we have listened and we will support them. We have a plan to do that and we want to work with this Government and all parties to ensure that we can protect them and our oceans. I believe that our motion does that, and that the amendments from Labour and the Liberal Democrats show their willingness to do that. I welcome their support and that they are standing up for fishermen, and I am sure that there are others on the back benches who will also stand up for their constituents.

I move,

That the Parliament values the £560 million that fishing contributes to Scotland's economy and the communities that rely on that industry; recognises fish and shellfish as Scotland's climate-smart food; further recognises that the fishing industry has worked constructively with the Scottish Government for many years on the network of Marine

Protected Areas (MPAs) covering 37% of Scotland's seas; notes that the Scottish Government's plans to arbitrarily designate 10% of Scotland's waters as Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) with no scientific basis, or proper analysis of any ecological justification; further notes the significant concerns of the fishing sector as a whole and the coastal communities that rely on it, in relation to the Scottish Government's HPMA proposals and that those proposals have failed to gain the support of coastal communities and that many local authorities also oppose them; notes the lack of any baseline, reliable methodology or modelling and a lack of suitable indicators for assessing their impact; believes that the HPMA policy is at odds with the Scottish Government's own established cycle of reviewing the MPA network that has been carefully and rigorously developed, and calls upon the Scottish Government to fundamentally reconsider its HPMA proposals and the timeframe for their introduction.

16:05

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): As I do not have a great deal of speaking time, I will restrict my opening remarks on behalf of the Government to what I think are the key issues.

First, it is an unavoidable truth that we are in the midst of a climate and nature emergency. This Parliament recognised that when every party proceeded to pass some of the world's most ambitious climate targets into law.

Our oceans are a vital part of the emergency response that is needed. Scotland's marine environment stores at least 5.6 billion tonnes of CO₂, but recent research shows that the oceans are reaching their capacity to help us. That is because of a number of issues, including human impact on them. If we do not protect our seas, they will not be able to protect us for much longer. Despite the considerable progress that has been made to improve the state of our oceans, the Scottish marine assessment of 2020 shows that a number of species are in decline. The most recent assessment under the UK marine strategy showed that, across the UK, 11 out of 15 indicators of good environmental status are being missed.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Could the cabinet secretary set out exactly how banning fishing will reduce greenhouse gases?

Màiri McAllan: Finlay Carson may wish to use language such as "banning fishing", but the point is that we are in the midst of a consultation process that asks about the principles of HPMAs, including how they are constituted and what features we might wish to protect. The consultation includes the issue of blue carbon, which directly responds to Finlay Carson's point. However, the issue is not just about carbon; it is about ecosystems and species abundance, issues that are critically important to the equilibrium of our natural world. All of those issues are connected to

the climate emergency, and I would expect Finlay Carson to understand that. That matters to me, and it matters most of all to the people who are economically, socially and culturally connected to our seas.

That brings me to my second point, which is that it is an unavoidable truth that, as we take the action that we have to take to respond to the climate emergency, we have to do it in a way that is fair, just and leaves no one and no community behind. That is the task that I and the Scottish Government are committed to, and it is one that we take very seriously indeed. That is why we have approached this really complex and emotive topic with as much democracy as possible. It is why, at this early stage in the process, the Scottish Government has held no fewer than 40 stakeholder meetings during the development of the consultation and since then, to assist stakeholders in completing—

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

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

Màiri McAllan: I am sorry, but I do not have any more time to take interventions from the Conservatives.

The meetings that we held included ones with regional inshore fisheries groups, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance and the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation. As I said, we must respond to the climate emergency in a way that is fair, just and leaves no one and no community behind. That is why we met yesterday with MSPs, it is why I have committed to meet with communities across the summer and it is why I reiterate my commitment to look very closely at the thousands of consultation responses that we have received. I commit myself to that without politicking and without positioning, which I regret that some are very much engaging with.

Let us be clear: every party in this Parliament was elected on a manifesto commitment to marine protection.

Brian Whittle: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention on that point?

Màiri McAllan: No—I am afraid that I do not have time.

The Conservatives stood on a manifesto commitment to HPMA pilots, and the Labour Party stood on a manifesto to include 20 per cent of Scotland's waters in highly protected marine areas—double what the Scottish Government consultation proposed. Therefore, I assume that we agree that action is needed.

I realise that I am very short of time, so in the time that I have left—

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I am afraid that you are over your time, so I ask you to conclude at this point.

Màiri McAllan: I am short of time, so let me just—

The Presiding Officer: I regret that I cannot let you continue, because we are very tight for time this afternoon.

Màiri McAllan: That is a shame, Presiding Officer.

I move amendment S6M-08766.3, to leave out from “the Scottish Government’s plans” to end and insert:

“Scotland is in the midst of a climate and nature crisis and that decision-makers must be prepared to take action commensurate with the scale of that challenge, including enhanced marine protection, through a fair and just transition; believes that Scotland’s seas must remain a source of economic prosperity for the nation, especially in remote, coastal and island communities; recognises the considerable strength of feeling on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs); highlights that no sites have been selected, and welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to work with island and coastal communities, including the fishing sector, throughout the site selection process to ensure that their views are listened to and understood; notes the Scottish Government’s commitment that it will not impose HMPAs on communities that are vehemently opposed to them; understands that comparable levels of high protection are found internationally, and that Scotland’s proposals are similar to the EU’s commitment; notes the clear evidence base that shows the positive impact that enhanced marine protection makes, once in place, on recovering ecosystems and supporting a sustainable fishery sector; believes that the experience of the Lamlash Bay no-take zone has shown the benefits for both the marine environment and the people who rely on it; remains committed to supporting Scotland’s fishing sector, which plays such a key role in contributing to the country’s economic prosperity, especially in remote, rural and island communities, and believes that the real threat to the Scottish fishing industry is the continuing adverse impacts of Brexit and the UK Government’s immigration policies.”

16:10

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I start by expressing our disappointment at the Scottish Government’s amendment. The tone and content do not demonstrate any understanding of the consternation that is felt by our coastal communities. Let me be clear that we are all concerned about our marine environment and protecting it—none more so than those people whose parents fished the seas, who continue to fish themselves and who wish to ensure that their children will be able to fish in the future.

In support of the Government’s proposals, the example of Lamlash Bay is often quoted, but that example makes my point. The Government did not

impose the Lamlash Bay no-take zone on the community—the community fought for it. Local people who know their seas fought hard for those powers, for which the Scottish Government now seeks to take credit. It took the community 13 long years to fight the system and get that protection. It is also noticeable that Broad Bay is not so often quoted as an example.

The HPMA proposals seek to ban the most sustainable form of fishery that we have: static gear boats, which are small boats that fish in local waters and cannot move to other fishing grounds.

Rachael Hamilton: I believe that the only species that is really left at Broad Bay is starfish.

Rhoda Grant: That is correct. Untold damage has been caused to the fishery there.

The other thing that cannot help but leave us gasping is that, under those proposals, paddle boarding and swimming can also be banned, which makes no sense at all.

We are concerned that more and more fisheries will be funnelled into smaller areas that will end up overfished. It is really concerning that these are top-down proposals. The First Minister gave a commitment that they would not be imposed on coastal communities, but the Scottish Government motion now says that they will not be imposed

“on communities that are vehemently opposed to them”.

Does the Government really want those communities to demonstrate vehement opposition? What would that look like?

That is not a just transition. I am already hearing about boats going on sale and families preparing to move away as a direct result of the policy. That is deeply damaging, given that the areas concerned are also subject to depopulation right now. The uncertainty that surrounds the proposals is damaging local economies; people cannot invest and banks will not support them, because their businesses might not have any future.

It is not just fisheries but fish farming, seaweed cultivation and harvesting that are involved. The list is long and includes the many businesses that depend on marine tourism. However, ScotWind areas are exempt. The waters that were sold on the cheap, with no community benefit, will be exempt in order to protect foreign investors. Exempting them and their profits shows the priorities of the Government—it does not care about small businesses, including the one-person or two-person businesses that are being put out of work and forced to leave. Those small businesses are not being given any exclusions.

I have never seen such a backlash. Everyone who I have spoken to in coastal communities is furious. It takes a lot to drive people to write

songs, and it takes even more to make Donald Francis MacNeil sing them. The Government should not underestimate the vehement opposition to the proposals.

I move amendment S6M-08766.1, to insert at end:

“, and urges the Scottish Government to work with fishing communities and economies that have safeguarded the seas for generations to support and empower them to protect these fishing grounds for future generations, and to ensure that appropriate exclusions are put in place to benefit local communities and economies without being to the detriment of the marine environment.”

16:14

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): It appears that, if we wait ages for a debate on HPMAAs, two will come along in quick succession.

I thank again all those who took part in last night's debate, which was led by my colleague Beatrice Wishart. I think that it sent the most unambiguous message about the strength of cross-party opposition to the Government's proposed approach on HPMAAs. Of course, that is merely a reflection of the anger—and, in some cases, fury—that is felt in island and coastal communities the length and breadth of Scotland. Therefore, it is right that we return to the subject again today, and I thank Rachael Hamilton for allowing us to do so.

Sadly, the Government's amendment is a rather predictable and vintage example of whatabootery. Brexit continues to cause great damage, and the United Kingdom Tory Government's policies on skilled worker visas are indefensible. However, as Elspeth Macdonald of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has made clear,

“whatever issues the industry has with Brexit and labour issues, these pale into insignificance if fishermen are banned from fishing.”

The topic of today's debate is the same as last night, but the cast list looks a little different. Much like the HPMA designation, members operating arguments that are felt to be potentially damaging to the Bute house agreement are to be arbitrarily excluded. As such, Fergus Ewing, Kate Forbes and Alasdair Allan find themselves tied up in port by the SNP whips office. Yet, appropriately, there is no evidence that this forced tie-up regime will provide any protection for the SNP-Green Government's policy on HPMAAs, particularly when assurances that were previously offered up by the First Minister and the cabinet secretary are already being redefined and diluted.

Humza Yousaf could not have been clearer in stating that he would not

“impose these policies on communities that don't want them.”

That promise was echoed by the cabinet secretary. Now, we are told that there needs to be “vehement” opposition, whatever that means.

The lack of any prior discussion or consultation with stakeholders in the fishing, aquaculture and other key sectors that are most directly affected is inexcusable. It has seen Government policy, developed—

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: I do not have time, I am afraid, Mr Whittle.

It has seen Government policy, developed and consulted on over years, upended and replaced by closed-door negotiations in Bute house between the SNP and Greens. That is not evidence-based policy making; that is not ministers being inclusive or accessible. It makes a mockery of any commitment that the Government professes to genuine island proofing, which is a point that I make in my amendment.

As Rhoda Grant has said, damage is already being done through heightened uncertainty and a collapse in confidence. Reaching agreement on measures that might actually help to protect our marine environment have been made more difficult to achieve. The Government's handbrake turn undermines those in the fishing sector who are already leading efforts to manage, protect and enhance stocks and biodiversity.

In my Orkney constituency, fishers recognise that their sector relies on healthy ecosystems and environments. They have been working in partnership with academics and environmental groups on a range of projects, including tagging brown crab; trialling technology in creels to measure environmental variables such as salinity, temperature, light and current; using cameras to understand interactions of creels with the sea bed; recording sightings of cetaceans and seabirds; and carrying out a carbon audit of Orkney's fleet. That is precisely what we would want to see in the interests of our fishing sector, the marine environment and our island and coastal communities.

I will finish with the words of Hannah Fennell of the Orkney Fisheries Association, who told me earlier this week:

“HPMAAs undermine the concept of environmental stewardship. Instead of punishing those who live near and work in the marine environment, the Government should be empowering communities and fishers. The knowledge fishers hold should be seen as an asset, and part of the solution to the twin climate crises.”

I could not agree more.

I move amendment S6M-08766.2, to insert at end:

“; recalls the passing of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, which allows for the ‘island proofing’ of legislation, meaning that the needs of island communities must be taken into consideration when creating policy or legislation, and believes that this approach must be followed in relation to Highly Protected Marine Areas.”

16:18

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): At the outset, I will say that I was taken aback by the call that I was on yesterday afternoon with many MSPs. On that call, we were asked for our opinions on HPMA, which is a bit late, and I am not sure that it actually followed the advice that had been given. It was disturbing—and must have been disturbing for the cabinet secretary—to hear from nearly all the MSPs on the call that the level of responses, and the pure venom in some of those responses, had not been experienced by those parliamentarians before.

Presiding Officer, you will know, as I do, that many songs and folk songs that we hear are written about either heroes or villains. In this case, a folk song, “The Clearances Again”, has been written. It is not about heroes; it is about villains. That is the way that the islanders view it.

If we consider all the Highlands and Islands MSPs, there is no doubt that the Conservatives understand the issue. I know that Labour understands it, and I know that the Liberal Democrats get it. I am pretty sure that the Greens do not get it. I am also pretty sure that some SNP members get it. We listened to Fergus Ewing’s members’ business speech last night—he gets it. I will come back to that later. I think that Kate Forbes gets it, too.

However, it is clear that the other two Highlands and Islands MSPs, Maree Todd and Emma Roddick, do not get it. In fact, I do not even see them in the chamber. Perhaps that is because they have taken the Government’s shilling and they do not have to respond or take part in this debate. However, there is no doubt that they will pay for that at the next election.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Edward Mountain will know that the whole of Scotland’s seafood sector is united in its opposition to HPMA. Does he agree that the proposals are about the survival not only of fishing and aquaculture but of the very communities that rely on them?

Edward Mountain: Absolutely. I take this opportunity to thank Beatrice Wishart for enabling last night’s members’ business debate, which was really interesting. One thing that we must understand—I will come on to this—is the importance of not destroying the livelihoods of those people who are employed in the local economy and who live in that area.

There is no doubt that, if we start a hare running, it is difficult to stop it. That is exactly what this Government has done with HPMA. It has no clear idea about how it will achieve its aims, but it has a clear idea that it must get on with it, because the Greens are telling it to do so. Furthermore, it has no clear idea how it will save the jobs of the fishermen. The Greens do not care about that because, to them, those jobs are collateral damage.

The Government will push on with a policy that, to me, is not based on the knowledge of those people who live and work in that environment, who protect that environment, who cherish that environment and who have no wish to destroy it because it forms part of their livelihood.

Màiri McAllan: I agree with Edward Mountain about the importance of those communities. From the beginning, I have been clear that the measures would be developed hand in hand with them by a broad and deep consultation at the start of the process. How does he think that I could have more meaningfully engaged with communities that I have been so clear that I care deeply about?

Edward Mountain: Presiding Officer, I do not know whether I will get back my time for that.

No, that is not what the communities see. They see a centralised Government pushing down from on top without listening to a word that they are saying. If the cabinet secretary is in any doubt about that, all that I would say to her is that she should take the time to come up to my office and have a look at some of the emails that I have received. I will be very happy to share them with her.

Presiding Officer, I know that, because I took some interventions, I will have to end my speech early.

16:23

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I have had sincere and deep ponderings over this debate today and, in fact, over the past few weeks. I have had cause to really take time to reflect.

My concerns about HPMA and the impact that they will have on fishers and coastal communities across Scotland are well known to the Scottish Government. First and foremost, however, I hope that they are known to the fishers across my constituency, because representing the coastal communities of Banffshire and Buchan Coast is a great honour and one that I do not take lightly. It is for that reason that I wish to make this promise to them: I promise that I will never support a policy that would be to the detriment of the lives and

livelihoods of coastal communities across Scotland. I was elected to be a strong voice for our coastal communities and a steward and an advocate of not just the people but the land and the sea, and I will be just that.

Our rural communities have been through a great deal over the past few years. As a member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, I have listened to some devastating testimonies about the impact of Brexit on our farmers and fishers. The loss of European Union funding as a result of the reckless Tory Brexit is just one example of the significant damage that has been imposed on our rural economies. We place so much responsibility for delivering net zero on our rural industries. We must remember that our farmers and fishers are also responsible for our food security.

Finlay Carson: Does the member agree that it is not Brexit that is hellbent on banning fishing in vast swathes of our seas, but that it is the Greens and the SNP that want to do that?

Karen Adam: I disagree with the member's take on that issue. I will come to this later in my speech, but that politics, with the whole rhetoric around "banning fishing", seems to be driven by popularity. That is not helpful to this debate and it is not constructive.

We place a lot of burden and responsibility on our farmers and fishers, and they are responsible for our food security. If we place ever greater burdens on them, we must ensure that we also provide the relevant financial, human and legislative support. Fishers have lost trust in politicians to deliver for them, and quite frankly I do not blame them. That is the sorry result of their being used as political footballs for so long and having their priorities consistently politicised.

That brings me to the motion that is before us, which is in the name of Rachael Hamilton. Are we really supposed to believe, after everything that the Tories have done over the past few years to bring our rural industries to the brink and our economy to its knees, that they are trustworthy custodians of our farms, fisheries and natural environment? Need I say more than "Liz Truss", "Boris Johnson" and "Brexit"? *[Interruption.]* Despite the Tory indignation, I note that it was announced in March that HPMA's will be introduced south of the border by the Tory UK Government. The hypocrisy is astonishing.

Rachael Hamilton is obviously opposed to HPMA's, so why did she stand on a Tory manifesto commitment in 2021 to implement pilot schemes for them? The fishers who are listening at home should be aware of that. *[Interruption.]*

The cabinet secretary will be reassured to hear that I do not intend to tear up any motion in a fit of theatrics today, although my colleague Rachael

Hamilton stated that she would like to see that. The Scottish Parliament is not a place for amateur dramatics. It is a place where we debate and discuss as reasonable representatives the genuine needs of our constituents and our country.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Ms Adam.

Karen Adam: I thank the cabinet secretary for the constructive discussions. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Adam. You must conclude at that point.

16:27

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): The Lamlash Bay no-take zone has already been mentioned in the debate. Having represented Arran, it is clear to me that strong marine protection can have support and buy-in from local communities. The Community of Arran Seabed Trust—COAST—was founded in 1995 and it led successful community campaigns to establish Scotland's first no-take zone. The Scottish Government has much to learn from COAST's approach and the painstaking work that was carried out on Arran to build community support for marine protection.

I pay tribute to COAST for the work that it has done because, without buy-in from the local community, marine protection areas will not work. I hope that the cabinet secretary will accept that there have been significant mistakes in the handling of the policy to develop highly protected marine areas.

Màiri McAllan: Will the member give way?

Katy Clark: I will very briefly.

Màiri McAllan: I thank Katy Clark for taking an intervention and for her contribution. I am looking at the foreword that I put in the consultation, and the closing lines are:

"That is why I want to hear what you think. I want to take on board your concerns ... I want you to help shape the creation of these highly protected areas."

How does that not demonstrate that I care how coastal communities feel?

Katy Clark: The approach that the Scottish Government has taken has caused upset in many communities that rely on the sea and it has caused concern to many who would probably never be affected by any of the proposals. I hope that the cabinet secretary will accept that it would have been far preferable for the Scottish Government to have come forward with specific proposals to restrict particular practices in defined areas, and to have had a full and genuine consultation and evaluation process.

Finlay Carson: Will the member give way?

Katy Clark: I do not think that I will get the time back, so I apologise but I will not take the intervention.

The approach that the Scottish Government has taken has created maximum distress and anger.

The cabinet secretary rightly pointed out that we are in the middle of a climate and nature emergency, the backdrop for which is a significant decline in the marine environment and in many parts of the fishing industry and fishing stocks over many decades. A World Wildlife Fund report that was published in 2015 highlighted that, worldwide, the number of fish in the oceans had halved since 1970. The report also highlighted that populations of marine mammals and birds fell by

“49 per cent between 1970 and 2012”.

I do not think that anybody in the chamber refuses to accept the scale of the challenge that the damage to our oceans poses or the urgent need for action to help to regenerate marine ecosystems.

Many parts of Scotland, such as Ayrshire—where I come from—had significant fishing industries in the past, with coastal communities that relied on the industry for jobs and livelihoods. With the removal of the coastal limit on bottom trawling in 1984, we have seen over many years the significant damage that Government policies have done to Scotland’s sea bed habitats. There is no doubt that the use of high-impact, unsustainable fishing practices has taken a significant toll on our seas.

Those issues, however, including the use of high-impact fishing methods such as bottom trawling and dredging, remain unaddressed by the Scottish Government. More than 17,000 tonnes of fish are estimated to have been discarded by Scottish fishing boats in 2021 as a result of its policies, but the future catching policy is unlikely to address those issues. The Scottish Government has failed to come forward with a sustainable fishing policy.

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to conclude at this point, Ms Clark.

Katy Clark: We need marine protected areas and we need community buy-in in order to get them.

16:31

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am delighted to speak in this debate, which will be watched with interest and real concern in coastal communities across my Highlands and Islands region. I thank all the individuals and organisations who have provided

input to the debate, including the many constituents who have been in contact. They represent communities right across my region, and let me be clear that they are almost without exception strongly opposed to the Scottish Government’s plans.

It is important to listen to my constituents. One of them, Kate from Dingwall, recently said of the Government’s plans that

“no other EU country has implemented HPMA’s”

and that

“there is no evidence to demonstrate they actually achieve their aims”.

She argued that they would

“have a disproportionate socio-economic impact on our island and coastal communities”

and she added that she could not

“understand why anyone in Government ... thought it would be a good idea to take such a blanket approach”.

I hope that Kate from Dingwall will stand by those comments, which she made when campaigning for the SNP leadership, and that she will stand for our constituents in our coastal communities today by voting against the Scottish Government’s shameful attempt to water down the Scottish Conservative motion. Only by doing so will she send out a clear message that she opposes the SNP-Green proposals.

I hope that those of her SNP colleagues who represent coastal communities will do the same. They will know as well as I do the real anger and fear for the future that their Government’s plans have caused in those often fragile communities. Those members will know that, if they prioritise the deal with the Greens over the future of their communities, they will never be forgiven.

The plans have been rejected across the Highlands and Islands. Highland Council warned that they will stop vital economic activity in fragile remote and rural communities, and it referenced concerns that were raised with it that make comparisons between the proposals and the Highland clearances. Orkney Islands Council has said that it believes that the proposals

“could have adverse economic and social effects on Orkney’s communities”

and that it would

“strongly oppose the introduction of HPMA’s—by judicial means if necessary.”

Màiri McAllan: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I apologise to the cabinet secretary. I just do not have time.

Orkney's supply chain would be impacted, too. Julius Garrett of Garrett Bros said:

"the proposed HPMA's would be devastating, not just to the aquaculture and fisheries sector in Orkney, but also to the hundreds of jobs in the supply chain which depend on these businesses".

In Shetland, the Shetland Fishermen's Association called the Government's plans

"one of the most pressing threats facing all sectors of Shetland's fishing fleet, and therefore Shetland's entire seafood economy".

Daniel Lawson of the SFA said:

"Shetland's fishermen have proven in the past that they are not opposed to sensible conservation measures, recognising that strong fish stocks and healthy marine ecosystems are in their own interest—and in the wider interest of sustaining our fishing community. However, proposals for HPMA's are being driven by politics and pledges, and are devoid of any environmental imperative or scientific backing."

Ruth Henderson of Seafood Shetland said that the aquaculture sector is already highly regulated and she warned the Scottish Government against disregarding the sector's importance to jobs and the provision of nutritious food in

"pursuit of vacuous conservation headlines."

Tavish Scott, once of this place and now of Salmon Scotland, said that the HPMA proposals risk seeing jobs and investment going abroad. How does that fit with the cabinet secretary's claim that

"Our seas must remain a source of economic prosperity for the nation, especially in our remote, coastal and island communities"?

The Green-SNP coalition is pushing proposals that would decimate our fishing industry, its supply chain and our coastal communities. I therefore urge all MSPs, but particularly those SNP MSPs from the Highlands and Islands, to put their constituents first today and not the Government and its deal with the Greens. I urge them to reject the Scottish Government's amendment and back ours at decision time.

All those who care about our coastal communities and their future must come together and send a clear message to the Scottish Government that it has got this very wrong and it must scrap its plans for HPMA's.

16:35

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The fact that we have debated the same issue twice in this Parliament in the space of 36 hours says something significant.

As I indicated in the members' business debate last night, I have never before had to confront anything quite like the issue of highly protected

marine areas—a policy to which, to the best of my recollection, literally every single one of the many people in my island community who have offered me a view is strongly opposed. As I mentioned last night, even when I was showing a local primary school around the Parliament recently, the first thing that the kids wanted to ask me about was HPMA's. That is a measure of where things have reached—in the Western Isles, at any rate.

There is an undoubted need to address biodiversity loss in our seas, so I certainly do not make any case today for unrestricted fishing. I am also aware that the Tories, who had HPMA's in their own election manifesto, are playing political games with their motion today.

However, the problem with HPMA's is that, although they will affect only 10 per cent of our sea area, we will not know for two years which 10 per cent that will be. In the meantime, every coastal community in Scotland, particularly those on the west coast, not unreasonably fears that it will be them.

The prospect of a virtually total ban on all fishing activity in any one of our most fragile communities would, in fact, disproportionately affect some of the very forms of fishing that have the smallest environmental impacts. In areas that are fished by smaller vessels, such as many of those in my constituency, there is little realistic prospect of established fishing businesses—or, indeed, aquaculture or fish processing businesses—finding somewhere else nearby to go.

I know that the scenario that I describe is not what the Government seeks. The very encouraging tone struck by the First Minister and other ministers in recent weeks, indicating that HPMA's will not be imposed on unwilling communities, is very helpful and much welcomed locally. I also acknowledge that the Government's amendment goes some way towards recognising the fears that exist, although I regret that it almost certainly does not go far enough for my constituents.

I realise why the Government has to wait for scrutiny of the consultation responses before it can commit to action, but I can see locally what the Government must itself increasingly now suspect, which is the sheer depth of opposition in many island communities to the proposals as they stand.

After much thought, therefore, I am going to register those concerns in a very reluctant vote against the Government's amendment. In case anyone imagines that I do such things lightly, I say that I am someone who believes—quite unapologetically—that politics is a team sport. I am not one of those types who suffers from delusions that the lone brilliance of the tennis

player is often required or helpful on the political football pitch. However, I feel that I have little choice today but to apply some real pressure on behalf of my genuinely worried island constituents.

As the policy stands, HPMAs need to be rethought, and sooner rather than later. I welcome the encouraging way in which the minister has engaged with those concerns today.

16:39

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): All of us depend on a healthy natural world, because nature underpins life. It is not a nice-to-have; it is essential. However, species are being lost today even faster than in any of the previous five mass extinctions. Scientists say that ecosystems will collapse if we do not stop this biodiversity loss. We must act. It is that sense of urgency that led us to ensure that protections for our oceans were included in the Bute house agreement, because what happens in our seas is just as important as our attempts on land to replant, rewild and reverse the destructive impact that humans have had on our planet.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member give way?

Ariane Burgess: The Scottish Government does not stand alone in proposing HPMAs. Let me share some quotes from other supporters.

“Highly Protected Marine Areas are a vital step forward in enabling our ecosystems to thrive, increasing climate resilience and ensuring we have a healthy and productive marine environment for generations to come.”

That was the Tory environment secretary, Thérèse Coffey, earlier this year. But that is England, you may say—Scotland’s marine environment is clearly different. Well, here is the Tory manifesto on which Ms Hamilton and her colleagues stood in 2021:

“Our coastal communities can thrive and grow while we better protect our marine biology—the two are not mutually exclusive”.

Their manifesto commits to a pilot of highly protected marine areas.

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

Ariane Burgess: I do not have the time. I am sorry.

Here is Conservative MSP Peter Chapman, speaking in this very Parliament in 2020:

“There is no doubt that no-take zones would be beneficial in the long run ... I genuinely think that having more no-take zones would be good not only for the environment but for our fishermen.”—[*Official Report*, 15 December 2020; c 117.]

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I do not believe that I will get the time back. I apologise to the member.

HPMAs are a policy on which all parties were once united across this chamber. But the Tories cannot stand to see Greens in Government standing up for our values and delivering on our commitments to voters, so they have pulled a U-turn. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members!

Ariane Burgess: They have sacrificed highly protected marine areas for their highly protected Tory vote. The hypocrisy of their motion, which not only calls for the scrapping of their own manifesto commitment but claims that there is “no scientific basis” or “ecological justification” for marine protections that they, themselves, are rolling out in England is breathtaking.

No-take zones and strict marine protections are not new policies that the Scottish Government has thought up, but standard good practice for ocean protection and recovery, with well-established zones across the world in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the Mediterranean. The EU is currently passing a nature restoration law that would require at least 10 per cent of European waters to be strictly protected. [*Interruption.*] To claim that that continent-wide move somehow has no scientific backing takes Brexit-fuelled exceptionalism to an astonishing level. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members, we will not continue shouting across the chamber.

Ariane Burgess: We have just begun the process of community consultation. We must let that continue and let the genuine concerns of local communities be heard, not seek to undermine the real and credible scientific basis that underpins this policy. We need a process for communities to meaningfully input into wider spatial plans for their inshore waters. The Scottish Government is consulting with communities and trying to make this work for everyone with a stake in our seas. It is the Tory politicians who are playing politics, jumping on an oppositional bandwagon—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Burgess. I must ask you to conclude at this point.

Ariane Burgess: —stirring up fear and uncertainty, and undermining our serious attempts to tackle—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Burgess. You will conclude your remarks.

Ariane Burgess: —the climate and nature crises.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Burgess! Thank you.

16:43

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I highlight at the outset that, as colleagues will know, I do not represent a coastal constituency. I know that my colleagues who do are much closer to the issue and much more knowledgeable. Indeed, I caught many of the speeches in last night's members' business debate and found them very educational.

We can all agree that we need our fishing industry to be sustainable for the future. That is why we must take steps right now to facilitate the transition. The fishing sector in Scotland has often been the leading industry in our country's immensely successful food and drink trade. However, that very industry is at risk due to the climate crisis that we find ourselves in.

Our marine species are in the midst of a population decline. A report published last month by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change bluntly stated that smallholding farmers, pastoralists and fishing communities could be some of the most vulnerable groups when it comes to climate change.

As we have heard, HPMAs seek to protect marine environments, to increase sustainability and—as is seen in California, Malaysia and New Zealand—to provide economic benefits to regions that are close to them through increased stocks and ecotourism.

On the other side of that, I am aware that the proposals have been met with significant criticism and objection, as colleagues such as Alasdair Allan, Karen Adam, Fergus Ewing and Kate Forbes mentioned yesterday and today. I am very much a believer in representational politics, and I think that it is essential that we hear the concerns of communities when we make policy decisions. If depopulation and loss of livelihoods and culture are a possibility, as has been suggested, we must do all that we can to prevent those things, not least because further migration to the urban central belt will not help us to meet our climate targets either.

From an outside perspective, if I can call it that, it seems that we have two strong cases—one that is for HPMAs and one that urges a total rethink of the policy. Of course, it is the job of Governments across the world to navigate and balance competing rights and ideas, and, from what I can tell, that is exactly where we are, despite the attempts of the Tories, through their motion, to say otherwise.

Indeed, the Scottish Government's initial consultation on HPMAs closed only just over two weeks ago. As others have said, it is now necessary for the Government to take some time to review what I believe is a substantial number of

responses, which were collected over a four-month period.

The First Minister has made it abundantly clear that the Scottish Government will not steamroller through or impose on any community a policy that it is vehemently opposed to, which is why the Government has engaged with a wide range of fishing groups and many other environmental organisations. There have been public engagement sessions and the like, and, from what I have heard from colleagues, in yesterday's debate as well as in today's, the cabinet secretary has been very open to meeting communities to hear their concerns and has been given much credit for that.

The policy will get much attention, and it is important that the Scottish Government pushes forward with its environmental policy objectives while not leaving anyone behind and protecting our communities. Therefore, I encourage the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary to continue their robust engagement with stakeholders. I eagerly await the assessment of the consultation process. I would also like to hear a bit more about the thinking on swimming and water sports in relation to HPMAs, which is an issue that has not been touched on a great deal today.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): It is clear that members across the chamber are concerned about the fact that the Scottish Government's proposals for HPMAs are causing anxiety, stress and even much anger among all who are involved in the fishing sector. Does Fulton MacGregor agree that we need to seek concrete assurances from the cabinet secretaries that fishing communities will not be decimated as a result of the process that the Scottish Government is pursuing?

The Presiding Officer: You will have to conclude, Mr MacGregor.

Fulton MacGregor: I thank Emma Harper for her intervention. I agree with her. I should have mentioned her earlier, as I know that she is a great representative and advocate in this area.

I will conclude there.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the winding-up speeches.

16:47

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): During the course of the debate, reports have appeared in the media that the First Minister has confirmed that he is happy to reconsider publishing the details of the investigation into the allegations of bullying that were made against former minister Fergus Ewing. Previously, it was asserted by the

Government that that would not be in the public interest and that there would be a legal bar to it. I cannot help but have some suspicion that the First Minister's announcement is related to the concerns that Fergus Ewing expressed in last night's members' business debate on HPMA's. If that were the case, it would be absolutely despicable. *[Applause.]*

I know that the issue of HPMA's is one that raises high emotions. I see that in my constituency, and evidence of it was cited in last night's debate and has been referred to again today.

There have been some excellent contributions in the debate, but I will single out that of Alasdair Allan. I know that it cannot have been easy for him to give the speech that he gave in last night's debate, and it will have been even harder for him to give the speech that he gave passionately in this afternoon's debate. As someone who has rebelled against my party—some would argue that that is perhaps more commonplace in my party than it is in his—I know that it is not an easy thing to do. Politics is a team sport, and I do not doubt for a second that Dr Allan has come to his decision very reluctantly. The views that he expressed on behalf of his constituents are reflected in coastal and island communities around the country, and I hope that his constituents will consider the speech that he has given and the decisions that he has taken as an exemplification of the way in which we, as elected members, ought to be representing our constituents and constituencies.

The problems with the approach to HPMA's are many and various. The fact that there is a lack of evidence and a lack of clear purpose to the proposals has not helped, and the blunt and arbitrary nature of a 10 per cent designation by 2026 puts the tin hat on them for many people.

The cabinet secretary reflected earlier that there is a need for an emergency response in relation to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, but in an emergency response the Government will still, despite having to make difficult decisions, have to bring people with it. My concern is that the approach that the Government is taking has so alienated key stakeholders in the debate that the ability to reach agreement on the protections that might be needed will be immeasurably more difficult as a result.

Rhoda Grant mentioned the reference in the Government amendment to Lamlash Bay. I was interested in Katy Clark's insights on the bottom-up approach that was taken there and the buy-in that is absolutely needed. That is what we all wish to see, whether on MPAs or stricter protections that are put in place. If such protections are imposed from above, they have no prospect of

being accepted and, therefore, of delivering the objectives that we wish them to deliver.

This matter is certainly about the fishing industry, but it is also about depopulation and the viability of many communities. As I did last night, I urge the Government fundamentally to think again on the proposals and the damage that they are likely to cause to island and coastal communities.

16:52

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

This has been a vital debate for our Parliament and, particularly, for the communities that we serve. As many members have said, it will have been watched closely by constituents in our coastal communities.

The debate is also a taste and, indeed, a test of the very idea of a just transition during what we all recognise is a climate and nature emergency. The approach that we take to the idea of a just transition matters to all our constituents across the country. In Parliament today, all parties have been clear that the Government must do better; it must listen and it must bring people with it.

When we talk about ideas of transition, the SNP Government—rightly, I believe—continually rejects the Tory approach to economic change. The Tories abandoned our coal fields and industrial communities over generations. It must not and cannot be a case of Lerwick no more, Kirkwall no more, Stornoway no more, Ullapool no more, Arbroath no more.

Tragically, today's debate is just the latest example in a litany of policies from the Government that have failed our coastal and, in particular, our island communities, and which have resulted in ferries that do not materialise, a breakdown in crofting regulations, delays in extending reliable broadband provision, housing policies that push families out of villages, and a tokenistic commitment to the Gaelic language—which I will come back to. The Government's myopic focus on central belt policies has served our island and coastal communities poorly for 16 years.

Protection of Gaelic and our ancient cultural heritage cannot be achieved without protection of the communities that speak Gaelic. The language is a question of economy. The Government's systemic failure of our island communities in the west of Scotland is leading to depopulation and the destruction of livelihoods. That was made clear in a research paper entitled "The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community", which was published in 2020. It had this stark warning: the Gaelic speaker group does

“not have the demographic or societal resources to sustain a communal presence in the islands beyond the next 10 years”.

Although we undoubtedly face a climate crisis, the Government must also recognise the concurrent demographic crisis in the communities that are most impacted by the proposals that we are debating today.

That paper went on to highlight that on-going economic and demographic challenges in the Western Isles and other island groups exacerbate matters—

Màiri McAllan: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: I will finish this point, and then I will let the minister in.

The retention of young people and young families who are willing to contribute to community vitality will be central to any credible strategy of revitalisation.

Màiri McAllan: Michael Marra rightly sets out a swathe of concerns. Does he accept, however, that where those views are held, by consulting as broadly and as early as I have done, and by committing to closely considering the responses before deciding on steps forward, I have engaged with coastal communities as early and as meaningfully as I could.

Michael Marra: I say to the cabinet secretary—not quite gently, I have to say—that meaningful consultation is genuinely about listening and changing. That is the opportunity that the cabinet secretary has today: to accept the motion and the amendments that are in front of her, to listen to some of her back benchers and—crucially—to listen to the people in the affected communities, many of whom do not see a future for themselves and for their children and grandchildren in the places that they love, and which we are elected to serve.

The Government cannot persist in wilful ignorance of the realities of life in those communities. Islanders are making sure of that, and I have to say that Parliament has, today, made sure of that, too. The people have raised their voices through the consultation that the cabinet secretary talks about, and those voices are being heard in the debate through many of the speeches. Those voices cannot be ignored, so I ask the Government—please, please—to think again.

16:56

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I thank members for their contributions today. I am glad to have the opportunity to take part in and close the

debate in my role as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, given my responsibilities for fisheries, aquaculture and cross-Government work on islands. I care about those responsibilities and take them seriously. I appreciate the gravity of the concerns that have been raised by members on all sides of the chamber today, and I have listened intently to each of the contributions that members have made.

Like the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, Màiri McAllan, I represent a rural constituency and coastal communities within it and, like her, I care about what those communities are saying to us and what they are thinking, as I know that all those who have taken part in the debates today and yesterday, and those who took part in the meeting with Màiri McAllan and me, do too. All that is clear from the contributions that we have heard in the chamber this afternoon.

First, I welcome the widespread recognition, which I think we all share, of the importance of the Scottish fishing and aquaculture industries, as well as the importance of having healthy and vibrant coastal communities.

Scotland's marine environment is a national asset that we are privileged to have. The resources that it provides maintain and create jobs, and it brings prosperity to coastal and island locations and to the wider supply chain across Scotland.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): On that last point, what assessment has the Scottish Government made of the economic impact of a fishing ban on those very fishing and coastal communities?

Mairi Gougeon: I am sure that the member will be aware that we have published partial information in relation to that. With regard to the socioeconomic impacts and the island community impact assessments, we can fully complete those only when we have sites in mind so that we know what the exact impact will be and can look at it more fully. That is why the partial assessments were included in the papers.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Mairi Gougeon: Sorry—not at the moment. I need to make progress.

We need to recognise that our marine environment and resources are also under pressure like never before, and that bold and ambitious decision making is needed to ensure that we have that sustainable future.

Alongside other priorities that the Government is delivering, HPMA's will have a role in helping to preserve our natural capital, on which our marine

industries depend, and in safeguarding our marine environment for future generations to enjoy. That is essentially what this is about. The Government's priority is the long-term sustainability of our communities for our economic growth, supporting people to live and work in our rural areas and helping those communities to thrive. However, we are also wholly committed to protecting the marine resources that our fishing industry depends on, with consultation embedded at every stage and just transition at the heart of everything we do to give us the best chance of arriving at the right decisions for the right reasons.

That approach is the complete opposite of what has been delivered elsewhere, and we do not have to look far to find those examples. HPMAs are in the process of being introduced by the UK Government, which is implementing pilot sites in England. It is doing that in a top-down way with unclear goals and in inappropriate locations. It is important to remember that two of those sites have already been dropped because of rejection by those communities.

Unlike the Tories, this Government is not willing to base the future of marine protection in Scotland on pilots in English waters, or on the English fishing industry, when they are profoundly different from those in Scotland. Doing that would mean disregarding Scotland's unique interests.

It is also not clear from the debate today whether the Scottish Conservatives support their own manifesto commitments on HPMAs. Indeed, all the Opposition parties campaigned and were elected on manifestos that committed to pursuing a policy in that regard to enhance protection of our marine environment.

In her contribution, Katy Clark mentioned that we should have introduced specific proposals, but that approach would have been the opposite of the one that we are trying to take, which is to consult at as early a stage as possible on how we go about the process, which is really important.

I know that we all agree about the importance of fishing and aquaculture to our economy, which is why we have supported the industry with significant amounts of funding over previous years, such as the £9.7 million for fisheries science. We have negotiated £468 million-worth of quotas through our international fisheries negotiations, because we recognise the importance of the sector.

I am sure that we also all agree that we need to take action on the climate and nature emergencies, and I am sure that we would all agree that we need to do that in a way that, as the cabinet secretary described in her opening, is fair and just, and which leaves no one and no community behind.

The Scottish Government wants to work hand in glove with everyone who has a stake in this, including communities, fishers and our marine industries, to create the best possible future for our environment, our economy and those communities.

In closing, I want to reiterate some important points. First, we will not steam-roller through or impose on any community a policy that it is vehemently opposed to.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Mairi Gougeon: I am in my closing remarks.

Secondly, I emphasise that we are at the very start of the process, not the end. Thirdly, we have had a consultation and we will carefully look at all the responses that we have received. We will engage with industries and communities, and we are listening.

Let us agree to put people ahead of politics and help make the consultative and collaborative process to deliver that vision of a positive future for our environment, economy and communities as successful as it can be.

17:02

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The First Minister stated:

"My starting point will always be that we all want the best for Scotland and the people that we are so privileged to represent."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 2023; c 16.]

Those are powerful words, and I genuinely hope that he delivers on that promise, particularly in light of the response to the ill-conceived proposals to introduce highly protected marine areas, which have sparked an enormous backlash among fishing communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

They rightly fear that if the plans to increase limitations on inshore fishing and marine activities go ahead, they will devastate many coastal communities, in what is being described as the modern-day Highland clearances.

Jamie Halcro Johnston mentioned Kate from Dingwall, and her comments are remarkably similar to those of MSP Kate Forbes, who voiced deep concern during her leadership campaign, saying:

"I cannot understand why anyone in government, particularly when we are deliberately trying to stem depopulation in rural areas, thought it would be a good idea to take such a blanket approach."

She more recently suggested that the Government may have turned a corner. Sadly, from what I can see from the Government's amendment, the only

corner that it has turned is the corner that leads to a dead end for our fishing communities.

Rachael Hamilton: Could Finlay Carson enlighten me as to what “HMPA” means in the Government amendment?

Finlay Carson: It came to light that the Government amendment does not make sense. It might be helpful if the cabinet secretary explains what “HMPA” means.

It is obvious that changing direction is not unusual for the SNP, because it has had more changes of direction than the wind off the Mull of Galloway. One thing is certain: the SNP-Green alliance will not be satisfied until even guddling in rock pools is prohibited.

Karen Adam, Emma Harper and—before her pay rise—Jenni Minto have spoken about the enormous levels of concern that exist about the future of our fishing communities. Even primary school children are questioning Alasdair Allan about HPMAs.

The phrase “leave a light on” was once commonly used by the SNP-Green Government, but this time it is they who are looking to turn the lights off in our coastal communities.

Perhaps the most emphatic critic has been Fergus Ewing, who stated:

“The only mention of fishermen says that what they do is ‘destructive’”

and described the consultation document as

“a notice of execution.”—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2023, c 85, 86]

If these HPMAs go ahead, everyone involved in our seafood industry sector will have the spectre of redundancy hanging over them for many years to come.

Is the Scottish Government going to seriously jeopardise plans for a workable blue economy just to appease the Greens, who—make no mistake—are the extremists behind this highly contentious back-of-a-fag-packet policy commitment, who cannot even turn up in the chamber in any numbers to defend their policy? There is no robust policy analysis, no data underpinning the process, no indicators to measure the effect and, critically, no assessment of the impact on thousands of families in rural communities. Should we be surprised, given the central belt bias that we often see from the SNP-Green coalition? Only the Scottish Conservatives understand and stand up for our rural and coastal communities.

Seafood is a key part of Scotland’s transition to net zero, and we need policies that support sustainable, low-emission food production. That goes hand in hand with marine conservation. The seafood sector is highly supportive, and for

generations it has practised meaningful and well-founded conservation, but the HPMAs policy fails to appreciate that.

Màiri McAllan: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: Sorry, but I do not have time.

The proposals for HPMAs threaten balance, with the Government unable to provide any substance as to why it believes that they are needed.

As Elspeth Macdonald of the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation pointed out, the latest response from the Government is both misleading and hugely concerning. It takes as fact that HPMAs will happen—making a complete mockery of the consultation process. The Scottish Government is clearly interested only in discussing where HPMAs will be imposed, and not whether the case for them has been made.

Karen Adam has already sought and been given assurances from both the First Minister and the cabinet secretary that HPMAs would not be imposed on communities, but that language has now changed to refer to

“communities that are vehemently opposed.”

Does that mean protests outside Parliament or gunboats quelling troublesome fishing boats? If “vehemently” could be defined or measured, it would be evident whether the Government has moved the goalposts.

Perhaps Màiri McAllan can tell us what she plans to do if the consultation reinforces universal opposition to HPMAs from coastal communities the length and breadth of Scotland. What will happen to the Bute house agreement commitment to the Greens to designate 10 per cent of Scottish seas as HPMAs?

Furthermore, the Scottish Government made a misleading statement by claiming that the plans are in line with those of Europe: wrong—they are going to exceed them. The EU target is to protect 30 per cent of waters. That is similar to our existing MPAs, which allow some fishing and aim to strike the right balance between conservation and sustainable harvesting. Scotland already has almost 40 per cent of its waters under some protection, so now we are adding another 10 per cent that will be under a total fishing ban. I am quite sure that even the SNP treasurer can do that simple sum.

The cabinet secretary said that she cares and empathises, that she is a rural MSP and is deeply connected and listening, but she was not so deeply connected or willing to listen to stakeholders on the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill, when she effectively banned the legal activity

of rough shooting after watching a YouTube video. She also does not understand that muirburn does not burn peat, so how can we place any trust in her or her colleagues' judgment to get this right?

This shows all the signs of being another example of bad policy making. Acronyms seem to be a common thread of SNP-Green policy; from DRS to GRR and R100 to UNCRC. Now it is HPMAs. It should be TTFN—ta ta, for now—to this policy. It should be tagged “DNR”—do not resuscitate this dead-duck policy.

Our manifesto supports a pilot, but we did not support a blanket introduction of HPMAs.

We have already heard about the anti-HPMA protest song “The Clearances Again” by Skipinnish, which highlights the fears surrounding the serious economic and social devastation that the policy will bring:

“My song marks a fight for survival
A Mayday call we cry.
We will stand for the rights of our children.
We will not let our islands die.”

Alasdair Allan, Karen Adam, Emma Harper, Jenni Minto, Maree Todd and Emma Roddick, do not allow yourselves to be bullied by the whips. Stand strong for your communities. Where will you place their allegiance at decision time—with the extreme policies of the Greens or with the communities that you represent?

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Mr Carson.

Finlay Carson: If you let your communities down, they will be watching.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on reconsidering highly protected marine areas.

Urgent Question

17:10

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is an urgent question from Stephen Kerr.

Universities and Colleges (Funding)

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further explanation of the removal of the previously announced £46 million of funding for universities and colleges in Scotland.

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): We currently face the most difficult public spending environment since devolution and we have been clear that Government will have to make difficult choices to address new pressures in the education and skills portfolio since the 2023-24 budget announcement, which is the explanation for that decision. The £46 million of funding was not part of the core allocations for colleges and universities that the Scottish Funding Council published on 13 April. The funding was intended to enable strategic change in the sectors, additional funding for which will be reconsidered if and when the Government's financial position allows.

The decision returns funding for universities and colleges to the previously announced flat-cash settlement, in line with the resource spending review. Despite the current challenges and extreme pressures, we continue to spend nearly £2 billion on Scotland's colleges and universities, demonstrating our continued commitment to tertiary education.

I understand that this is disappointing news for colleges and universities and that it has added to the challenges that they face. We are therefore engaging with the Scottish Funding Council as well as the college and university sectors to ensure that institutions can achieve financial stability. I have also spoken directly today with Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland on the matter.

Stephen Kerr: This is the last thing that our country needs right now. Professor Dame Sally Mapstone from Universities Scotland says:

“It is ... dismaying when ... we are told that higher education is being deprioritised by the Scottish Government ... The Scottish Government ... cannot keep expecting to have world-class universities on the cheap.”

Shona Struthers, of Colleges Scotland, says of the clawback that it is “inexplicable”, adding:

“Ministers are relying on colleges to provide hundreds of thousands of students with training and education each

year, but with less and less funding. It simply can't be done any more."

I believe, from our time together on the Education, Children and Young People Committee, that the minister genuinely wants to support Scotland's colleges and universities, but I wonder whether he has had a personality transplant, because one of his first acts on his return as a minister is to put the equivalent of a dagger in the heart of Scottish higher and further education. What did they tell him about the real-world consequences of this drastic funding cut?

Graeme Dey: There is an element—or a portrayed element—of surprise and shock in Mr Kerr's presentation, which I do not understand, because the fact that the education portfolio has had to revisit its original budget planning can come as no surprise to Mr Kerr, nor to any other member of the Parliament's education committee.

Not only do we face the same pressures as other portfolio areas, brought about by the appalling mismanagement of the United Kingdom economy by the Tories, we provided local government with substantial financial assistance in order that it could reach a pay settlement with teachers—something that Opposition politicians, led by Stephen Kerr, demanded repeatedly that we assist in securing.

The then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills was crystal clear to Mr Kerr and other members of the education committee back in February that the funds involved would have to be found from within the portfolio budget, so either what we have here is an attack of selective amnesia on the part of Mr Kerr or—perish the thought—the very worst of Opposition politicking. Mr Kerr cannot have it both ways. The same money cannot be spent twice.

Stephen Kerr: I honestly think that the minister is better than the reply that he just gave. By the way, nobody told Ross Greer, another member of our committee, who was busy tweeting the day before how proud he was about the £46 million he had managed to procure for the sector from the Government, so there is something not quite joined up about all this. It was only on 15 December last year that John Swinney, with much fanfare, promised £46 million more for universities and colleges. He said:

"We must have a skills, training and research environment that enables our people and businesses to realise their potential."

Ironically, in response to an intervention that I put to the then Deputy First Minister, he said:

"I also point out to Mr Kerr that, as part of the budget—he did not welcome this bit—more resources have been allocated to universities and colleges, which obviously contribute to the skills opportunities and capacities of our country." —[*Official Report*, 15 December 2022; c 70, 93.]

John Swinney said that 20 weeks ago. What has changed? Was John Swinney wrong to allocate the money? How can Scotland's colleges and universities be expected to plan for the long term and to fulfil the vital function that is in their power to deliver for our country, when they are faced with what is a total betrayal?

Graeme Dey: Not only does Mr Kerr display selective amnesia, he shows an inability to listen to an answer. I was very clear about what has changed. I will go back to Mr Kerr's second point. He is right that this sets challenges for the colleges sector. I have spoken at length today with Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland. Next week, I will be meeting Colleges Scotland's chief executive and, separately, the principals and chairs and Universities Scotland. There will be considerable dialogue about how we can collectively address what I acknowledge are the challenges that this regrettable decision has created for them.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The Government has thrown further and higher education into chaos by continually failing to provide answers on funding. It has given at least three different explanations to Scottish Labour about what that funding could have been used for, including supporting the transition to a financially sustainable system, supporting skills, training and research and future proofing the sector. The Government identified those challenges. Can the minister tell us how he expects the sector to address any of those challenges in the absence of the funding that it was promised?

Graeme Dey: The funding was intended to support the transition of those sectors to a more sustainable footing. Of course, the decision makes that more difficult, which is why I am engaging directly with the sector to identify ways of moving forward. I say gently to Pam Duncan-Glancy that if, God forbid, Labour ever found itself in government, it would be faced with making difficult financial decisions such as this one—although perhaps not, because if reports are to be believed, Labour favours tuition fees, although I expect that the students of Scotland would have something to say about that.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): The minister has already spoken about the difficult financial environment that we have been experiencing since devolution in 1999, with multiple shared challenges and demands on the public purse. Therefore, in relation to this decision, can the minister advise what analysis the Scottish Government has done in order to quantify the impact of external factors in the scenario, including Brexit and the United Kingdom Government's 2022 mini-budget? [*Interruption.*]

What effect has that had on financing our colleges and universities?

Graeme Dey: I hear the Conservatives groaning—how predictable. There is no doubt that Scotland continues to feel the effects of Brexit and the impact of the UK Government’s spending decisions. I spent much of this week with the university sector and I hear the continuing pain that it is suffering as a result of Brexit. Scotland is losing out on hundreds of millions of pounds in EU funding due to Brexit, including losing access to the £26 billion Erasmus+ programme because of the UK Government’s decision not to participate in it. Although the Scottish Government is doing what it can with its limited powers to ensure that we provide the services that people need, the UK Government could do far more to ease the burden that is affecting so many.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Last week, the head of Universities Scotland described the Scottish National Party Government’s university policy as “managed decline”. In response, the minister said that he was listening to universities and colleges. This week, he cut £46 million from the budget. Is he sure that he was listening? Does he think that those cuts will end that managed decline?

Graeme Dey: Once again, as with Stephen Kerr, Willie Rennie is displaying selective amnesia, because he is also a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. He sat at the committee and heard Shirley-Anne Somerville explain that the funding for the teachers’ pay settlement would have to be found within the education budget. I do not know from where he thought that was going to come.

To go back to Willie Rennie’s point about engagement and listening to the universities, I will, as I said, meet the relevant people in the sectors next week. I am open minded about any suggestions that the college and university sectors have about flexibility. As Willie Rennie knows, because we have talked about this in the committee in recent months, any suggestions that they have will be listened to.

Business Motion

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is S6M-08795, 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 9 May 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by The Coronation of King Charles III and The Queen

followed by Ministerial Statement: Europe Day 2023 – The Scottish Government’s Commitment to Remain Aligned with EU Laws

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Transforming Justice in Scotland – Person-centred and Trauma-informed Approaches for Victims and Witnesses

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Wednesday 10 May 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Thursday 11 May 2023

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	similar subject matter or” are inserted.—[George Adam]
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice	<i>Motion agreed to.</i>
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 1 Debate: Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill	
<i>followed by</i>	Financial Resolution: Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill	
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions	
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
5.00 pm	Decision Time	
Tuesday 16 May 2023		
2.00 pm	Time for Reflection	
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)	
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business	
<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements	
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions	
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
5.00 pm	Decision Time	
<i>followed by</i>	Members’ Business	
Wednesday 17 May 2023		
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; Justice and Home Affairs	
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Labour Party Business	
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions	
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)	
5.10 pm	Decision Time	
<i>followed by</i>	Members’ Business	
Thursday 18 May 2023		
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
11.40 am	General Questions	
12.00 pm	First Minister’s Questions	
<i>followed by</i>	Members’ Business	
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills	
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business	
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions	
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	
5.00 pm	Decision Time	

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 8 May 2023, 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

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam to move motions S6M-08796, on a committee substitute, and S6M-08797, on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Keith Brown be appointed to replace Fergus Ewing as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

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

Decision Time

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-08764.2, in the name of George Adam, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08764, in the name of Douglas Ross, on transparency of Scotland's governing party, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

17:21

Meeting suspended.

17:24

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S6M-08764.2, in the name of George Adam. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)

Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08764.2, in the name of George Adam, is: For 67, Against 48, Abstentions 4.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-08764.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08764, in the name of Douglas Ross, on transparency of Scotland's governing party, 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)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)

McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08764.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, is: For 52, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08764, in the name of Douglas Ross, on transparency of Scotland's governing party, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)

McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08764, in the name of Douglas Ross, on transparency of Scotland's governing party, as amended, is: For 67, Against 48, Abstentions 4.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that good governance and transparency are matters of the utmost importance; believes that democracy is best served when all political parties are transparent on their party membership and sources of income; recognises the improvements made to the transparency and openness of the Scottish budget process as a result of cooperation between the Scottish Government and parliamentary committees; welcomes the upcoming review of the Chief Executive Pay Framework and encourages all parties to clearly lay out their position on public sector pay policy ahead of the annual budget process; calls on all political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament to refuse and return any donations from unincorporated associations that do not publish their sources of funding in full; believes that all political parties should refuse to nominate their donors for any form of honour bestowed by the Crown, including membership of the House of Lords; recognises that the only parties represented in the Scottish Parliament to have published up-to-date membership numbers are the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party, and calls on the leaders of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Scottish Labour Party and Scottish Liberal Democrats, in the interests of democracy and transparency, to publish their membership numbers as a matter of urgency.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-08766.3, in the name of Màiri McAllan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08766, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on reconsidering highly protected marine areas, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08766.3, in the name of Màiri McAllan, is: For 61, Against 55, Abstentions 3.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-08766.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08766, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on reconsidering highly protected marine areas, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-08766.2, in the name of

Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08766, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on reconsidering highly protected marine areas, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08766, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on reconsidering highly protected marine areas, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)

Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08766, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on reconsidering highly protected marine areas, as amended, is: For 62, Against 53, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament values the £560 million that fishing contributes to Scotland's economy and the communities that rely on that industry; recognises fish and shellfish as Scotland's climate-smart food; further recognises that the fishing industry has worked constructively with the Scottish Government for many years on the network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) covering 37% of Scotland's seas; notes that Scotland is in the midst of a climate and nature crisis and that decision-makers must be prepared to take action commensurate with the scale of that challenge, including enhanced marine protection, through a fair and just transition; believes that Scotland's seas must remain a source of economic prosperity for the nation, especially in remote, coastal and island communities; recognises the considerable strength of feeling on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs); highlights that no sites have been selected, and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to work with island and coastal communities, including the fishing sector, throughout the site selection process to ensure that their views are listened to and understood; notes the Scottish Government's commitment that it will not impose HMPAs on communities that are vehemently opposed to them; understands that comparable levels of high protection are found internationally, and that Scotland's proposals are similar to the EU's commitment; notes the clear evidence base that shows the positive impact that enhanced marine protection makes, once in place, on recovering ecosystems and supporting a sustainable fishery sector; believes that the experience of the Lamlash Bay no-take zone has shown the benefits for both the marine environment and the people who rely on it; remains committed to supporting Scotland's fishing sector, which plays such a key role in contributing to the country's economic prosperity, especially in remote, rural and island communities; believes that the real threat to the Scottish fishing industry is the continuing adverse impacts of Brexit and the UK Government's immigration policies; urges the Scottish Government to work with fishing communities and economies that have safeguarded the seas for generations to support and empower them to protect these fishing grounds for future generations, and to ensure that appropriate exclusions are put in place to benefit local communities and economies without being to the detriment of the marine environment; recalls the passing of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, which allows for the 'island proofing' of legislation, meaning that the needs of island communities must be taken into consideration when creating policy or legislation, and believes that this approach must be followed in relation to Highly Protected Marine Areas.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on the two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

As no member objects, the final question is, that motion S6M-08796, on a committee substitute, and S6M-08797, on designation of a lead committee, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Keith Brown be

appointed to replace Fergus Ewing as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

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

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Historic Environment Scotland (Site Closures)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07369, in the name of Sharon Dowey, on the impact of long-term closures to historic sites managed by Historic Environment Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the importance of historic sites to communities across the South Scotland region, and the rest of Scotland; believes that any long-term closures to sites managed by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) could have a severe impact for Scotland's tourism industry, and a devastating impact on any communities and businesses that rely on these attractions being fully open; understands that the heritage sector is a vital part of Scotland's tourism industry, and considers that it is responsible for attracting millions of visitors from around the world to Scotland each year; further understands that 60 historical sites managed by HES are closed, and that the inspection programme is expected to conclude in April 2024; recognises what it sees as the need to address the shortage of skilled labourers, such as stonemasons; notes the calls on the Scottish Government to make additional funding available to accelerate the reopening of closed sites, and further notes the view that it is vital that all efforts are made to secure the long-term viability of Scotland's historic sites.

17:36

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this debate to the chamber, and I thank all the members who supported the motion.

We are a nation of proud Scots: we are proud of our culture, our history and our historic sites. We attract millions of visitors from all around the world to Scotland each year. They come to see our beautiful scenery; meet our friendly, welcoming people; and visit our castles, monuments and heritage sites. Tourism is huge for our economy. It gives a boost not only to the sites themselves but to local businesses, hotels, restaurants, shops and communities, where employment relies on those attractions being fully open. For local communities, however, they are much more than just tourist attractions—they are often the hub of a lot of activities and social gatherings.

In February 2022, I made my first visit to Dundonald castle, where I met the general manager, Dr Kirsteen Croll, and her colleagues from Friends of Dundonald Castle, which is the charity that looks after it. I was not able to see inside the castle at the time of my visit, as it was closed due to high-level masonry inspections at the site. However, I heard all about the plans for the castle and the visitor centre; all the activities

that could take place, the events that could be organised, and the visitors that the castle could attract, not only from this country but from around the world; and the involvement of the local community and the lifeline that that gave to those who were involved. There was one sticking point, however—all that could happen only if the castle was open. For Kirsteen and her team, all their future hopes and plans were centred on that.

Kirsteen and her team have always had a good relationship with Historic Environment Scotland. At the time of my visit, the first phase of an inspection programme that is expected to be completed by April 2024 was being conducted. That was proving not to be the easiest of tasks. As many of the properties were built for defensive purposes, they have thick walls and narrow doorways, which makes it a challenge to get access with modern machinery. The inspections required careful planning, with some areas able to be accessed only from above, by harness and a rope. The availability of stonemasons was also having an impact on the delivery of repairs.

HES recently hosted a drop-in session in the Parliament, in which it engaged with a number of MSPs and was able to discuss how it was progressing with sites in each area. I also recently met HES on site at Crossraguel abbey, just outside Maybole—the ancient capital of Carrick, as my dad always reminded me. Although the abbey still has Heras fencing around it, the team was discussing how it could safely move the fencing to allow more access and let visitors see more of the site. It was also planning to put story boards in the fencing to allow the story of the abbey to be told. I take this opportunity to thank Craig, Paul and the rest of the team for taking the time to show me around and explain what they were doing; it was very much appreciated.

Since I lodged the motion, the figure of 60 sites closed has now reduced to 47. Although that reduction is welcome, the number of closed sites is still too high. HES has said that it is making every effort to safely reopen sites as quickly as possible, but the Government needs to ensure that it engages with the agency and gives it all the support that it needs.

HES continues to deliver traditional skills training at its two stonemasonry training centres, in Stirling and Elgin, as well as through its craft fellowship programme. The agency works with the Construction Industry Training Board, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland to create a sustainable framework of qualifications and apprenticeships. However, the sector has faced a shortage of skilled craftspeople, including stonemasons, for many years now, and the

funding for training must be available to allow the training places to be taken up.

The motion

“calls on the Scottish Government to make additional funding available to accelerate the reopening of closed sites”.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government has now increased funding for HES. I encourage both the agency and the Scottish Government to ensure that the money is indeed being used to help to open closed sites as quickly as possible.

In March this year, I visited Dundonald castle for the second time. There is still some scaffolding in place for repairs that have yet to be completed, but the castle is open, and it is now a hive of activity. It is now open every day, from 10 am to 5 pm, and this time, I was able to go inside. The 14th century hilltop fortified castle was once home to the Scots king Robert II, grandson of Robert the Bruce, and it offers spectacular views across the Ayrshire countryside. When I first walked inside and saw the impressive barrel-vaulted ceilings, my first word was, “Wow!” I then understood why the community was so passionate about its castle.

On the day that I visited, there was a school visit from Glasgow. The kids had an educational talk in the visitor centre, a tour of the castle and then a guided walk in the grounds, which all tied in with the curriculum. Alongside educational talks, the castle hosts theatre productions, movie nights, weddings and the Dundonald games. It is also home to a number of groups, including a writers group, a young walking group, Ayrshire’s Young Archaeologists’ Club, the crazy castle kids group and a Scrabble group, which I am told is diverse and very competitive.

By hosting those groups and arranging visits from schools and care homes, those sites provide cosy spaces, education hubs and placement and volunteering opportunities—they are so much more than just a visitor attraction. Although visitor numbers are not back to pre-Covid levels, the fact that the castle is now open makes life much easier. It is now seeing the return of international tourists, with the visitor book showing visits from tourists from Lithuania, Poland, Italy, the United States, New Zealand and Canada, to name but a few countries.

We need to ensure that all efforts are made to secure the long-term viability of Scotland’s historic sites, and reopening them gives them a starting chance.

I will finish with something that Kirsteen Croll said to me on my first visit to Dundonald castle. It stuck with me, and it sums up how we feel about our heritage. She said:

“At Dundonald, the visitor centre is the heart of the community, but the Castle is its soul.”

17:44

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): I congratulate the previous speaker on bringing the debate to the chamber. The benefits of having heritage and historic sites of national importance in your home town are endless. The passion and pride in our sense of place is evident, as Sharon Dowe has just set out in relation to Dundonald. Our heritage sites not only bring in tourists from around the globe and support our local economy, but provide us with a sense of place: of who we are and where we have come from.

Sites such as Linlithgow palace, in my constituency, offer a direct connection to our local history, offering opportunities to learn and engage with the worlds and the stories of the past. Linlithgow palace, which is the birthplace of Mary, Queen of Scots, was closed at the beginning of lockdown, and it remained closed following investigations by HES into the fabric of the high-level masonry in May 2021. The scaffolding on the north range predated all of that.

In March last year, I personally requested a site visit to the palace, which I attended with the then culture minister. I was taken up the scaffolding on the north side of the palace to see the range of damage and decay that had been found as a result of decades of adverse weather. Wetter climates have had their impact on our ruins, advancing that ruination further. The damage meant that the necessary repairs that were required on public safety grounds were substantial.

There has, on and off, for decades, been a debate in the town about having a glass roof on the palace to allow more functionality, and in recognition that the continuing ruination and decay of the stonework needs to be arrested somehow and that other countries have taken more radical approaches such as glassing historic buildings. Had we done so in years gone by, we would perhaps have pre-empted the current situation.

We need to look nationally at a strategic approach to the problem, which at least is being addressed in Scotland. Historic England and others will also have to face up to it. Planned management of our ruins of sites and buildings, which themselves evolved in different ways between and within different centuries, needs to be addressed and faced up to.

The closure of such an important site as Linlithgow palace has had a massive impact on the town. The connection between the palace, the town and the local community is significant. Local business, heritage sites and national tourism are

intertwined. When heritage sites close, therefore, streets lose footfall, businesses lose custom and communities lose their sense of place.

Last year, it was revealed that visitor numbers to Linlithgow palace had soared from 66,500 in 2013 to 94,718 in 2018, which shows the increasing volume of visitors to Linlithgow before lockdown. As the palace is one of the few closed sites that was previously fully staffed, and as it had the largest number of visitors of those sites that were closed, the loss of income for Historic Environment Scotland has been felt in the town also.

As the local MSP, I have previously convened meetings between Historic Environment Scotland and local community groups to ensure that visitors who came to the palace would linger longer in Linlithgow. I was pleased to hear that HES had announced a partial reopening of Linlithgow palace, which was planned for this summer, although I understand that that has now been delayed as a result of the shocking act of vandalism on the delicate fountain masonry and walls and flagstones of the palace.

That sort of action on a national monument is heritage crime and must be treated very seriously. It is worth highlighting that irresponsible acts such as vandalism often take place in closed-off spaces, in areas where the perpetrators believe that they are less likely to be caught. HES must consider that factor when it is considering closures and reopening.

It is vital that Linlithgow palace, which is a site of national importance and the heart of a local community, can open in full as soon as it is safe to do so. The people of Linlithgow and beyond need their palace, and the palace needs its people.

17:48

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Sharon Dowey on securing the debate, and I associate myself with the words that she expressed. I also associate myself with the words of Fiona Hyslop; I very much agree with her in hoping, as she just expressed, that Linlithgow palace will be open to visitors again soon.

In this country, we have a wonderful history, from the wars of independence and the Jacobite rebellions to being at the forefront of the industrial revolution and the enlightenment, and the defence and liberation of the free world during the world wars. This is our story, and we can take pride in retelling that story from whichever perspective we choose to tell it. I am a Scottish unionist, and I believe that it is very important that we celebrate Scotland's history, whether it is before or after the act of union of 1707, the 316th anniversary of which was just earlier this week.

If I may express my personal feelings—I have said this before and I will take this opportunity to say it again—I find it frustrating in Scottish politics that there are some people, although not necessarily in this Parliament, who would consign to the margins of the Scottish political spectrum those of us who believe in being Scottish and British, in the sense that they say that we are not true Scots. I am a true Scot. I love Scotland and I take a great deal of pride in our nation and draw a great deal of passion from it. That combination of Scottishness and Britishness is an enhancement. I think that I heard the former First Minister say last summer that she identified as both Scottish and British, and I think that that is a very welcome thing to hear members of the Scottish National Party say, because it will blunt some of the anger and vile hatred that some of us experience.

Whether one believes, as I do, that Scotland is empowered by being in the union or whether one does not, it is important that members of this Parliament are perturbed by and interested in the condition of Scotland's historic sites—the symbols of Scotland's cultural independence. All of us who believe in Scotland's nationhood would like priority to be given to the accessibility and safeguarding of the key sites that shape our Scottish identity. I ask Angus Robertson to explain to Parliament fully why it is that, after so long, Arbroath abbey—the site of one of the proud moments of Scotland's emergence of a nation with an identity: the signing in 1320 of the declaration of Arbroath, a document of worldwide importance—is still closed. We have heard Fiona Hyslop talk about Linlithgow palace, and it is important that we receive reassurances from Angus Robertson that it will open soon. What is the delay? When can we expect that magnificent site—the birthplace of Mary, Queen of Scots—to reopen?

Those are just two of the sites managed by Historic Environment Scotland that are currently closed—as Sharon Dowey said earlier, there are 47 of them. For a nation to have a greater sense of its own identity, the places where that identity was forged and continues to be shaped must be accessible to all of us. We must learn lessons from what has happened to some of these historic sites in terms of their upkeep and maintenance. Deep down, we must resolve, collectively, to support the Scottish Government to ensure that there are appropriate levels of investment and care in relation to those sites of historic Scottish heritage.

People who love Scotland feel compelled, as I do, to preserve those things that make us the nation that we are, and these historic sites are one of those things.

I am a Scottish Conservative; I am interested in conserving. I hope that we hear from Angus Robertson exactly the steps that will be taken to

open up all of these historic sites, which have been closed for too long.

17:53

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Sharon Dowey for bringing this important issue to the chamber.

Earlier this year, I visited Linlithgow palace and met some of the Historic Environment Scotland team who work there. They told me about the restoration and preservation work that had been undertaken on the palace. I learned of the unique history of the palace and the important work that Historic Environment Scotland was doing to keep that history alive. Our historic environment is on the front line of climate change and some of our historic sites need specialised restoration and repair work. During my visit to Linlithgow palace, I learned about the work that needs to take place there, which requires skilled labourers and stonemasons to carry out.

I agree with the statement in Sharon Dowey's motion that the Scottish Government must do more to ensure that there is not a shortage of skilled labourers who are able to do the necessary work. A modern apprenticeship in stonemasonry must be funded and made more readily available. College and further education courses should be fully funded to enable them to teach these important skills. Providing skills to labourers who can help to restore our historic sites is crucial to ensuring that we can reopen some of them.

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government took a serious look at stonemasonry and helped to develop the stonemasonry facility at Forth Valley College, which was referred to earlier. At one point, the number of apprenticeships in stonemasonry had doubled. That commitment is there, and I am sure that the cabinet secretary can tell us what the current situation is when he closes the debate.

Foysoyl Choudhury: It is good to hear that the Scottish Government is looking into that, and I also look forward to hearing an update on it.

Scotland's historic environment provides huge support to Scotland's tourism industry. Statistics show that, in 2019, the sector generated £4.4 billion, as well as supporting 68,000 full-time jobs. The towns and businesses around these historic sites benefit greatly from the increased footfall from tourists and visitors. Many businesses in areas such as Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders greatly rely on the revenue from tourism. However, at the beginning of 2023, those areas had some of the highest reported percentages of site closures or restricted access.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, we must ensure that our historic sites are able to remain open and to keep supporting local businesses and tourism in Scotland. That is not possible if 60 of them remain closed to the public. The Scottish Government's most recent budget predicted an increase in commercial revenue for HES in the coming year. How will that happen if many of those important historic sites remain closed?

Scotland's historic environment plays an important role in keeping Scotland's culture alive. It tells a story of Scotland's past and our cultural heritage. It supports the economy and thousands of jobs. The Covid-19 pandemic hit the arts and culture sector hard and investment and funding is still needed to help to rescue it. If many of those historic sites remain closed in the coming months, we cannot hope to revive that important part of our culture.

17:58

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Sharon Dowey on securing the debate, and I have listened with great interest to members' speeches. It is clear from them that Historic Environment Scotland's properties are an important part of our history, our heritage and our culture, but that they also have a major economic role to play and draw hundreds of thousands of visitors to Scotland—and to certain localities in particular—with people coming from the rest of the United Kingdom and all around the world. Therefore, it is important that we do what we can to preserve them and ensure that they stay open.

We have already heard about the negative impact of the closures that have taken place over the past few years. At first, those closures were caused by Covid but then, following the pandemic, when we hoped that they would reopen, a range of issues with the fabric of the buildings was identified. On a visit to Dunkeld cathedral, I saw for myself how the masonry was crumbling due to the impact of weather—as the weather gets wetter, the stonework is crumbling to the point at which it poses a real risk to visitors. Sadly, Historic Environment Scotland has had no alternative but to close those properties until they can be properly restored, and we should not underestimate the cost and the time that that will take, in many cases.

However, there is good news. Doune castle in my region reopened last year after some remedial works. Aberdour castle in Fife, which is a lovely property and well worth a visit, reopened in April for the season. I well remember visiting Aberdour castle a few years ago and watching Colonel Hugh Fraser's dragoons—he is not in any way related as far as I know—which is a re-enactment society that re-enacts a battle from the 17th century. I

watched that with great interest, and when I was doing research for my book about the Marquis of Montrose and the Marquis of Argyll, watching Colonel Hugh Fraser's dragoons with their pike pack was incredibly helpful in helping me to understand how battles at the time of the Scottish civil wars would have been conducted.

I said earlier that I have visited Dunkeld cathedral. Last summer, I was contacted by a number of constituents who were concerned that Dunkeld cathedral and its grounds were closed to the public. Dunkeld is quite an unusual property because the choir and the east end of the property are still in use by an active Church of Scotland congregation as a place of worship. However, the west end of the property—the nave—is ruined; it has no roof and is in the care of Historic Environment Scotland. The whole building has been affected by crumbling masonry, which is why it was closed, although church services could still take place under a canopy over the entrance. It also meant that the grounds down by the River Tay, which are very attractive and popular with visitors, were also closed. Following contact from me and work that was done by the kirk session, I am pleased that the grounds can be reopened so people can at least visit them, although safety fencing has had to be put up around the nave of the cathedral to prevent people from getting too close and putting themselves at risk from falling masonry.

It is terribly sad to see such a building, which should be open and accessible to visitors, closed because of the risks. I saw for myself the work that HES has done to restore it. However, we should not underestimate how much that will cost, nor should we underestimate the difficulties of getting the work done because of the shortage of stonemasons, as other members have talked about. Stonemasons are in high demand in our country and right across Europe; it is difficult to recruit them. HES is doing good work in trying to recruit apprentices by making it an attractive career option, but there is a lot more work to be done.

The constitution secretary knows that this is a vital issue for Scotland and that funding will be required to support HES, which also requires funding to allow apprentices to train to be stonemasons. It is vital to all our communities across Scotland that these historic monuments are put in a condition that means that they can not only last for future generations but be enjoyed by locals and visitors as an important part of the visitor economy that we have heard about.

18:03

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution,
External Affairs and Culture (Angus**

Robertson): I begin by extending my warm thanks to Sharon Dowe for providing the opportunity to highlight and discuss the importance of protecting the historic environment for the benefit of everybody in Scotland and people who travel to this country wishing to enjoy it. I also underscore my appreciation for the entirely positive tone and approach from right across the parties to the challenge that our historic environment faces.

In addition to Sharon Dowe, we heard from Fiona Hyslop, who has been a consistently strong advocate for Linlithgow palace, and her call was echoed by Stephen Kerr. We heard from Foyso Choudhury and Murdo Fraser, who said, among many other things, how important it is to understand the scale of the issues that our historic environment faces and the challenge that that poses, given that we are a country full of castles, abbeys and other historic sites that are being challenged by the 21st century environment.

The motion mentions the important benefits that the historic environment sector delivers, and the Scottish Government very much agrees with that. Those benefits feature heavily in the revised strategy for Scotland's historic environment, "Our Past, Our Future". The strategy focuses on priorities that have been identified through extensive consultation with the sector and the people of Scotland. Those priorities include the core themes of

"Delivering the transition to net zero"

in response to climate change,

"Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places"

and "Building a wellbeing economy", all of which align with Scottish Government ambitions. I therefore commend the strategy to all members who have taken part in the debate or who have been in the chamber throughout it. The strategy was published on 28 April, and I look forward to its formal launch in June.

Regarding the closure of historic sites, I appreciate the great frustration that Sharon Dowe, other members across the chamber and the wider public feel when they see some of our historic properties with access restrictions. I think that we all understand that. However, it is vital that we recognise the reasons for those restrictions, which we have heard about, because the health and safety of visitors, Historic Environment Scotland staff and our contractors, and the associated challenges, must be of paramount importance. Therefore, safety must remain our top priority while the inspection programme progresses and while work to repair our historic properties takes place.

I recognise that Historic Environment Scotland acted responsibly with the speed at which access

was restricted at affected sites when it became aware of significant high-level masonry concerns. Those concerns make it clear that the increasing effects of climate change are having a marked effect on our built environment. Historical structures were not designed or built to withstand the current levels of precipitation or the fluctuation in temperatures that have now become commonplace. Those stresses are felt not only on the original fabric of our historic buildings but on repair work, which has exacerbated weaknesses in our historic high-level masonry.

The situation is not unique to Scotland because, as we know, climate change is having an impact across the world. Although the situation is far from ideal, I am heartened that Scotland's lead public body for the environment, Historic Environment Scotland—known by many of us as HES—quickly put in place a prioritised inspection programme to assess our historic properties. That programme of work has allowed sites deemed safe to reopen as soon as possible—Sharon Dowe outlined the number that were able to open, which I welcome—or partial access to be provided when it is safe for that to happen.

It is important to note that many of the properties in care are routinely closed during the winter months, and Historic Environment Scotland recently announced the reopening of more than 20 sites as part of its seasonal reopenings. I think that we can all welcome that. It has also fully reopened or increased access at more than 40 sites as part of the high-level masonry inspection programme.

I am pleased that Sharon Dowe has had the opportunity to visit Crossraguel abbey, which is affected by high-level masonry issues, to witness at first hand the work that is being undertaken by Historic Environment Scotland. I encourage other members with affected properties in their constituency or region to take up Historic Environment Scotland's offer for site visits in order to learn more about the challenges at individual properties.

Stephen Kerr: I make a plea to the cabinet secretary to use his good office to intervene in relation to the excellent stonemasonry coursework that is done at Forth Valley College, which has been highlighted by a number of members and which I have seen myself—it is absolutely superb. Regardless of the current flux in the finance arrangements for colleges, will the cabinet secretary intervene to ensure that that particular course, given its vital importance to the preservation of our historic sites, will be properly funded and protected?

Angus Robertson: I will certainly be raising the issues that Stephen Kerr has raised with my colleague the Minister for Culture, Europe and

International Development, who takes the lead on that matter within the portfolio.

Undoubtedly, substantial resources are required to undertake the high-level masonry inspection programme and subsequent conservation work. We are providing HES with unprecedented levels of funding: £72.7 million in 2023-24 to maintain Scotland's heritage and historic environment. That is an 82.6 per cent increase from the £39.8 million of support that it received in 2019-20, before the impact of the pandemic.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I am running out of time, but I will take a very brief intervention.

Fiona Hyslop: It is important to reflect on the issues around lost income. Clearly, before the pandemic, Historic Environment Scotland had a very buoyant income, not least from Linlithgow palace, so the cabinet secretary might want to give that perspective when presenting such figures.

Angus Robertson: Indeed. Taken with the commercial income of HES, which is showing strong signs of recovery, the current funding means that HES's operating budget for this financial year is £114.5 million, which is 22.4 per cent higher than it was before the pandemic.

I draw members' attention to the increase in visitors to the top-five visited properties in 2021-22. Visitor numbers to all those increased by more than 300 per cent. Glasgow cathedral was visited by seven times more people than it was in 2020-21.

I will briefly take the opportunity to encourage everybody in the chamber and anyone who is watching the debate to join Historic Environment Scotland, which is an extremely effective way of supporting the organisation.

I have been asked specifically about skills training, which is extremely important. A short-life working group has been established with a diverse membership to investigate the skills gaps and the demand for stonemasons. The working group will report shortly, and I will ensure that members are updated on its work.

However, it is important to point out that the shortage of skilled craftspeople has not yet had an impact on the high-level masonry inspection programme, as there are other more relevant restricting issues, as Sharon Dowe correctly highlighted. Those issues include the availability of the limited stock of specialist heavy plant hire to undertake high-level work; the remote location of many sites, which causes access issues for equipment; and the protection of certain species of nesting birds, badgers and bats, which delays

some inspections. Therefore, there is a variety of complications for Historic Environment Scotland.

The Scottish Government remains committed to the protection and conservation of our historic environment and is proud to champion the role that it plays, not only as a defining waypoint in our past but in presenting opportunities to build a fairer and more sustainable future for Scotland.

I again thank Sharon Dowey for bringing the debate to the chamber and other members for their interest in and support for the historic environment. I welcome the views that have been expressed in the debate, which have been helpful in raising the profile of these important issues. I will forward the points raised today to the Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development to inform her future discussions with Historic Environment Scotland regarding this vital issue.

Meeting closed at 18:12.

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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