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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 25 March 2025

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Right Rev Dr Shaw James Paterson, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

The Right Rev Dr Shaw James Paterson (Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland): Presiding Officer, thank you for the invitation to speak and lead this brief time of reflection. I bring with me the good news and the good wishes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and also a word of thanks for the way that you support the faith communities and so many other groups, charities and organisations around the country—it is much appreciated.

Many of us grew up hearing about and learning the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic—I wonder who thought all those words began with the letter R. This afternoon, I am going to talk about the three Bs. My theme for the year is building together—not bricks and mortar, but building people together. The next B that I am going to mention is barriers, and breaking barriers. Too often, our society focuses on what divides us rather than what we have in common. My final B is budget. There are limited financial resources, but if they are used wisely, we can break down barriers and we can build communities. However, the greatest resource that we have is the people whom we are called to serve.

Over the past 10 months, I have travelled the length and breadth of Scotland and have been amazed at the good news stories that are out there. Communities, groups and individuals are caring for others. I have witnessed local people putting the three Bs into action, often with little recognition and little news coverage. I could be here all afternoon if I spoke about the open hearts, open minds and open doors that we all recognise and take pride in.

The great commandment to love our neighbour is something we all recognise. Scotland has a long history of welcoming our neighbours, including refugees, asylum seekers and Ukrainians seeking a safe place—the list is endless. Caring for the poor and the marginalised is central to the worlds of faith and politics, which I do not see as separate

entities, as I will say at the parliamentary service in Canongate church tomorrow.

Members, do not underestimate the role you play in supporting the people within your constituencies. It is easy to get so caught up in the difficulties and problems that we face, particularly during this changing and challenging world of ours, that we lose sight of the wonder and beauty of the individuals that you, the church and all faith communities, seek to serve. They are our greatest resource.

Be assured of my continuing prayers.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Rape and Serious Assault Victims (Provision of Court Transcripts)

1. Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider an independent external evaluation of the pilot scheme that provides victims in rape and serious assault cases with access to transcripts, in light of reports of some waiting a year for transcripts of their court cases. (S6T-02446)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): As I intimated to you, Presiding Officer, and to the member, I am answering this question because both the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs and the Minister for Victims and Community Safety are unavoidably engaged on important Scottish Government business elsewhere.

The Scottish Government recognises that considerable delays in people receiving transcripts will cause distress, and we apologise for that. It is not good enough, and we are working closely with the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service to address the issue. The pilot was extended for a further year, so that lessons can be learned on delivery and on communication with requesters, which also needs to be addressed. The pilot has proved to be successful in that more than 87 applications were received from March 2024 to February 2025.

We will continue to work with the court service to ensure that any operational challenges are overcome. That includes an on-going evaluation process, which will rightly reflect the feedback from applicants.

Ms Clark will also be aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs committed to working with members of the Scottish Parliament to consider an amendment at stage 3 of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill to create a statutory right to transcripts.

Katy Clark: Over the weekend, three women who were raped by a controlling abuser described the scheme as “shoddy” and “insensitive”. I hope that the Scottish Government will consider a review. Will any evaluation or review that is done include feedback from survivors? Is the Government doing any work with victim support organisations to mitigate re-traumatisation risks?

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, all of that work must be trauma informed. It is essential that feedback from applicants forms part of any evaluation and that it

includes the perspectives of organisations such as Rape Crisis Scotland.

We regularly review the content of the application forms to address known and emerging challenges. Importantly, there need to be offers of support at the time of receipt of the information, because, as the member has indicated, how it is received can cause further concerns. How it is received is agreed in advance with the requesters.

Katy Clark: I am pleased that the cabinet secretary has raised the issue of how information is received. Some victims are now saying that they received an email with the transcript without any notice that it was coming, after many months of waiting. Has the Scottish Government given consideration to improving personalised communication, particularly in cases with not guilty verdicts? A number of women are now raising that as a concern.

Fiona Hyslop: How the information is received clearly is an issue. That is why planning in advance is important. Of course, that can be done only on an individual basis. Some people have requested that they be emailed and some people have requested information in other forms. Paying attention to such requests, particularly the aspect of communications, is really important. I will ask the cabinet secretary to address the issue of receiving transcripts in cases with not guilty verdicts. Every individual's situation is different, but the trauma that people perceive and have experienced has to be recognised.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Absolutely no one wants survivors to have to wait any longer than is necessary for a court transcript. I hope that that issue can be resolved as part of the evaluation of the pilot.

I welcome the commitment by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs to work with me and others ahead of stage 3 of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill on making the provision of access to transcripts permanent within the terms of the on-going pilot. However, I am a little concerned about the implications of another external evaluation for further progress on the pilot. Can the cabinet secretary outline how such an evaluation could impact the progress of the pilot?

Fiona Hyslop: It would be of concern if the evaluation were to delay making the pilot statutory. It is important that lessons from the pilot are used to improve how any statutory process would operate. Some of the emerging detail, such as the reasons for applying for transcripts, has reaffirmed how transcripts can play a role in a person-centred, trauma-informed justice system. It is vital that any revised system takes account of the

experiences of victims, irrespective of how that is done. However, that should not be done at the expense of improving access to transcripts generally, which is what the cabinet secretary is aiming to achieve through the work on amending the bill.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Having to wait a year for a transcript is unacceptable by any standard. It also demonstrates that our justice system is neither modern nor digitised in any way. The cabinet secretary will know that I lodged an amendment at stage 2 of the Victims, Witnesses, and Criminal Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill to establish a court transcript fund, which could alleviate some of these problems. Has the Government also considered whether the Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill, which is also going through Parliament, might be the perfect opportunity to ensure that we have a modern, digitised justice system that is fit for purpose and looks after the needs of victims?

Fiona Hyslop: I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs to address the second part of the question in relation to the modernisation programme. Digitisation has an impact across lots of public services, and how that is approached in the justice system is particularly important.

The expense of court transcripts is an issue, but some of the delay that we are aware of relates to the redaction of personal information and the process for doing that. There is a process of improvement in relation to that system and how technology can improve the timescales for the provision of not only this vitally important new service but services generally. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will reflect on that.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I recently met a constituent who had been raped in 2022. The case went to trial in 2024, but there was a not proven verdict. That brought home to me how dreadful the stress and the lasting trauma is, and that continues even today. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will convey to the cabinet secretary for justice the significance of obtaining the transcript and the need for continuing support when the transcript is delivered, because one must never underestimate the impact, particularly of a not proven verdict, on a victim.

Fiona Hyslop: I reflect the concerns of anybody who has been involved in giving evidence in situations that can reassert their trauma. A trauma-informed system can help to address that. The member reflects why that is important in the first place. Providing the transcripts was intended to help to address some of the on-going concerns and to recognise that, at the time of giving

evidence, the person might not immediately reflect on or remember what was said, for obvious reasons. Introducing the pilot was the right step; the issue is how to improve the process during the pilot as well as about what happens in the statutory system. I hope that the lessons that were learned during the pilot will help to inform continuous changes as of now and will ensure the strength of the statutory system, if the Parliament approves that when the bill is amended, for exactly the reasons that Christine Grahame set out.

Scottish Universities (Funding Model)

2. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what practical steps it is taking to review the funding model for Scottish universities, in light of recent reports that the number of international students enrolled at Scottish universities fell by more than 10 per cent between 2023 and 2024. (S6T-02448)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): The drop in international student numbers that was revealed last week did not come as a surprise to institutions, as they had already felt the impact of it. Although the specific numbers crystallised the scale of the issue, they did not introduce a new dimension. We were already alive to the issue.

For the past year, the Scottish Government and the sector have been working closely on international promotional activity that is aimed at mitigating the situation. We expect to see the results of that in the coming months. We have also been advocating, with the sector, for a Scottish graduate visa, and we need the United Kingdom Government to work with us on that.

On the specific issue of funding, thanks to the recent Scottish Government budget, which was passed with the support of Mr Rennie and his party, the university funding allocations for 2025-26, which institutions will receive sight of in the next 10 days or so from the Scottish Funding Council, will show an uplift in teaching price. As I indicated at an Education, Children and Young People Committee evidence session some months ago, in response to a question that was also from Mr Rennie, we are absolutely open to exploring the future funding model with our universities, albeit starting from the position that we will not reintroduce tuition fees.

Willie Rennie: That sounds like a step in the right direction. I accept that the UK immigration policy has not helped, but global factors have caused even more damage. Whatever the balance, it is clear that the funding model, which depends on high numbers of international students to subsidise our universities, is broken. Something has to change if we are to maintain the world-class

reputation of our universities. Half of them had a deficit last year, and that was before the dire situation that has developed in Dundee. Does the minister accept that the financial model for universities is broken?

Graeme Dey: We recognise that the assumptions on which the financial settlements are predicated have changed, mainly through circumstances that are outwith Scotland's control, as Mr Rennie alluded to. For example, damaging actions around migration and geopolitical events have impacted on a model that had worked previously.

For our part, the Government is committed to engaging constructively with the sector to future proof the funding approach. The University of Dundee situation is uppermost in all our immediate activity, but the cabinet secretary and I have had a preliminary conversation with Universities Scotland on the funding approach and have agreed to return to the subject before the summer.

We need to be clear that our support for free tuition is about more than ideology; it was founded on an equity-of-access approach. Beyond that, it is based on simple logic; we should all be mindful of the University and College Union survey of a couple of years ago that showed that, if tuition fees were to be reintroduced, as some suggest, two thirds of students would have at least to think hard about whether university was an option for them. That would potentially wreck the very foundations that our university offering is built on. Access to higher education that is based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay, needs to stay.

Willie Rennie: The minister knows that the issue is bigger than tuition fees; it is about the future of our universities and their world-class status. I hope that he accepts that, and I think that he understands that. If we use tuition fees as the blockage to a discussion all the time, we are going to get nowhere.

Can I take the discussion with the minister forward? What particular discussions will there be? Who will be involved? By when will the discussions be held? Will all the parties in the Parliament be invited? When will we see a conclusion?

Graeme Dey: We are absolutely open to having constructive cross-party discussions on the university funding model's future, while recognising the changing circumstances that institutions find themselves in and what the sector's future asks might look like.

As Mr Rennie knows, in addition to the work with the university sector, a Royal Society of Edinburgh conference, which will help to move the discussion forward, is coming up towards the end of May. The sector is keen to lead on the

development of potential solutions, but my door is absolutely open to Mr Rennie and others who want to engage constructively on the issue and bring forward ideas.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): When the facts change, people should be open to changing their minds. The reality is that the big four countries that host international students, including the United Kingdom, are all seeing massive reductions in the numbers who are attending. In Scotland, the number of international students has dropped even further.

What is depressing is the response of the First Minister, who has made it clear that he is not prepared to even discuss any fundamental changes to the funding models. On the basis that no discussion can include all variables, what financial assessment has been done in respect of keeping the sector solvent? How much more public money would it take for that to be achieved?

Graeme Dey: I want to make a point about the level of the drop in international students. The situation in England has been compared with that in Scotland, but they are not comparable, because of the different education systems. I can go into further detail at a future date, when time allows.

The First Minister did not rule out changes to the future funding model—he was very clear about that, and rightly so. The return of tuition fees, which Mr Kerr perhaps favours, is not an option for this Government. Beyond that, we are willing to have a discussion with the sector. If the Conservatives want to engage constructively on the issue for a change, even they are more than welcome to engage on it.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I take the minister back to Willie Rennie's second question, which was about whether the funding model is broken. It is important for Scotland—including the university sector and others—to recognise whether the Government feels that we are in a position in which the model is broken and needs to be fixed. The minister talked about what, who and by when, and he mentioned the RSE conference at the end of May, but does the Scottish Government accept that the current model is broken?

Graeme Dey: I do not accept that the current model is broken, but I accept that it is under severe pressure, largely because of circumstances that are outwith our control. I say very gently and with respect to Mr Whitfield that it is incumbent on us all not to add to the pressures that the sector is already facing.

One such additional pressure that has arisen is a £45 million ask as a result of Labour's employer national insurance hike. I am happy to engage constructively but, collectively, we all have to

recognise the pressures that are on the sector, wherever they have come from.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): The minister says that the system is not broken, but we now have a situation in which, because of a cap, the number of Scotland-domiciled students who are unable to go to a Scottish university has increased by 84 per cent. That is a broken system for any of our constituents.

I will ask a question to be as helpful as I can to the minister. Will he commit to the Scottish Government commissioning an independent review of further and higher education to report before the summer recess—the point when he said that he wanted deliberations to take place—and then to having a cross-party discussion?

Graeme Dey: We can stand here and bandy statistics back and forth. I can point to the fact that record numbers of Scots are going to university in Scotland, which is a success story. I will take no lectures from the Conservatives—[*Interruption.*] Here we go, Presiding Officer. I just knew that that would be the reaction.

I will take no lectures from the Conservatives about taking responsibility, because, fundamentally, we are in this situation, first, as a result of the actions of their Westminster bosses in wrecking the international student market through their migration policy. Let us also not forget that the Conservatives sought to vote down the budget, which will provide welcome additional funding for the university sector.

Agricultural Support Payments

3. Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I declare an interest as a small farmer.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that the reported £203 million it spent on external advisers to help administer agricultural support payments to be good value for money. (S6T-02447)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The figure that the member has mentioned relates to spend that spans more than a decade. Most of the existing information technology systems that support agricultural stakeholders were developed for the common agricultural policy in 2015. The money has been used predominantly for the submission and processing of rural applications. The system availability for the scheme in 2024 was 99.92 per cent, and £475 million has been paid out so far, with the final total expected to be £555 million. Payment performance has steadily improved, with payments now being made sooner. Over the period, we have paid out about £5 billion in agricultural support payments.

We are not designing our future capabilities based on current IT, but we must provide the industry with stability and certainty as we develop new services.

Tim Eagle: I remind members that the £203 million is on top of the nearly £180 million that it cost the Government to build the system in the first place. At the current rate of spend, by 2030, the Government will have spent £500 million on an IT system and consultants.

Over the past two weeks, the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee has heard from industry leaders who have expressed serious concerns about the future direction of agricultural policy. Jim Walker summed it up by saying:

“the way of delivering the support payments to agriculture is just not fit for purpose ... The computer system is knackered and has been for years”.—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, 12 March 2025; c 5.*]

Does the minister agree with Jim Walker that this costly system is not fit for purpose?

Jim Fairlie: No, I simply do not agree with Jim Walker’s assessment. First of all, he is not an IT specialist and does not know what is going on behind the scenes. [*Interruption.*] I point out to Conservative members, as they barrack me, that, as I have said, 99.92 per cent of payments have been made on time. We have brought forward the payment period, so payments have regularly been made far before the deadline dates. It is normal to spend roughly 20 per cent of the IT set-up spend that was initially spent in the first place.

I know that some members will use a committee session as an opportunity to beat the Government, but the reality is that the system works and is making the payments. The most important thing to our farming community is that the payments get into people’s bank accounts on time and in full.

Tim Eagle: The Government might have made some payments, but it is costing a lot of money to do that. I do not think that the minister really gets it. Every year over the past eight years, the Scottish National Party has squandered more than £25 million on IT consultancy fees. That money could have been used instead to double the sustainable farming capital fund. There is a lack of coherent agricultural policy, there is harmful new rural legislation and there has been a real-terms cut to the rural budget. In the light of the serious concerns that have been raised not by me but by agricultural leaders at the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, will the minister spell out what immediate action he is taking to ensure that our essential farmers and crofters will be supported in the future?

Jim Fairlie: I find it ludicrous that the member is saying that we have squandered £20 million when

we have been making payments on time and in full every year, well before we were required to do so. [Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the minister.

Jim Fairlie: The Government has done nothing other than support the agriculture sector time after time. Every time that there has been an issue, we have found solutions to it, so I find the member's questions absolutely ludicrous.

The Presiding Officer: We have interest in the question, and I would be grateful if we made sure that questions and responses were concise.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The purpose of the payment system is to ensure that money goes into the pockets of farmers and crofters. The Scottish National Party decided that our agriculture sector deserved that money and that it was worth while, while other parties elsewhere in the United Kingdom decided to take that money off the farmers. Will the minister reiterate how the Scottish Government's rural payments system has ensured that money gets into our agricultural sector and the rural economy on time and as quickly as possible?

Jim Fairlie: As part of our transparent approach, we publish an annual payment strategy. The targets in each iteration of the strategy have been met, and payment performance has improved year on year. Indeed, we are paying under the basic payment scheme earlier than ever. I would be happy to provide the member with the data behind that in writing.

It is crucial that the sector has financial consistency, unlike what we have seen from the sustainable farming incentive down south. In addition, the Scottish Government provides funding streams to farmers and crofters via the crofting agricultural grant scheme, the croft house grant scheme, the less favoured area support scheme, the Scottish suckler beef support scheme, the Scottish upland support system and the fruit and veg aid scheme, none of which has an equivalent in England.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests in that I am part of a family farm in Moray.

Does the minister regret that, when Fergus Ewing was the cabinet secretary, he did not scrap the £178 million failed system and implement a new system that was estimated to cost £34 million? Would that not have saved the minister the extraordinary amount of money that he has had to pay in the past 10 years?

Jim Fairlie: I am not quite sure what Edward Mountain is asking when he asks whether I regret what Fergus Ewing's decisions were a number of

years ago. I know that, when he was in office, Fergus Ewing made an exceptional effort to make sure that the system worked. He got the payments out and into the bank accounts of farmers on time, which is exactly what farmers require. What they do not need is this.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The computer system is flawed, as was highlighted in a damning Audit Scotland report from back in 2017. Policy is now being devised to fit the computer system rather than the system delivering the Government's policy. How will the minister ensure that policy is delivered? Would it be cheaper to scrap it and start again?

Jim Fairlie: I do not think that it would be cheaper to scrap it and start again, because I do not think that there is any need to scrap it and start again. As I have already stated, we are getting the payments out on time. The payments that we are making to the services that are helping to sustain the system are in line with what would be expected for such agreements. The system is doing the job that we require it to do. We will definitely have to update it as we establish new schemes as we go along, but that is no reason to chuck the baby out with the bath water.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): At the 12 March meeting of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, concerns were raised about the lack of effective implementation and about the constraints that the outdated information technology system created. Jonnie Hall of NFU Scotland stated:

"The biggest single constraint on policy development and, therefore, its implementation ... is the ability to deliver. There is a fundamental issue with the IT system and everything that goes with that."

With reference to future policy, Kate Rowell, chair of Quality Meat Scotland, said:

"Unfortunately—and this brings us back to the computer system—there seems to be no way of implementing that list."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Islands Committee*, 12 March 2025; c 20, 13.]

The minister continually tells us that he listens to the industry. If he is, indeed, doing so, why are industry leaders always wrong while the minister is always right when it comes to concerns about the IT system's limitations?

Jim Fairlie: I refute the basis of the question. It is not the case that the industry is always wrong and the minister is always right—the fact is that we have a system that we know is working. We know that the system is getting the payments out. We know that farmers are being paid and they are being paid ahead of time. I will repeat that all day, if that is what I have to do.

This attack is based purely on something that the Tories have decided. They have an

unwarranted and unjustified attack line on the Government. The payments continue to get made.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time. I will allow a moment or two for front benchers to organise.

Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 2 Report

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a statement by Paul McLennan on the Scottish Government's response to the Grenfell tower inquiry phase 2 report.

14:30

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I am pleased to make a statement setting out the Scottish Government's response to the Grenfell tower inquiry phase 2 report. My statement will provide an update to Parliament on a range of key actions that the Scottish Government will now take, in response to the inquiry's recommendations, to further strengthen the safety of Scotland's built environment. I will also provide an update on action that we are taking to increase the pace and breadth of our work on cladding remediation.

On 14 June 2017, a fire at Grenfell tower in London resulted in the deaths of 72 people. It was a tragedy that should never have been able to happen. The exceptional work of the inquiry team is to be commended.

The report of phase 2 of the Grenfell tower inquiry was published on 4 September 2024. The findings of the report expose failings in the construction industry, the regulatory system and the organisations that should have kept people safe. Although the fire occurred outside Scotland, it has been felt deeply here. There is a shared construction industry, in which many of the same organisations, practices and products are used across the United Kingdom.

Immediately after the tragedy occurred, the Scottish Government set up the ministerial working group on building and fire safety to consider how buildings in Scotland could be made safer and how people would feel safe within their own homes. Much has been done to improve building safety since.

The inquiry's second report made 58 recommendations, covering Government structures, building regulation, fire and rescue, civil contingencies, professional competence and product testing and regulation. Although the recommendations are mainly directed at the UK Government, 43 are in devolved areas of competence.

Last month, I met ministers from the UK Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. We agreed to continue work collaboratively on building and fire safety matters. That is fundamental, as areas such as construction products regulation and professional

regulation are reserved to Westminster. Government and industry in Scotland simply must be able to trust the testing and certification of products and the information that is presented by manufacturers. Disgracefully, the Grenfell tragedy exposed the dishonesty of manufacturers who put profit above people's safety in their homes.

Our response to the inquiry has been published today. Although we have already delivered change and improvement to and strengthening of systems, there is still much to do. We intend to deliver an on-going programme of systematic improvement.

The Scottish Government will consult on the need for new legislation to strengthen the building standards system. That includes introducing a compliance plan manager and changes to strengthen enforcement powers and sanctions. That builds on the established work of the building standards futures board. We will ask the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland to report to us on changes that they have made to strengthen the effectiveness of their operational systems in response to the inquiry's recommendations.

We will undertake a further campaign to highlight the action that can be taken to support vulnerable people to take appropriate action in the event of a fire. We will continue to engage with partners, including social landlords, on the longer-term options, including necessary legislative change, to consider how to bring in the regulated requirements to carry out person-centred risk assessments. We will consult on the introduction of mandatory periodic fire risk assessments in specified multi-occupancy buildings to reduce the risk of fire. We will strengthen fire risk assessor competency in Scotland and the requirements for duty holders to hire a competent assessor. We will work with local authorities and other category 1 responders to review and refresh resilience guidance, training and practice. We will, of course, continue to work with the UK Government to strengthen construction products regulation and the regulation of fire engineers and fire risk assessors. We will reset the ministerial working group on building and fire safety to oversee that work.

As well as responding properly to the recommendations of the Grenfell tower inquiry, it is incumbent on the Government to tackle the problems of unsafe cladding. That is why, today, I am publishing a renewed "Plan of Action on Cladding Remediation", which sets out the key actions that we are taking, who we are working with and how we plan to deliver a collective national effort.

We have today launched what we are calling the single open call, which is a key element of that plan. It invites residential property owners or their

representatives to notify us of their concerns about cladding in their properties. Having done so, and as long as their property meets some basic criteria of height and age, they will be able to apply for Government funding for a statutory single building assessment. Further, the Scottish Government will fund all compliant applications for an SBA for eligible buildings, up to an initial level of £10 million in the coming year.

Assessment of that kind is a necessary first step towards the ultimate remediation of a property's cladding. The initial funding will support a substantial acceleration in addressing the risks that are posed by cladding in Scotland. Importantly, the support will be available to the owners of all residential properties that meet the basic criteria, regardless of tenure type. That means that our support for assessment will extend to properties that are owned by local authorities and registered social landlords, as well as to privately owned properties. The investment is designed to reduce risk in the broadest range of properties as quickly as possible.

I should make it clear that, where a developer has accepted responsibility for the assessment and remediation of a property, it will remain for that developer to take forward and fund that work, as is appropriate.

The single open call is already open on the Scottish Government website, where owners can find further information and complete a simple expression of interest.

Of course, assessment is just the first step in making a property safe. Responding to the findings of the single building assessments is the critical next step. I can announce today that a further stage of the single open call process will be launched before the end of June this year. The second stage will extend the scheme to include potential support for mitigation and remediation works. Where a single building assessment has found that mitigation and/or remediation works are required to address a property's cladding issues, owners will be able to apply for Government funding for those works. Information on the works that will be eligible for funding will be published on the Scottish Government's website.

It is expected that, at the mitigation and remediation stage, a local authority or registered social landlord would be responsible, as the owner, for taking forward and funding any required work. However, where social landlords are not in a financial position to be able to meet the costs of essential remediation works, the Scottish Government will consider the need for Government support and will provide financial assistance, subject to ability-to-pay criteria.

Once again, where a developer has accepted responsibility for the assessment and remediation of a property, it will remain for that developer to take forward and fund the work.

The owner-led model that is envisaged by the single open call process will complement the existing developer-led and Government-led processes of assessment and remediation. We believe that this broad-based approach gives us the best chance of moving more quickly to address Scotland's cladding problems.

We continue to make progress with both developer-led and Scottish Government-led remediation. We are finalising an agreement with the larger developers on the developer remediation contract, which will enable them to take forward assessment and remediation of properties for which they have accepted responsibility. That follows intensive negotiations since the sharing of draft terms in September 2024, with significant progress made to agree key terms in principle. We are working towards final agreement as soon as possible. We continue to work in partnership with developers to support their efforts and to track, gather and assure information on their remediation progress.

We will, of course, continue to make progress on the Government-led leg of this broad-based effort. As members will be aware, following our pilot programme, the Scottish Government is currently concluding the single building assessment process for 13 properties and is about to commission assessments for a further four. We will continue to support their assessment and remediation journey.

We will continue to work with partners to gain as clear a picture as possible of buildings at risk. We will use that information to make sure that properties that are at elevated risk are being appropriately addressed, whether or not their owners have come forward through the single open call process.

We have already sought updated information from local authorities, asking them to provide an update on the situation in relation to cladding for each high-rise building in their ownership. Similarly, we have asked the Scottish Housing Regulator to provide information in connection with RSL-owned properties.

I hope that my announcements today will mark the delivery of a substantial acceleration in the pace and breadth of assessment across Scotland, as a necessary step towards the effective mitigation and, if required, remediation of affected properties across Scotland.

We have the foundations of the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and the single building assessment process. It is now

time to turn those strong foundations into real action.

The Presiding Officer: The minister will take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to put a question were to press their request-to-speak button now.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement. We are now eight years on from the Grenfell tragedy. The Scottish Government has had eight years to carry out remedial works to properties with unsafe cladding, yet here we are with another statement, and we are no further forward. It feels like groundhog day in Holyrood.

To be frank, it is embarrassing that the Scottish Government has concluded the single building assessment process for only 13 properties. Progress has been painfully slow and the Scottish Government has shown a distinct lack of leadership, leaving us miles behind our UK counterparts.

Today's statement is riddled with next steps that should have been completed following the passing of the 2024 act. There will be more consulting and assessments, more information gathering and a resetting of the ministerial working group, but that will lead to no further action. Today's announcement is a kick in the teeth for those waiting for work to be carried out on their homes. People want to know when cladding will be removed from their properties, not when the latest Scottish Government talking shop will next meet.

The Grenfell tower inquiry's second report, which was published on 4 September last year, made 58 recommendations, 43 of which fall within areas of devolved competence. Does the minister accept all of those 43 recommendations? When will remediation works on the five properties where work has begun be completed? Finally, it feels as if it is a lifetime since the Government announced it in the first place, so when will work on the remaining 102 properties be completed?

Paul McLennan: I thought that the member would have welcomed today's statement. In the discussions that I have had with residents, what they have said to us most often is that they are keen to move on as soon as possible, and the single open call will allow us to do that.

The member mentioned it being eight years on from Grenfell. I have spoken before about pace and, when I made a statement in January, I said that we would come back to talk about trying to accelerate the pace. I think that the actions that we are taking today certainly do that.

I set out the work that has happened since the fire. Extensive work has been carried out and Scottish Government building safety standards people have picked up on and improved some areas. In our most recent debate about the issue, I acknowledged that we need to accelerate the pace, following feedback from residents who told us to do that, and today's announcements do accelerate the pace.

I will come back to the member in writing regarding her particular points about the dates.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): As Meghan Gallacher said, it is almost eight years since the Grenfell tower fire. We are now in the remarkable position of having had more ministerial statements about cladding than buildings remediated.

On behalf of the residents who are still living in fear of fires in their homes, I ask the minister how many buildings will be remediated by the end of this session of Parliament, what date has the Government set for every building in Scotland to be free of combustible cladding and why is Scotland so far behind the rest of the UK on remediation? Will the minister guarantee, as the UK Government is doing, that the companies that are responsible for the absolute tragedy at Grenfell will not be allowed access to any public contracts and will he update procurement legislation to make that happen?

Paul McLennan: I repeat the point that I made about accelerating the pace. There are a couple of important things to say about that. I said in my statement that we are concluding 13 single building assessment processes and are about to commission another four. Those single building assessment processes take a period of time and are all different, as is the completion of remediation. If Mr Griffin wants to get back to me about particular buildings, I am happy to get back to him on that particular point.

Mr Griffin made a point about procurement issues. That is obviously a reserved matter, but it is something that we have discussed with the UK Government, and we will continue to do that. We have an intergovernmental meeting coming up, when ministers will be available to discuss that particular point.

That legislation lies with the UK Government, which has published a green paper, but my officials and I are working closely with it on that particular point. If anything came out of the Grenfell inquiry, it was about products, commissioning and so on. We are working closely with the UK Government.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Can the minister assure residents living in buildings for which no known developer is

responsible for the upkeep that the Scottish Government's cladding remediation programme will not leave them behind and that a single building assessment will take place?

Paul McLennan: I am happy to give that assurance. Where no developer has taken responsibility for a relevant building that is affected by cladding, the owners of the property will be able to apply for a Government-funded assessment through our single open call system, regardless of whether the building is privately owned, mixed tenure or social housing. The second stage of that scheme, which is to be launched by the end of June, will allow owners to apply for Government support for necessary works, based on the findings of that assessment.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): It sounds as though the owners hotline that the minister announced previously is now up and running. People will be able to contact it if they have concerns about their building. They might get an assessment done and then they might get help with work, but we just do not know. The minister speaks about working at pace, but he cannot tell us what that pace will be. Last year, £41.3 million was set aside for cladding remediation, and £52.2 million has been set aside for that in the current financial year. How much of that money has been spent?

Paul McLennan: I will come back to Graham Simpson on that point. On his other point about the cladding remediation, the purpose of the single open call is to quicken that pace. I have met residents from across Scotland, and one of the key questions that they have asked me is, "Can we just get on with it as soon as possible?" The single open call allows us to do that. We have also had that feedback about buildings from residents associations and factors.

On the member's point about when work will happen, one of the key points is that we are trying to accelerate that. We will be working as quickly as possible around the single open call. If people come back to us, we will respond to them as quickly as we possibly can. The whole point of working with registered social landlords and social housing providers is to increase the breadth of that. Every single building assessment and remediation will be different, as the member well knows. The purpose of my statement today is to accelerate the pace and the breadth of that.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I welcome the minister's statement. As he knows, many of the buildings in Scotland that are affected are in my constituency. I appreciate both the challenge and the complexity of the work and I welcome the progress. However, there is a strong need to pick up the pace. Although I welcome the single open call, can the

minister tell Parliament how he will keep members updated on progress? How will he engage and communicate with those who live in affected buildings, property factors and residents associations, and how will he keep developers to their commitments?

Paul McLennan: I thank the member for his dedication in working with his constituents on the matter. I also commend my colleague Kaukab Stewart for the work that she has carried out in this area. Our new scheme will accelerate progress on cladding assessment and remediation by empowering owners—“empowering” is the key word here—and providing appropriate financial support. We will also continue to work with those developers who have already taken responsibility for assessing and mitigating risks in properties that they have built. Our regular newsletters and bespoke proactive communications will keep owners and residents updated, and a letter from me is going out to all MSPs today. We have also notified the committee of the statement about Grenfell and cladding, and I am happy to keep it informed on a regular basis.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): It is a basic human right that people feel safe in their own homes, and yet the awful facts are that 40 per cent of people with a disability who lived in Grenfell tower died that night in 2017 and a quarter of all children who lived there died in Grenfell tower that night. To avoid a repeat of this tragedy, we need investment in not just building standards but building control. Local council departments that deal with this have been decimated, so how does the Scottish Government intend to ensure that, in line with the Grenfell tower inquiry phase 2 report recommendations, building control is properly resourced and supported to do its job?

Paul McLennan: On the funding for that, there has been an increase in Government spending this year, with funding for local authorities increasing by a considerable amount. It is up to local authorities to decide where they spend their money. Our building department colleagues have been discussing the matter with them on a regular basis, and we set up the Scottish building standards hub to listen to what they are saying on that point.

On Mr Leonard’s point about evacuation, we have been working very closely with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on person-centred risk assessment, as I mentioned in my statement. One of the key things is communication with residents on that point. The SFRS also carries out operational quality assurance visits to every high-rise domestic building in Scotland to check features such as fire doors, lifts and stairs. We continue to work with the Convention of Scottish

Local Authorities and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on the point that Mr Leonard mentions.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Is the minister able to provide an update on the work to establish a comprehensive cladding assurance register for Scotland, as set out in the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Act 2024?

Paul McLennan: The Scottish Government’s budget for 2025-26 provides £52.2 million in funding for the cladding remediation programme. Today, we have announced an initial tranche of £10 million for assessment through our single open call scheme. As any owner of a relevant property that is affected by the cladding issue can do, local authorities can apply for support for the assessment of properties through that scheme.

I made the point to Richard Leonard that the Scottish Government has provided substantial—record—funding of more than £15.1 billion for local authorities, which is an increase of £1.1 billion. That funding empowers local authorities to address critical issues such as cladding remediation, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I extend my condolences to the families and friends who lost their loved ones in the Grenfell tower fire. It is a tragedy that should never have been allowed to happen.

When we discussed cladding last year, I highlighted the shortage of skilled, qualified fire safety professionals. Although the approach that the minister has set out is welcome, how is the Scottish Government working to ensure that existing skills gaps do not hold up works to make buildings safe?

Paul McLennan: That very valid point about skills has been made in committee and discussed in the chamber, and it is a key thing that we have taken forward in discussions with our colleagues in the UK and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive. According to the capacity assessment that has been made, there are sufficient assessors in that regard at the moment, but we continue to closely monitor that and will continue to discuss it with UK Government colleagues.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am afraid that the minister is not inspiring confidence. He does not seem to be answering many of our questions this afternoon. Can he help me to understand? I would have thought that, by now, we would have known which buildings across Scotland were potentially at risk. Why are we only now doing a single open call? Why could that not have been done last year, the year before, the

year before that or even the year before that? Why is this taking so long?

Paul McLennan: I have said previously in the chamber that the pace should have been quicker. The very purpose of what has been announced today is to quicken the pace. Again, the pilot model and what we learned from it were key. A key thing that we are moving on now is the grant funding model, which, we think, will quicken the pace.

A few things that have happened since then have been mentioned. We now have the statutory single building assessment, which is backed up by the robust standards that I have talked about. We created the legislative framework through the 2024 act. As I said, we have spoken to COSLA about support for the approach that we have taken. I held a meeting with a committee—I think that it was the wellbeing committee—in that regard, speaking on that point to councillors who are responsible for building safety. The approach was supported at that time.

As I said, the purpose of today's announcement is to quicken the pace and to look at how we widen arrangements. That approach has been supported by COSLA, and we are working very closely with the regulator on RSLs.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am glad to hear the minister discuss the need to strengthen building safety standards. I have been concerned by recent reports that the UK Government is looking to cut red tape in order to push developments through the planning system faster. The tragedy at Grenfell and the recent report remind us that the planning system and building standards are our opportunity to get things right before they can go wrong. Does the minister therefore agree that the most important aspect of house building is providing people with a safe and secure place to live?

Paul McLennan: In my responses, I have highlighted that, as well as the work that has gone on since the fire. One of the main aims of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 concerns health and safety in building. As I have mentioned, the response to the Grenfell tower inquiry has strengthened building standards, made regulations more effective and delivered safer buildings. In addition, changes to the fire safety standards of buildings have been made by requiring the use of non-combustible cladding, improving escape provision and introducing automatic fire suppression. A new building standards compliance plan approach is being developed under the direction of the building standards futures board and is at the early adopter stage. To answer a point that Richard Leonard, I think, made about support for local authority verifiers to fulfil their role

on delivery, building warrant fees are currently being increased through a three-year model.

Our planning system has a statutory structure that ensures that planning decisions are made following a thorough assessment of the development plan and all material considerations.

Where permitted development rights may also be involved—so removing the need for planning applications for specified development—those rights are carefully created to ensure that the potential impacts are properly assessed.

To come back to the member's point, we have undertaken considerable work since the fire. We will continue to do so, and we will continue to work on the recommendations of the inquiry.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Implementation of the cladding remediation programme has been plagued by shifting criteria, long waits and a lack of clarity. A classic example of that concerns my Glasgow constituent Park Property Management. For affected property owners, every delay means more uncertainty, more financial strain and more stress. The statement does not provide a clear timeline, but another drawn-out process, leaving residents trapped in uncertainty and fear. When—with a timescale, please—will my constituents see action?

Paul McLennan: As Mr Gulhane knows, we have been engaging in a particular discussion around about his constituents. He knows that individual cases are different in terms of single building assessments and the remediation work that is carried out. I will continue to engage with Mr Gulhane on that.

The point of making today's statement is, as I said, to try to quicken the pace, which I think we will do through the single open call process and through the remediation part.

We have taken action on the single building assessment and also through the cladding act, which has pushed us towards that. I will continue to engage with Mr Gulhane on that particular point.

I cannot give specifics on where the single building assessment is at, what is highlighted and the remediation work that is carried out. However, I give Mr Gulhane the assurance that I will continue to engage with him and his constituents on that particular issue.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The Scottish Government has taken a firm but fair approach to ensure that developers uphold their responsibilities in relation to cladding remediation. Will the minister outline how interventions such as the Scottish safer buildings accord and the upcoming responsible developers scheme ensure that developers are incentivised to

work with, and not against, the Scottish Government in making our buildings safer?

Paul McLennan: One of the key things all the way through this process has been the partnership approach that we have taken with developers, which we are committing to with local authorities and RSLs.

On the member's specific point, I note that developers agreeing and signing the legally binding developer remediation contract will be a positive step in ensuring the safety of home owners and residents in multi-residential properties with unsafe cladding. We have made significant progress on the key principles of the developer remediation contract negotiations, which are continuing in a good vein with developers.

We continue to work constructively with developers that are taking steps to assess or remediate buildings of which they were the developer. That will include considering proposals for a responsible developers scheme.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I was in London eight years ago come June, and I will not forget the feelings but also the very sensation of the smell that arose because of the terrible tragedy at Grenfell.

This has really not been the minister's finest hour, by a very long way. If I understand what he has told us this afternoon, in a statement that he asked to make, he cannot tell us how many high-rise buildings need to be remediated; he cannot tell us how many are going to be remediated by the end of this parliamentary session; and he cannot tell us how much of the £97.1 million that the Scottish Government receives from the UK Government for cladding remediation has been spent. Is he not ashamed and embarrassed not to know such basic information when appearing before this Parliament?

Paul McLennan: I come back to a particular point that I have made a few times. If I am expected to highlight which buildings will be completed without some of those buildings having gone through the single building assessment process and without a remediation contract having come out, that is a bit unfair.

We will continue to work on quickening the pace, which I am confident that we will do.

On funding, I note that more than £50 million is being set aside. We publish a quarterly review of how much is spent.

To come and ask me what buildings will be remediated by a certain point in a certain year is unfair. I am happy to keep Mr Kerr updated on that particular point. [*Interruption.*]

I am coming back to the point that Mr Kerr mentioned. A single building assessment process takes a different period of time depending on where the building is. The remediation contract and the work that is required also take a different period of time. I am happy to keep Mr Kerr up to date with regard to the buildings that are remediated.

I have made the statement on what we are currently going through in relation to the single building assessment process. As I said, the whole purpose of the statement today is to quicken up the pace and widen the breadth of work that we are undertaking.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I think that I heard the minister say that, from June, social landlords will be able to apply for funding for cladding remediation, which is welcome. Such issues exist in my constituency, so that opportunity will be important to my constituents. There are often disputes among developers, architects and owners, some of whom can be social landlords. Will that be a barrier to social landlords applying for remediation funding from June onwards?

Paul McLennan: Mr Doris makes an important point. I am aware of the local housing association that he is referring to in that context, and we will continue to work with it on that aspect. We mentioned the open call that is being made for those who are already in place. One of the key aims is to ensure that we move forward on that. I mentioned RSLs' and housing associations' ability to pay, which is relevant. Cladding officials will continue to work with factors, residents, developers and housing associations. That principle could be shared across any RSL or local authority.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement. I will allow a moment or two for front-bench members to organise themselves before we move on to the next item of business.

Fair Trade

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16923, in the name of Angus Robertson, on “Scotland—a fair trade nation”. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:02

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I am proud to have the opportunity to open the debate, which will celebrate Scotland’s renewed status as a fair trade nation.

The title of fair trade nation is one that Scotland has held for more than a decade. We share it with only one other nation, namely our friends in Wales. However, being a fair trade nation is about more than just a title. The motion recognises the dedication and hard work of fair trade campaigners, businesses and communities across Scotland to achieving and, importantly, sustaining fair trade nation status. I had the chance to meet some of them at a reception ahead of the debate, and I am delighted to see them in the public gallery today. I thank them for their work in championing the cause of fairness in global trade, and I look forward to hearing more about their efforts from colleagues across the parties during the debate. I also thank Scottish Fair Trade for its leadership in promoting and strengthening Scotland’s fair trade commitment.

The report “Is Scotland Still a Fair Trade Nation?”, which was published earlier this month, notes that 97 per cent of the Scottish population have heard of fair trade. That is a phenomenal result, which reflects the work of Scottish Fair Trade and its members to ensure that fair trade remains at the forefront of people’s minds.

The report also reminds us of the turbulent context in which renewed fair nation status was achieved. It has been seven years since the previous assessment. Since then, we have had a period of unprecedented upheaval, with Brexit’s trade realignments, the economic and social disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the heightened urgency of the climate emergency. Yet, in the face of those immense challenges, Scottish civic society has held fast to its commitment to justice and equity in trade.

This year also marks a significant milestone in Scotland’s commitment to addressing poverty and inequality overseas, as it is the 20th anniversary of the Scottish Government’s international development programme. That milestone is significant not only for the Government but for the whole Parliament.

Twenty years ago, the G8 met at Gleneagles to discuss the challenges that Africa was facing at the time. Shortly after, the Scottish Parliament hosted an event called “Malawi After Gleneagles”, which brought together key Scots and Malawians from across Government, Parliament and civic society. The approach that was mapped out at that event—with a clear focus on people-to-people links and dignified reciprocal partnership—has guided our international development work ever since. That is reflected in the new international development principles that we co-developed with our partner countries and international non-governmental organisations in Scotland in 2021.

At that Scottish Parliament event in 2005, the then First Minister of Scotland, the Rt Hon Jack McConnell, made a point that is as true now as it was then. He said:

“The primary duty of this Parliament and our devolved government is to use our powers for the betterment of the people of Scotland. But we have another duty too, as elected politicians and as citizens of the world: a duty to be good neighbours and to play our part in global challenges.”

Strong cross-party support for international development in the Scottish Parliament has been a feature that has underpinned the international development work of successive Scottish Governments since 2005. It has been fundamental to the international development programme and therefore to the difference that has been made by contributions from Scotland over the past two decades to the lives of those who live in our partner countries and, through our wider aid, to the communities that live through humanitarian crises.

My express hope is that the Scottish Parliament will continue our proud tradition of supporting our partner countries for the benefit of the most vulnerable communities globally and that the Parliament will continue to show leadership on the global stage.

Members here today will, I am sure, share concerns about the deteriorating global order at this time and the cuts to aid that have been made over the past weeks by Governments around the world. The freeze and now newly-announced termination of 83 per cent of US Agency for International Development spend has seen the largest donor of humanitarian and development assistance pause and then cancel the majority of its programming. We know that that will have a serious global impact on the most vulnerable, including in our partner countries.

The United Kingdom Government recently announced further cuts in aid, with the amount of UK gross national income being spent on overseas development aid dropping from 0.5 per cent to 0.3 per cent, which will further compound that global impact.

The Scottish Government has been clear that, although we welcome the UK Government's commitment to increased defence spending at a time of such acute need across Europe, we are deeply disappointed by the cut to the overseas aid budget, which will be the lowest percentage of UK finance spent on aid in over a quarter of a century.

This is a time when, globally, we all need to step up to support the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world. One of the simplest ways that we can do that as a nation is through our support for fair trade. By promoting and purchasing fair trade, we support producers, workers and enterprises, particularly in the global south, to build a fairer, more sustainable trading system—one that supports the rights, dignity and livelihoods of people throughout the supply chain.

Businesses, schools, churches and local communities across Scotland are doing just that. The assessment report "Is Scotland still a Fair Trade Nation?" noted that fair trade activity regularly happens in 22 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas. That level of civic engagement across all sectors of society in Scotland speaks to the deep and unwavering commitment to justice and equity in trade that exists across our communities.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): I agree with a lot of what the cabinet secretary has said. He mentioned that there is activity in many local authorities. However, does he accept that that is quite a low bar? It does not need to be a lot of activity.

Angus Robertson: I agree with John Mason that the level of support will vary from one part of the country to another. I will use his intervention as a springboard to encourage the local authority areas that are not yet playing a part to begin to do so. I hope that, through encouragement and with the support of campaigners, we can broaden, widen and enhance the fair trade movement's impact across Scotland. He is right to wish that the level of support be increased, and I would welcome the minority of local government areas in Scotland that are not yet part of the process being part of it in the future.

Edinburgh, where my Edinburgh Central constituency is located, obtained Fairtrade status in 2004. I commend the work of the Edinburgh Fairtrade city steering group for its work to support and promote fair trade across the city. I particularly congratulate the steering group and Scottish Fair Trade for their successful bid to host the international Fair Trade Towns conference in Edinburgh later this year, which will be the first time that the prestigious event has been held in Scotland.

Today's global challenges—climate change, pandemics, conflict, poverty and inequality—can be addressed only if the global south and the global north work together.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The minister will have seen reports today challenging Ed Miliband on the sourcing of solar panels from China. Has he reassured himself about the source of solar panels that are purchased through Government schemes in Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to Willie Rennie for raising the issue. I have a confession to make: I have not read those reports yet. I commit to doing so, and will look closely at the points that he raised. I am just being frank with him; I have not yet read those reports.

Fair trade, with its focus on global solidarity and marginalised producers, is an important part of our international development programme, alongside other key areas. Over the past year, we have launched new programmes on health and inclusive education, from new strategic education partnerships with the World Bank to support at a very local level for girls and learners with disabilities to better access school, and from a new strategic partnership with the World Health Organization on non-communicable diseases to developing community palliative care within our partner countries.

Beyond our support for our partner countries, through longer-term programming, we have also continued to contribute globally where humanitarian crises occur. It was reported that 2024 had the highest number of countries engaged in conflict since the end of world war two. Climate change is increasing the risk of conflict, with more frequent extreme weather events and the world hitting 1.5°C for the first time last year.

According to the December 2024 report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 305.1 million people are expected to require immediate humanitarian assistance in 2025. We have continued to respond to global crises, principally through our standing humanitarian emergency fund panel, including for the less well-known crises, such as that in Sudan.

I turn to our commitment on climate justice. Scotland remains committed to addressing the injustice that is at the heart of climate change—that those who have done the least to cause the crises are suffering the impacts worst and first and are often the least able to respond. That is becoming ever more evident, with some global south Governments' budgets so consumed with responding to the latest climate disaster and debt relief payments that little or nothing is left for health and education. This is why the Scottish Government established the world's first climate

justice fund, with the £36 million fund specifically focused on supporting the most marginalised communities around the world to address the impacts of climate change. That support extends to the very producers that we are discussing today. For example, the climate justice fund water futures programme in Malawi worked with UK retailers to ensure water sustainability for communities in Malawi to protect their key exports, namely tea and coffee.

It is in recognition of the challenges that our partners face that we remain committed to growing the international development fund to £15 million by the end of this session of Parliament and to maintaining a £1 million humanitarian emergency fund.

Scotland also faces its own challenges, of course, and we cannot shy away from the fact that there are increasing pressures on public finances. However, our international development funding reflects our commitment to support and align with the sustainable development goals domestically in Scotland and to contribute overseas as a good global citizen. We have been clear that we do not want to

“balance the books on the backs of the poor.”

Today’s debate on Scotland’s renewed fair trade nation status serves as an important reminder that we live in a world that is facing immense challenges and that we need to work together to ensure our planet is more equal, fair and sustainable for everyone. Promoting fair trade does just that.

I am pleased to move the motion, and I ask members across the chamber to support it.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes Scotland’s renewed status as a Fair Trade Nation; recognises the dedication and hard work of Fair Trade campaigners, businesses and communities across Scotland in sustaining this achievement; congratulates Scottish Fair Trade for its leadership in promoting and strengthening Scotland’s Fair Trade commitment; acknowledges the vital role of Fair Trade producers, workers and enterprises in the Global South in building a fairer, more sustainable trading system; recognises that Fair Trade is a partnership that supports the rights, dignity and livelihoods of those throughout the supply chain, and commits to uphold and advance Scotland’s role as a Fair Trade Nation as part of its broader commitment to global citizenship and international solidarity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Murdo Fraser to speak to and move amendment S6M-16923.1.

15:14

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I very much welcome the opportunity to debate the topic of Scotland as a fair trade nation. In the

course of my remarks, I will talk about the progress that we have made in relation to the purchase of fair trade products internationally, but I also want to spend a little time looking at what is happening in Scotland in relation to giving a fair deal to producers here.

As the cabinet secretary has already said, Scotland is a fair trade nation. On 10 March this year, Scottish Fair Trade announced that we had retained our status, stating that all five criteria that we require to meet to be a fair trade nation had been met. However, Scottish Fair Trade made a series of eight recommendations for keeping the fair trade movement going, including on the need to improve data and legislation, to connect with supermarkets and to work with the public to keep ethics a high priority.

We know that, across Scotland, there is considerable consumer support for the concept of fair trade. The latest figures, from March 2024, tell us that 85 per cent of Scottish consumers say that they buy a fair trade product at least once a year, with 66 per cent—two thirds—saying that they buy one at least once a month. Despite the rising cost of living, there is little evidence that those figures are going into decline, which shows that, even when economic times are tough, people still recognise the value of fair trade.

What is fair trade? Essentially, it is an arrangement designed to help producers in developing countries to achieve sustainable and equitable trade relationships. Generally speaking, producers who are part of the fair trade movement can expect higher prices for their products. They can pass that extra money on to their workers in better pay and benefits, and it can also be used to help to improve environmental standards.

The fair trade movement originated in relation to commodities that were typically exported from developing countries, such as coffee, cocoa, sugar, fruit, flowers and gold. The Fairtrade Foundation works with farmers, producers and more than 1,900 producer organisations across 68 countries. In 2023, UK sales of fair trade products generated £28 million in fair trade premiums for farmers and workers—that was money over and above the cash that they would otherwise have received for their products.

A number of years ago, I had the privilege of visiting Malawi as part of a visit with a number of other parliamentary colleagues. We saw for ourselves at a coffee plantation the value that fair trade brought to the workers there. It allowed them to enjoy a level of income and job security that simply would not otherwise have been possible.

Public agencies here can lead by example on the purchase of fair trade products, and here in the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Parliament

Corporate Body has been very clear that fair trade products should be used wherever possible. However, ultimately, fair trade is driven by the consumer. If individuals recognise the value of the Fairtrade label and understand the benefits that it brings, they can choose to use their spending power to support the initiative, even when it might cost them a little bit extra. As I highlighted earlier, the evidence shows us that Scottish consumers are prepared to continue to support the fair trade programme, even though it might mean them paying a small amount extra to do so.

It has been good to see many local communities across Scotland embracing the concept of fair trade. In my region, Aberfeldy became the first Fairtrade town in Scotland, in 2002, and Kinross-shire became the first Fairtrade county in Scotland, in August 2005. Those were both communities in which active people came together to push for the label to be adopted, and I am sure that other members will have similar stories of communities in the areas that they represent similarly embracing the concept of fair trade.

Although the focus of the fair trade movement is on international imports of commodities, such as coffee, we should not lose sight of the wider concept of fair trade for producers at home, which is a topic that is mentioned in my amendment. A consistent and regular complaint that we hear from farmers and food producers in Scotland is that they do not see sufficient focus on the purchase of locally produced food. Such a focus would not only support local employment but help the environment by reducing food miles. However, too often, we see supermarket shelves lined with fruit and vegetables that might well have been flown thousands of miles to get here, even though there are alternatives available that are produced closer to home.

That frustration is felt particularly when it comes to public procurement. Over the years, I can recall many occasions on which we have debated the need for procurement rules to better support local economies and local producers. Such support is particularly needed when it comes to the provision of food, such as for school meals or catering in hospitals, where there is an opportunity to purchase what is produced locally, which would put money back into the local economy.

Too often, in the past, national health service boards and local councils have hidden behind Scottish Government procurement rules to say that preference cannot be given to local producers. Similarly, the Scottish Government has hidden behind European Union procurement rules. Now that we are no longer in the EU, those excuses carry little weight.

When the Parliament's Economy and Fair Work Committee took evidence recently for its post-

legislative scrutiny of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014, we heard examples of good practice, where local authorities are making the effort to provide healthy, nutritious meals that are produced from local ingredients. That is very much to be welcomed, and I was encouraged to see Argyll and Bute Council providing venison on the school menu to support the local industry and local gamekeepers. I would like to see that initiative rolled out more broadly. However, that practice is not universal. We need leadership from the Scottish Government to ensure that we are providing fairness for the very substantial public sector spend in supporting local business.

There is a legislative opportunity to address some of those issues through the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced last week and which I had the pleasure of reading over the weekend. The bill's intention is to ensure greater support for local economic operators to access public sector contracts and to use public procurement to facilitate the generation, circulation and retention of wealth in the local economy.

That all sounds very welcome, but my initial reading of the bill leaves me with a whole list of questions, which I will raise as the bill progresses through its committee stage. In essence, the bill requires ministers to publish a community wealth building statement. There are similar obligations on local authorities and relevant public bodies, including health boards, colleges and enterprise agencies, to work together as community wealth building partnerships. It all sounds very heavy on strategy and the publication of documents, and rather light on outcomes. It would be a pity if the bill was not a significant opportunity to address the concerns that have been raised with us over many years by local businesses about their difficulty in accessing a fair share of public contracts. I am sure that we can pursue that issue in the Economy and Fair Work Committee and in the chamber as the bill progresses.

My amendment to the motion also makes a wider point about the benefits of free trade more generally. We have a new US President who is threatening to impose trade tariffs, which might or might not end up hurting UK exports. We should be unequivocal about championing free trade. Trade barriers hurt growth and cost jobs, so let us be clear that free trade is a positive. Let us encourage the UK Government in particular to look for new trade deals across the world with countries such as India, which will help Scottish and British businesses to grow.

I am happy to put on the record our party's continuing support for the concept of fair trade and to join the cabinet secretary in celebrating Scotland's position as a fair trade nation.

I move amendment S6M-16923.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises that free and fair trade is the most powerful engine for poverty reduction and global prosperity; affirms that open markets, trade liberalisation and the entrepreneurial spirit are central to Fair Trade; believes that protectionism and arbitrary trade barriers harm the very producers and communities that Fair Trade seeks to support; calls on all MSPs to actively champion global agreements that allow Scotland’s businesses to compete, innovate and lead on the world stage, and further calls on the Scottish Government to support the full potential of, and critical work already performed by, local producers by properly accounting for them in its public sector procurement rules and guidelines.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Colin Smyth to speak to and move amendment S6M-16923.2.

15:23

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Scotland’s status as a fair trade nation reflects a commitment to social justice, sustainability and global solidarity. It is a powerful statement of our shared values that demonstrates leadership and promotes ethical trade and equality at a time when inequality too often runs through our global supply chains.

As the convener of the Parliament’s cross-party group on fair trade and the chairperson of Dumfries and Galloway regional fair trade steering group, I see every day the difference that is made by the fair trade principle that producers and workers should receive fair payment, good working conditions and opportunities for economic empowerment. I recognise that it is the work of local groups and campaigners, businesses, faith groups, councils and, ultimately, the producers themselves that makes the fair trade principle a reality.

I am delighted to welcome some of those grass-roots campaigners, who join us in the gallery and online for the debate. Like many colleagues, I regularly get to meet inspiring fair trade campaigners at events across my region. In the past few weeks alone, I have spoken at Dumfries fair trade group’s public meeting on the future of fair trade and eaten way too many cakes at the Kirkcudbright fair trade group’s big brew and at the fair trade village big brew in Dunscore—a village that probably organises more fair trade events per head of population than anywhere else in the world.

Whenever I head to such events, my kids always shout, “Don’t forget the Fairtrade chocolate,” and my wife usually adds, “And the Fairtrade wine.” Let us hope that she does not find that there is now Fairtrade gold, too. That recognition, warmth and support for fair trade has

been generated by the work of our fair trade communities.

Therefore, I want to say a heartfelt thank you to every volunteer, shop, organisation, school and faith group that plays a role in delivering trade justice for vulnerable farmers and workers in the global south. Their efforts, along with ours in the Parliament, are supported by the fantastic work of Scottish Fair Trade, which was previously under the leadership of Martin Rhodes and is now led by Louise Davies, alongside her small but exceptional team of Catherine, Sissa and Kiera. They are backed by their board, which is under the chairmanship of Charles, Liz and Rachel.

The Scottish Fair Trade Forum’s work led to the step change in fair trade activity in Scotland that resulted in fair trade nation status being secured more than a decade ago. We celebrate the fact that that has been renewed this year, at a time when the fair trade principles of fair prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers have never been more important.

Fair trade challenges the injustices of conventional trade and is at the heart of the fight against climate change. The Fairtrade premium, which ensures that producers in the global south are paid fairly, is a lifeline for communities, as it allows them to invest in sustainable farming and to afford medicine, education, food and good housing.

John Mason: The member has mentioned a lot of good news that I certainly support and welcome. He has also said a lot about food. Does he accept that we still have some way to go as far as clothing is concerned? We have heard at the cross-party group on fair trade that it has been difficult to get procurement of fair trade clothing.

Colin Smyth: I agree entirely with the really important point that John Mason has made. I will come on to the importance of procurement in a second, because if the question is whether the Parliament and the Government can do a lot more, the answer is, “Absolutely—we certainly can.”

Many local fair trade groups that have tried get a Fairtrade sign put up at the entrance to their Fairtrade village or town say that their council, or Transport Scotland, has said no. How much of Scotland’s £16 billion public sector procurement budget is actually spent on fair trade products? The answer is often, “We simply do not know.” Scottish Fair Trade has been trying to measure that since 2019, yet no consistent monitoring or definition has been put in place. Last year’s Economy and Fair Work Committee inquiry into the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 highlighted the lack of a standardised legal definition of “fairly traded”, which has led to

different public bodies taking different interpretations.

We need to have a clearer definition that is aligned with Fairtrade International and the World Fair Trade Organization—not to mandate purchases, but to enhance transparency and accountability. Since our committee's recommendation, I am pleased that guidance on procurement has improved, but I urge the Government to go further and enshrine the definition in law by amending the 2014 act, which will enable us to see how many fair trade products are being bought.

Scottish business also has a vital role to play. As a Labour and Co-operative Party MSP, I am proud of the co-operative movement's early and continued support for Fairtrade. The co-op retail movement remains Fairtrade's largest UK supporter, and many Fairtrade producers operate as co-operatives. Other retailers could follow that example by increasing the amount of Fairtrade stock that they sell and ensuring that their supply chains are ethical. By integrating ethical risk assessments and supply chain due diligence, Scotland could lead the way in responsible trade.

Given that fair trade enterprises face higher costs than conventional businesses, we should also strengthen support to help them to thrive and scale up their impact. Just as it is vital to embed fair trade and ethical supply chains in Scottish business practices, it is vital to integrate fair trade in education and lifelong learning, to inspire the next generation's commitment to fair and ethical trade. I am delighted that we are joined by some of those future champions, who are from Holy Cross high school in Hamilton, in the gallery today. They really do lead by example in their work.

Fair trade nation status is more than a title; it is a commitment to social justice, sustainability and global solidarity. It strengthens our international reputation and affirms our leadership in ethical trade. To maintain that status, we can and must do more—for example, by ensuring that our public procurement policies align with fair trade principles and embedding such values in business and education. Fair trade is not only about purchasing choices; it is about the world that we want to build—one that is rooted in fairness, equity and sustainability.

I will be pleased to move Labour's amendment, in my name, and to support the Government's motion. Although I do not fully agree with some parts of the Conservative amendment, I recognise the important points that it makes about support for local producers—which, I stress, is not in conflict with fair trade—and I recognise that fair trade businesses are often the most entrepreneurial, given the barriers that they face.

It is important that we speak with one voice in the Parliament and work together across parties and sectors to ensure that Scotland continues to lead as a fair trade nation. By doing so, we will make a lasting difference for communities that need fair trade today more than they have ever needed it.

I move amendment S6M-16923.2, to insert at end:

“; notes Scottish Fair Trade's strategy, which includes the aim of increasing the consumption and production of Fair Trade products, and calls on the Scottish Government to continue to support Fair Trade by establishing a standard definition and measurement framework for Fair Trade in public sector procurement, embedding Fair Trade in education and lifelong learning and supporting Fair Trade and ethical supply chains in Scottish business practices.”

15:30

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am very happy to have the chance to speak in this debate. We have already heard a few examples—my guess is that we will hear a fair few more—of local fair trade organisations in every corner of the country. The fair trade movement is in every community across the country.

I echo Colin Smyth's comments in welcoming the fact that the current generation and the next generation of representatives of the fair trade movement are with us in the Parliament and watching at home.

In my region, Glasgow, one of the most familiar names to people who seek out fair trade products and to businesses that want to put fair trade products on their shelves is Greency Wholefoods, which is a long-standing wholesaler that has done a huge amount to improve recognition and accessibility of fair trade products. However, there are also newer businesses, including coffee roasters and chocolatiers around the country, that might not necessarily have the Fairtrade logo on their products—or they might not have it yet—but which are making significant efforts. They are going above and beyond the bare minimum of what their businesses require in order to find ways to trade fairly and to ensure, and communicate, benefits to the producers around the world with which they have links.

As other members have said, the work of a wide range of such businesses and of a great many campaigners, voluntary organisations and others has been going on for a great deal of time. That is why, in our briefing papers, we see very positive statistics that show the high level of recognition of fair trade in Scotland, the number of people in Scotland who regularly buy fair trade products and the number of community organisations and local authorities that take account of fair trade as part of their procurement.

However, it is really important that we do not relegate or consign fair trade to the category of voluntary good works, because the fair trade movement is intended to achieve much more than that. It is intended as a provocation and, as Colin Smyth said, to challenge the unfairness of conventional trade. The fair trade movement is there to ask for, demand and achieve change in the way in which the whole global trading system works, and that change is absolutely needed.

I welcome the positive work that the Scottish Government has done on fair trade, such as it is. However, when I did a little bit of preparation for the debate the other day, I assumed that I would find information on fair trade on the trade pages of the Scottish Government website, but such information is absent from those pages. I looked at "A Trading Nation", which sets out the Scottish Government's approach to trade policy, but mention of fair trade is entirely absent from that document.

I do not single out the Scottish Government in that regard; the UK Government and a great many other Governments around the world also want to be seen to be doing the right thing when it comes to supporting voluntarism in relation to fair trade but do not join the dots by embedding fair trade principles in trade policy itself. There is a disjoint. Fair trade is seen as something positive but, basically, as an optional policy that is separate from trade policy.

There is a great deal of scope to take a much more expansive view of fair trade by adopting a wider ethical approach. For example, some businesses deal with the issues that arise from trading in conflict zones and areas of occupation. A number of fair trade businesses go out of their way to give space, profile and priority to, for example, Palestinian products and positively avoid stocking products that are produced by those who benefit from the illegal occupation of Palestine. That wider understanding of fair trade needs to go further.

There is nothing in the Government motion or the Labour amendment that I disagree with, and I will certainly support them, but the Conservative amendment is unsupportable, and I would be disappointed if the Government and the Labour Party support it. The idea that free and fair trade are part of the same sentence entirely ignores the fact that these concepts are, at the very least, in tension with each other—I regard them as being in conflict with each other, but, at the very least, they are in tension with each other.

The idea that trade liberalisation is central to fair trade must come from the head of someone who has never heard of the concept of structural adjustment. Far too often in the history of trade policy around the world, it has been the wealthy

and the powerful who have imposed trade liberalisation on the poor and developing countries, particularly in the global south, while happily using protectionism to look after their own industries at home. There has been a great deal of hypocrisy from powerful countries using free trade as an economic weapon to impose on others while protecting themselves from its harmful effects.

There is no attempt to structurally adjust those powerful countries even though we know that the way that they trade is fundamental to activities that undermine progress towards the international development goals or net zero, and now we live in the context of Trump's trade wars, which are based on the absurd idea that wherever a trade imbalance exists, the country with a surplus is doing something abusive or unacceptable to the country with a trade deficit, which means that, essentially, selling things that other people want to buy is inherently unfair trade.

At the same time, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, international aid is being slashed, not just by the US Government but by the UK and others. When those appalling cuts to UK aid were announced, far from opposing them, the Conservatives said that they were not deep enough. The fair trade movement will be less able to achieve the things that it has achieved in recent decades in the context of the decimation of international aid and the idea that powerful countries such as the US are simply going to dictate terms to the rest of us. Some countries are standing up to that nonsense, while others, including the UK, appear to be preparing to capitulate to powerful countries such as the US.

Fair trade should not be seen merely as a voluntary concession to producers in a minority of developing countries. If we accept that the global trading system is too often unfair and harmful, we should be seeking to achieve systemic changes that always protect the poorest and most vulnerable from exploitation by wealthy countries, big business and powerful Governments.

I regret that we will not be able to unite on an amended motion if the Conservative amendment passes tonight. I hope that we are united on the value of fair trade, but we are clearly not united on the idea that it is compatible with the deregulated, race-to-the-bottom free market economy that we live in today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to our guests in the gallery, who are most welcome here, that we do not really do applause in the gallery, because it is the elected members who are the participants in the proceedings. Of course, our guests are very welcome to listen to our proceedings.

I call Willie Rennie to open on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

15:38

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Presiding Officer, I am glad that you warned them before my speech, because I am sure that there would have been rapturous applause from across the gallery after they heard my rousing words.

Elements of my speech are remarkably similar to Patrick Harvie's speech, which causes me great anxiety this afternoon.

Patrick Harvie: Sound judgment.

Willie Rennie: Let us see.

The joining-the-dots bit—about the silo mentality that exists—is a fair point. On the intervention that I made on the minister about Chinese-produced solar panels, the claim is that Uyghur Muslims are being used as slave labour to produce the panels that we are using in our effort to tackle climate change in this country. That is a real conflict. There are very few countries in the world that produce solar panels, and China is one of the main producers, but we face a real moral conflict with that. It is too often the case that we parcel off the fair trade movement into a corner, and we do not think about the wider consequences of our main business.

Patrick Harvie: Would Willie Rennie agree that the solar panel example that he gives is a good argument for why a systemic change approach is required? There is no way that the Scottish Government or any other Government could simply take over something like solar panel procurement and buy them on behalf of everybody. That would massively reduce people's choice in installing the right kit in the right place. We need to prevent unfairly traded products from getting on to the market in the first place. Consumer choice cannot do that alone; it needs Government action.

Willie Rennie: On that scale of products, Government action is, of course, needed, as is a bigger-system approach. There needs to be a global recognition and understanding of where the challenges are. There is no way, I would imagine, that the Scottish Government could investigate the supply chain in China all the way down to the nth degree. However, there should at least be a due diligence process, which has been severely lacking in many cases. Some members will recall the issue of the China Railway Company No 3 Engineering Group in relation to human rights abuses in Africa. Through a subsidiary in the United Kingdom, it had offered a £10 billion deal to the Scottish Government to invest in infrastructure

here. There was not even a proper due diligence process involved in that.

I would have hoped that the Government would perhaps be consistent across its fair trade policies for its procurement so as to tackle some of the deep-rooted problems. We are now going through the process of investing significantly in the ScotWind round of offshore wind farms, and many Chinese companies are interested in that work. I would hope that there would be some kind of process to check the supply chain for that. There are some challenges, and there needs to be a global effort to ensure that we understand them, but I am afraid that the silo mentality that exists now is just not adequate.

I pay credit to the many organisations across the country that have engaged in fair trade over many years, and I recognise their contribution to making Scotland a fair trade nation—from councils to companies, communities and the public sector in all parts of the country. The weaknesses that the report has identified are quite sharp, however. Noting the point that John Mason made, there is quite a low threshold for passing the test, and we should be fully engaging across the country in order to say that we are truly a fair trade nation. A small number of schools are engaged in that. The NHS comes in for particular criticism in the report. Although it has a programme, is there proper engagement in the process? That is a big question. It is a low bar for local authorities to be involved, so let us challenge ourselves to be much better, rather than just accepting that we have passed the test.

I pay particular tribute to St Andrews, which celebrates 20 years of being a Fairtrade town. The campaign there has been very effective, not just in ensuring that there is a range of products for people to buy, but in terms of good education, so that the local community can understand the challenges that we face in that area. So effective has the campaign been that the University of St Andrews is now a Fairtrade university, which is very positive.

On Murdo Fraser's point about free trade, yes, free trade is good—I am a Liberal, and I would, of course, say that free trade is a good thing—but unfettered free trade is not a good thing. We need elements of control and a moral compass. We need to ensure that we are purchasing in a controlled way, rather than an unfettered way. Yes, free trade can drive improvements in many countries and can create opportunities, growth and jobs, but, if it is not used in the proper hands, it can be used as a weapon.

That is my second point of agreement with Patrick Harvie. President Trump is using trade as a weapon—not for the good of the globe, but for the good of his supporters in the United States.

We should not support that, and we should recognise when trade is being used in those terms.

I praise all those who have made sure that Scotland is a fair trade nation. However, there is so much more work to be done, and we should not rest on our laurels. We should ensure that everybody understands the benefit of fair trade, and the Government needs to ensure that every corner of Government activity endorses those principles, as well.

15:45

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): It is a privilege to speak in this debate on Scotland's status as a fair trade nation, which is an achievement that represents our unwavering commitment to fairness, social justice and global solidarity. As we all know, Scotland first became a fair trade nation in 2013, and we reaffirm that commitment today. However, let us be clear that this status is not just a title; it is a reflection of our values and a promise to do the right thing for the people around the world who produce the goods that we rely on.

For me, this is more than just a policy discussion; it is a journey that started all those years ago in the heart of the centre of the universe, if you wish—in Paisley. As members know, all roads lead to the great town of Paisley. Many years ago, the vision, commitment and determination of Provost John McDowall—a proud Paisley buddie, a Labour man and a St Mirren FC supporter; as Meatloaf said, two out of three ain't bad—set us on the path to making Paisley a fair trade town. He recognised that, if we wanted to call ourselves a community that valued fairness and justice, we had to lead by example. Under his leadership, businesses, schools and local groups came together to back fair trade principles, ensuring that Paisley took its rightful place in the global movement for trade justice.

However, this is not just about campaigns, meetings and certificates—it is also about action on the ground. A shining example of that is Rainbow Turtle, Paisley's fair trade shop. For more than two decades, Rainbow Turtle has been a cornerstone of our town's retail landscape, offering fair trade goods and educating the public about ethical trade. The shop is not just a place to buy fairly sourced coffee or crafts; it is a symbol of Paisley's commitment to doing business the right way. It has endured when many high street names have come and gone, showing that ethical retail can thrive in and support our community.

As a Renfrewshire councillor, I was proud to take the fair trade mission further. We worked to ensure that Renfrewshire became a fair trade county—why stop at just one town when the entire

region could follow? We engaged with local businesses, schools and faith groups to embed fair trade into everyday decisions. That was more than about selling Fairtrade tea and coffee; it was about making ethical choices as a core part of how we operate as a community.

When I came to the Parliament, I became the chair of the cross-party group on fair trade, and I had the honour of being at the heart of Scotland's national effort to secure fair trade nation status for the first time. I saw at first hand the dedication of campaigners, businesses and community groups that worked tirelessly to achieve that goal. Now, more than a decade later, we continue to lead the way. Basically, I am saying that it was me who did it—I was involved in absolutely everything. I am only joking. It is not just about me; it is about everyone who gets involved in the campaign.

We cannot take fair trade for granted. The world has changed, and so have the challenges that we face. Climate change, economic instability and deepening global inequalities all make fair trade more important than it has ever been. That is why Scotland must continue to be a leader not just in words but in actions. The Scottish Government has shown its commitment through initiatives such as the climate justice fund, which ensures that those in the global south who are the least responsible for climate change are not the ones paying the highest price.

However, we must go further. We must strengthen fair trade supply chains and support businesses that choose ethical sourcing and empower consumers to make informed choices.

That brings me to an area in which a massive difference can be made. Sporting goods and sportswear are massive markets, but, for years, the main manufacturers have been criticised for how they go about getting their goods to market, whether that be with regard to the almost slave wages of people in certain parts of the world or how manufacturers ensure that third-party suppliers have an ethical background. I note that it is a massive market that people outside the Parliament probably engage with regularly. It is down to our football and sporting clubs to lead the way. Work has been done on that, but it is an important issue that we need to take further.

Let us not forget the wider context. At a time when the UK Government has chosen to cut international aid, Scotland is taking a different path. We stand with producers in Malawi, Rwanda and beyond and recognise that fairness in trade is not only about economics but about dignity, human rights and a better future. Let us be clear: Scotland's status as a fair trade nation is not a trophy to be admired from afar but a challenge to keep pushing and improving and to keep making trade work for people and not just for profit.

Much of what has been said in today's debate has shown the way for us to do that and it has shown that we must work together. I keep coming back to the fact that we should look at key markets and at sporting goods in particular. We should look at how organisations such as local authorities, which may have sport and leisure facilities, could kit out those who work for them with more ethical goods. It is okay for us to talk about this here, but we must lead by example.

Sport is a multibillion-pound market, and I can guarantee that the two biggest German manufacturers no longer produce in Germany and that the major American manufacturers do not currently produce in America. Everything is made very cheaply and sold at massive profit, but manufacturers must give something back to the people who are producing their goods.

As someone who has seen the impact of fair trade, both locally and around Scotland, from Rainbow Turtle in Paisley to here in the Parliament, I know that we can meet the challenge and I know that Scotland can become a beacon of fairness and justice in a world that desperately needs both.

15:51

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to contribute on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, and I will be supporting the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser. We strongly welcome the recent news that Scotland has retained its status as a fair trade nation, reflecting Scotland's national commitment to ethical trade across the globe as we work towards an economy that is fair for everyone.

The concept of fair trade is not only welcomed across this chamber but has received widespread public support. Data from a recent report confirms that 97 per cent of Scots are aware of the concept of fair trade; that 85 per cent purchase fair trade items at least once a year, with 66 per cent purchasing at least once a month; and that almost 70 per cent of local councils agree with fair trade. Those are strong commitments, and they are vitally important.

John Mason: Buying one coffee in this Parliament would count as buying something once a year, but that is not a very high bar.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I can give you the time back, Mr Stewart.

Alexander Stewart: If everybody buys one coffee, that is a start. The public understand. As I have said before, we go to various events and have the option of using fair trade. If people take that up, that is a step in the right direction.

In the past couple of decades, fair trade practices have become ingrained in communities across the country. Last year, in my Mid Scotland and Fife region, Fair Trade Stirling held its 20th anniversary event. The 20-year work of that group, combined with the efforts of Stirling Council, led to the city receiving fair trade status back in 2004. As other fair trade groups across Scotland have done, Fair Trade Stirling has taken part in many important projects to promote and facilitate fair practices around the world, and that should be commended and congratulated.

Fair Trade Stirling's work included setting up the Stirling skills centre in Malawi almost 15 years ago. The centre helps young people to develop the skills that they need to find work, and Malawi is a shining example of the potential benefits of fair trade. The Deputy Presiding Officer and I are co-conveners of the cross-party group on Malawi and regularly see the outstanding work on fair trade that is done there.

The Scottish Fair Trade Forum, which was launched in 2007, has done much work on that. Back in 2018, I was pleased to be able to sign the international fair trade charter when the forum hosted the launch of that important agreement. The charter promises to use the vision and experience of over 250 organisations around the globe to help to reshape business and trade around the world. That remains a principle that I am happy to support.

Although we can be proud of the work that has been done, much more needs to be done to ensure that Scotland and the United Kingdom are seen as world leaders on the issue, as we have heard. Scottish Fair Trade's report highlights the "enormous effort" that will be needed to keep the fair trade movement going and enhance public awareness. We need to ensure that more people are aware of fair trade, including by embedding its importance in our education system. Many education authorities are already taking steps on the issue, and many schools take part in Fairtrade fortnight and attempt to purchase fair trade products.

However, it is important that the Scottish Government looks for opportunities to ensure that fair trade principles become commonplace in Scottish classrooms. We have heard this afternoon about what more we need to do to achieve that. One of the long-standing criteria for a fair trade nation is that there must be widespread awareness of fair trade. We now have more awareness of its importance, but we need to ensure that younger generations are actively aware of what is happening.

It is important we speak up for fair trade practices around the world, but it is also important that we highlight local and home-grown processes,

as we heard from Murdo Fraser. Across Scotland, we have great examples of councils ensuring that local food producers are fully utilised, which reduces transport costs and helps to protect local jobs. However, that is still not standard practice throughout Scotland, and there are clear opportunities for the Scottish Government to show national leadership on the issue.

Our amendment recognises that

“free and fair trade is the most powerful engine for poverty reduction and global prosperity”,

and that is what we want to see. Given the current global climate and the situation that we are in, we want to highlight the opportunities that are out there, but we are in a changing world, and we need to be alive to that.

Fair trade is less about what we buy as consumers and more about who we are as a nation. I hope that this debate is an opportunity for Parliament to highlight that. Our amendment makes it clear that we, on the Conservative benches, are committed to the fair trade principles because fair trade is good for communities, individuals, the supply chain and our nation.

15:57

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I join my colleagues in welcoming Scotland’s renewed status as a fair trade nation. It is not merely a badge of honour; it is a reaffirmation of who we are and the values that we choose to stand for—fairness, dignity, solidarity and justice.

I pay tribute to the fair trade campaigners, businesses and community groups across our country whose dedication has made that status possible. Among them are the inspiring members of the Peterhead and Buchan fair trade group in my Banffshire and Buchan Coast constituency. That collective, which is made up of volunteers from Peterhead and from Mintlaw and New Deer in my colleague Gillian Martin’s constituency, has worked tirelessly since achieving Fairtrade status in 2012—a status that it has proudly renewed again this year.

The group’s work reaches across our communities and into the hearts of our schools. It has held fundraising stalls at school fairs, presented to assemblies and even introduced Fairtrade cotton uniforms as an option in local schools, planting the seeds of global citizenship in the minds of our young people. It shows us that fair trade is not a distant ideal but something that is woven into our everyday lives—our choices, our shops and our classrooms.

The Peterhead and Buchan fair trade group has also worked with local businesses, organising

permanent fair trade displays in hardware stores and running seasonal sales and raffles to raise awareness. It has partnered with the Co-op, collaborated with Aberdeen fair trade group, presented to local organisations such as the Mintlaw women’s institute and the central Buchan rotary, and participated in national and international forums such as “Meet the Producer” and “Campaigning Together.” Its current campaign deserves special mention: collecting and sending donated tools such as drills, grinders and sewing machines to a rice co-operative in Malawi. That initiative speaks to not only the creativity of local campaigners but the deep solidarity at the heart of the fair trade movement.

Scotland has been a fair trade nation since 2013. The retention of that status in 2025 reaffirms our on-going commitment to fairness, social justice and global solidarity. It is a reminder that our small nation can make a big difference on the world stage, especially when we stand shoulder to shoulder with producers and workers in the global south.

We live in a world that is wracked by enormous challenges, such as climate change, conflict, inequality, and global health crises. Those crises disproportionately affect the very communities that fair trade seeks to support. Scotland’s response has been clear: we choose to stand in solidarity, we choose partnership over exploitation, and we choose justice over indifference.

The fair trade model is about more than just trade. It recognises the rights, dignity, and livelihoods of people throughout the supply chain, empowering farmers, workers and producers to build better lives for themselves and their communities.

That is at the heart of the Scottish Government’s international strategy. Through initiatives such as the climate justice fund, which was launched in 2012—making Scotland the first country to commit funds explicitly to climate justice—and through our partnerships with countries such as Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Pakistan, we continue to promote inclusive development and ethical global relationships. Scotland’s international development fund will increase to £12.8 million in 2025–26. That includes support for humanitarian emergencies and vital investment in areas such as global health and education—especially for marginalised women and girls.

At a time when global need is rising, the Scottish Government’s commitment is both morally right and strategically wise. In stark contrast, unfortunately, the UK Labour Government has chosen to slash international aid to just 0.3 per cent of gross national income—breaking a manifesto promise and turning its back on some of the world’s poorest communities.

Scotland chooses another path. We choose to lead.

I believe—deeply—that, given the full powers of independence, we could go even further, by committing to the UN's target of 0.7 per cent GNI for official development assistance and enshrining that promise in law. However, until that day comes, we must make every devolved lever count. Through our vision for trade, we apply the principles of inclusive growth, wellbeing, sustainability, net zero and good governance to every decision that we make, placing fairness and the planet at the heart of our economy.

Through grass-roots efforts such as those of the Peterhead and Buchan fair trade group, fair trade lives and breathes in our communities. Such groups remind us that global solidarity starts at home—that a stall in a school hall, a cotton uniform and a donated sewing machine are all acts of hope.

Scotland's status as a fair trade nation is not a static accolade but a living and evolving commitment. It asks something of each of us: to advocate, to educate, to choose differently and to build a system that serves not just the fortunate but the forgotten.

We must continue to uphold that commitment. We must honour the campaigners, the producers and the promise that Scotland can be a beacon of fairness in a world that desperately needs that.

16:03

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I join members in welcoming the continued recognition of Scotland as a fair trade nation. It is a testament not only to the work of campaigners and businesses that promote and stock fair trade goods but to Scotland's role as an outward-looking global nation.

A Scottish Labour Government kick-started the process in 2007 for Scotland to be recognised as a fair trade nation. However, the history of the movement goes far beyond that. The modern fair trade movement is said to have started after world war two with an American woman called Edna Ruth Byler, who would buy lace products from women in Puerto Rico for a truly fair price and sell them to her friends. She said:

"I'm just a woman trying to help other women."

Those simple principles of support, fairness and trade justice remain to this day.

Since then the movement has grown massively, with the UK's own fair trade certification turning 31 this year, generating millions in premiums for producers, improving their lives, and building their communities.

Edinburgh has played a role in the fair trade movement. On George Street, in the centre of the city, sits Hadeel, a fair trade shop selling Palestinian goods and providing a source of income for artisans and farmers. The University of Edinburgh is one of Scotland's three universities with Fairtrade status. Edinburgh itself gained Fairtrade city status in 2004.

The Edinburgh Fairtrade city steering group organises events marking Fairtrade fortnight such as the Fairtrade festival and displays in Edinburgh's libraries. That commitment has led to Edinburgh hosting the Fair Trade Towns International conference this August, bringing together producers and campaigners from across the world to discuss the benefits of fair trade and how we can use fair trade to meet the sustainable development goals.

I have heard at first hand about the impact of fair trade through the cross-party group on Bangladesh. We heard from a representative of Community Crafts, a fair trade organisation that has operated for more than 40 years, giving marginalised women the opportunity to make a fair wage by creating products from upcycled saris. Those products are sold right here, in Edinburgh, at One World Shop, which I visited last year and which has sold only fair trade goods for more than 40 years. The representative from Community Crafts was in Scotland to find more buyers for their goods. That shows the strength of feeling towards fair trade here in Scotland, and its powerful global effects.

However, given the continued prevalence of poor working practices and exploitation in the production of the clothes that we wear, or the technology that we use every day, there is still much more to achieve. Fair trade in Bangladesh, especially, can be a powerful force for achieving climate justice. Producers in the global south can be considered to have done the least to cause the climate crisis, but they face the greatest loss from climate change. For a multinational corporation, a changing climate may mean a loss on the balance sheet, but for a small-scale farmer, it means losing their livelihood. With fair trade, producers are better able to adapt and protect their livelihood and communities.

I note the story of Colombian coffee co-operative Red Ecolsierra, which, through fair trade, was able to invest in sustainable growing practices, such as shade trees and better coffee drying. However, we must keep working to maximise the benefit of being a fair trade nation.

Colin Smyth has already discussed procurement and a standard definition, which are positive steps. We should also be looking to further encourage businesses across all sectors to adopt fair trade practices and to support them to build sustainable

ethical supply chains by renewing and strengthening the Scottish businesses pledge.

I would welcome any further work to embed and encourage the principles of fair trade all across our economy. The strength of the fair trade movement in Scotland is something that we should be proud of. While much of the world seems to be turning inwards, with fair trade, we can make a positive case for co-operation and friendship.

16:09

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I, too, applaud Scotland's continued status as a fair trade nation. As we know, the principle of fair trade means that farmers and other producers in less economically developed countries should receive a fair price for the goods that they produce. As practically everyone knows, when sold in support of those aims, such products usually carry a Fairtrade label.

Sixty per cent of the fair trade market consists of food products such as coffee, tea, cocoa, honey and bananas. However, it also covers non-food commodities such as crafts, textiles and flowers. Those three items are not so often identified as products that might start their long journeys from the fields and sweatshops in countries where labour—and sometimes life—comes cheap. So much depends on businesses and us. We are at the end of a production chain that runs from growing to processing, and from there to packaging and then into our shopping baskets.

We recognise the labels on bananas and coffee, but what is often missed is the cost to poor countries of supplying garments to UK outlets. The prices of Fairtrade bananas and coffee are often on a par with those of other commercial products. However, if a T-shirt is only £2, or a jacket or dress is only £10, we should ask ourselves why it has such a low price. In these days of inflation and austerity, I realise that not everyone has the luxury of answering that question through their choices, but the culture of throwaway fashion has a lot to answer for. After all the back-breaking labour of poor workers who have been exploited, within weeks, such garments are often in landfill. Neither situation is good for people or for the planet. A few years back, several clothing retailers, including the venerable Marks and Spencer, were taken to task for what amounted to child labour producing clothing for their shops. Frankly, in some cases, the companies were simply unaware of that fact. Since that exposé of not only its own practices but those of other retailers, M and S has put in place a publicly accessible ethical trading policy.

Now, several supermarket chains from the UK, including Tesco and Sainsbury's, have been in

talks with the Fairtrade Foundation, as they want to join forces to buy Fairtrade bananas, coffee and cocoa from farmers in developing countries. A UK fair trade coalition would be the first buying coalition of its kind. It would increase the availability of fair trade products to consumers. Crucial to the establishment of such a project would be approval by the Competition and Markets Authority. The UK's competition watchdog has recently indicated, in an informal advice note, that it does not expect to take enforcement action as a result of such a scheme, and that joint buying would have

“neutral”

or even

“positive effects on competition”,

by giving shoppers a wider choice of fair trade products.

According to Fairtrade, such a buying coalition would give supermarkets more power to resolve major issues such as child labour, living wages and deforestation. If the project proceeds and proves successful in the UK, the non-governmental organisation hopes to expand it to other markets in Europe, including Belgium and the Netherlands.

I have yet to discover where the UK stands on such an initiative, and I would welcome up-to-date information on that, as regulatory powers on consumer products are reserved to the UK Government. Although Governments and public agencies, including the Scottish Parliament, which hold large procurement budgets, can exercise choices and promote fair trade, the public have a huge impact on what happens in the fields, forests and factories across the poorer parts of the world. Such an initiative might, in some way, change the balance from the position when Great Britain exploited large parts of the world and took so much of their natural resources—parts that are now in desperate need of economic assistance. Fair trade is one way of doing that.

16:13

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I also thank Colin Smyth, who leads the cross-party group on fair trade, which I seek to attend as often as I can.

The focus of the debate is on fair trade around the world, especially where the richer west buys goods and services from poorer developing countries. However, as other members have mentioned, such principles should apply across the board. Fair trade should include farmers in Scotland being paid a reasonable price for the milk that they produce and our workers being paid

properly for the jobs that they do. The concept of fair trade is absolutely excellent, and we should surely all support it.

We, in the richer west, should not maintain our affluent lifestyles at the expense of workers who suffer miserable conditions and who are paid minimal wages in the developing world or the global south. Many of us can easily afford to pay a little bit extra for coffee or wine, with the assurance that the farmers who grow the produce are getting a good deal so that they can work reasonable hours, live in decent housing and afford to send their children to school.

It is encouraging that fair trade products have improved over the years. For example, we get good-quality coffee in the Parliament—I remember the days when fair trade coffee was of pretty poor quality. Therefore, I congratulate those who were involved in once again achieving fair trade nation status for Scotland.

Secondly, we need to go further. It still seems to be a narrow range of products that have fair trade varieties available. According to *The Grocer*, there are almost 5,000 fair trade products for sale in the UK. However, I still feel that that is a restricted list. Specifically, we have not made as much progress with clothing as we might have done. There is praise in the report for the University of St Andrews shop, which supplies fair trade sweatshirts and hoodies to students, but that is clearly less common in high street fashion retailers.

In a meeting of the CPG, pupils from Corpus Christi primary school in Glasgow told us that they had worked with Koolskools and had sourced and sold fair trade uniforms, so we know that it can be done. However, from my memory of that meeting, they said that they had to go through a number of hoops to be allowed to do that. My understanding is that the procurement rules and regulations for public bodies such as councils do not always sit well with a desire to expand fair trade.

Thirdly, the fair trade system needs to be tightened up. It is definitely worth while at the moment but some questions were raised as my staff were doing research for my speech. Some figures look good on the surface, such as

“88% of local authorities have schools involved in significant Fair Trade activity.”

However, we are then told that only 6.5 per cent of Scottish schools are part of the Fairtrade schools scheme. That does not sound quite so good.

There are the 10 principles of fair trade from the World Fair Trade Organization and, although they are all good principles, some of them seem to be a bit too woolly. The principle of

“No Child Labour, No Forced Labour”

is pretty clear cut—that is good—and I accept that “Good Working Conditions” will inevitably vary from country to country, taking into account the local norms and cultures. However, other principles such as “Promote Fair Trade” and “Capacity Building” leave a lot to the imagination and a fair bit of wriggle room.

I note the recommendations in the report, some of which are for us as MSPs to take on board. For example, there is the recommendation for

“explicit inclusion of Fair Trade in legislation”

and to

“Be more prescriptive and supportive for MSP action to implement the pledge.”

The point is also made in the report that there should be better

“ways of measuring what is being implemented in constituency and local level.”

I am in broad agreement with the Labour amendment, especially the point about

“establishing a standard definition and measurement framework for Fair Trade in public sector procurement”.

I have no problem with supporting that.

However, not surprisingly, I have some reservations about the angle of the Conservative amendment, despite it being lodged by the relatively pleasant Conservative member, Murdo Fraser. [*Laughter.*] Free trade and fair trade are not the same thing, as Patrick Harvie pointed out earlier.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Will the member give way?

John Mason: Very briefly, yes.

Bob Doris: Do we also need a clearer definition of “relatively pleasant”?

John Mason: I could go into that in more detail, but I do not think that I quite have time.

Free trade and fair trade are not the same thing. In fact, in some cases, fair trade is the opposite of free trade. Free trade says that the strong extract resources from the weak at the lowest possible price that they can get away with. Free trade says that Ukraine must surrender its mineral assets to America in order to get support to be a democracy. Free trade says that children can be sold into slavery in south Asia and elsewhere to save their families from starvation.

There are, of course, good aspects to free trade, especially if the trade is between relative equals. However, one of the reasons that we need fair trade is because free trade has not worked and the west has not historically been good at ensuring that free trade is also fair.

I welcome the fact that Scotland has renewed her status as a fair trade nation. However, I feel that, at present, the bar is quite low and that we all need to do more as individuals and organisations and as a country if we are to be serious about making trade around the world beneficial for all who are involved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the final speaker in the open debate.

16:19

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am proud that Scotland has maintained its fair trade nation status since achieving that in 2013. I know that the topic is incredibly important to many of my constituents, including those who are involved with Fairtrade Inverness, which is a very visible group. That makes sense, given that Inverness achieved Fairtrade city status in 2008 and has maintained it ever since. That Fairtrade city status should not be confused with the far more controversial city status that we achieved eight years prior to that.

Last week, I had the pleasure of seeing artwork on display at the climate justice schools art exhibition at Inverness botanic gardens, many of which recognised the role and importance of fair trade. That display of understanding from primary schoolers across the Highlands of the intersectional inequalities that exist and of how climate change impacts some people more than others, was incredibly heartening.

I recall learning similar lessons as a child when looking at Fairtrade fortnight on a Scripture Union residential. What we discussed then about the power that individuals have really stuck with me, and I am glad to know that Highlands schools are taking the time to share that knowledge about the part that children can play throughout their lives in ensuring climate justice.

March is B corp month. Although Fairtrade and B corp certifications are different, I wanted to mention them both, as they both tie into the spirit of the debate.

There are businesses across the Highlands and Islands seeking to do the right thing—to be a positive influence on the world, to have a sustainable existence that plays its part in tackling climate change and to exert a force for good when it comes to working practices and social justice. From Prickly Thistle Scotland in the Black Isle to North Uist Distillery in the Western Isles, I am proud that my region continues to be a strong leader in sustainable, socially just businesses that have B corp and Fairtrade certification.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency hosted a reception in Parliament recently, celebrating the recent winners of the Vibes Scottish environment business awards. That included the Highland Weigh in Nairn, which is a zero-waste, ethical coffee shop and a favourite surgery spot of mine. At the reception, I heard business leaders from across Scotland discuss how Government can help them to make the right decision.

Most people who seek Fairtrade or B corp certification do so because it is the right thing to do. They do not need a better reason than that, although the satisfaction of their staff and customers, the benefits of having a good reputation and their own happiness and confidence in their impact are all common benefits. However, we must ensure that doing the right thing does not disadvantage those leaders.

Our international development work is something to be proud of, but individuals and businesses domestically can also make a huge difference themselves. I ask the Scottish Government to consider whether there is more that we can do to reward the best practice that exists in communities across Scotland.

Making use of the businesses across the Highlands and Islands that are already doing their bit has been a learning curve for me, but it was surprising to me how easy and inexpensive it is to make many better consumer choices.

When I was struggling with money, I fell into the trap of believing that making better decisions is too expensive and that shopping around required time that I did not have. I thought that people had to be rich in both money and time to change their habits. That is not true. I have saved money and found new products that I enjoy by seeking out fair trade and ethical products. My swapping to Palestinian olive oil, which has enriched a few of my go-to dishes, and laundry eggs and ensuring that the coffee and grains that I buy have the Fairtrade mark has required little time and, often, I am spending less than I would on familiar brands.

I completely understand that, if someone is suffering cash-flow issues, when every penny counts, it is easy to go for the cheapest and nearest options and not to ask any questions. However, those are all symptoms of the same problem, and the cost of not doing the right thing is greater. If it is okay for what we buy here, in Scotland, to be the product of exploitation, exploitation is okay. If it is okay for the UK to engage in unfair trade deals, it is okay for other countries to subject us to unfair treatment, too.

Fair wages for fair work is a principle that we cannot afford to neglect—either for those in the global south whom we trade with or for farmers

across Scotland. Although we might frequently discuss the global south when it comes to fair trade, the impact of accepting exploitation and low pay is felt by us all. Without equality and fairness for all, there is not equality and fairness. For the people of Scotland to enjoy high-quality products, fair work and happy lives, we must be a good global citizen.

Our continued efforts on fair trade in Scotland echo our wider campaign to be a neighbourly, co-operative country that has a positive and recognised impact on the rest of the world. It is yet another example of how in Scotland, the Scottish National Party Government, although undeniably held back by not having access to the full powers of an independent country, always seeks to act as we would if we were a normal independent nation. We support and work with other countries on shared goals and principles. We play our part in influencing others and showing leadership. We push the boundaries as far as we can, proving that we are more than capable of taking on those full powers and doing even more with them as soon as the people of Scotland back us in that aim.

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

16:25

Patrick Harvie: As I expected, a number of very positive examples from right across the country have been brought up in the debate, which I think are worth celebrating. I will take a minute or two to do that, and then I will come on to the reasons why—I say this with great regret, and I want to emphasise that—it seems that Parliament will not be able to unite on a final amended motion. That is a shame.

The positive examples are worth celebrating. A couple of members started with ones from within the Parliament, including John Mason's history of the improvement of the quality of the coffee. Another local example given was the fair trade shop in Edinburgh. There was a rare mention of Paisley from George Adam. He does not talk about his constituency nearly enough—we have all recognised that—but he finally got round to talking about Paisley. There was praise for the work of universities, including the University of St Andrews and the University of Edinburgh. Colin Smyth told us about the cakes in—if I am reading my writing properly—Kirkcudbright. I hope that he enjoyed them.

I want to mention a couple of speeches in particular. Karen Adam gave a local example of uniforms—if I heard her right, in Peterhead. She also used a phrase that stuck with me:

“the deep solidarity at the heart of the fair trade movement”.

That was a powerful expression of what, I hope, we all want to see the global trade system move to. This is about more than just a nice optional extra that makes us feel good in the moment of buying something; it is about provocation and a systemic change.

Emma Roddick also reflected on that. She gave local examples of art that she saw at the botanics that addressed climate and intersectional injustices, but she also used a powerful phrase when she said that without “fairness for all”—and now I am paraphrasing—we will not achieve what the fair trade movement is intended to achieve.

That is the critical point that I hope we all can reflect on. Those local examples are great—they are wonderful and feel good and positive. People feel somewhat empowered by taking such actions in the face of what can often be a frighteningly disempowering world. Local examples provide leadership, but they are not an end result; they are a provocation and a demand for wider change. I come back to the phrase that Colin Smyth used at the beginning of the debate about fair trade challenging the unfairness of conventional trade. We need to accept that provocation and to respond to it by taking responsibility for addressing the systemic change that is required.

Several members have talked about public procurement, and of course there is room to improve there. The £16 billion public procurement budget has been mentioned. Although it is clear that we do not have the research that would enable us to understand what percentage of that is being spent on fairly traded products, I would be very surprised if anyone would counter a bet that that percentage is very low. I suspect that the percentage of private spend by people and businesses that goes to fair trade products is even lower.

Several people talked about the scope for fair trade to move into other categories of products. John Mason mentioned that. I have mentioned his speech a couple of times, and I want to praise it. John Mason and I profoundly disagree on certain other values in politics—areas in which he perhaps has more in common with the allegedly pleasant Murdo Fraser. However, he spoke very well in this debate and he very clearly articulated the conflict between free trade and fair trade: the freer that any business is to behave in the way that it wishes, the less fair the outcome is likely to be.

John Mason and several other members mentioned the impact on developing countries of the way that clothes are produced. We cannot change that through public procurement. There might be a few areas that we could affect, such as school or NHS uniforms, but if we really want to change the role of fair trade in the clothing sector,

that is about changing a wider market, and that will not be done with a handful of ethical retailers who choose to put products on the shelves. It will require deep and fundamental change. The idea that fast fashion could ever be compatible with an approach to fair trade is ludicrous. If fair trade remains merely a choice—one of many choices alongside the unfair choices that occupy more shelf space in more outlets—it will never achieve the systemic change that is required.

At one point, I think that Alexander Stewart was reduced to defending the idea that buying a single cup of fair trade coffee in a year is a start—

Alexander Stewart: It is a start.

Patrick Harvie: No, it is not a start. The fair trade movement started in the 1940s. If we are going to persuade ourselves that buying a cup of coffee a year is a start, we will not achieve the kind of change that the fair trade movement provokes us to achieve. If fair trade is merely a choice, unfair trade will remain the default.

I will finish with one further comment on the Conservative amendment and by reflecting on why I am unable to support it and would be unable to support the amended motion, if that amendment were to be agreed to. It is not just about the conflation of free trade and fair trade—because those concepts are, at the very least, in tension if not in conflict. It is also because, regardless of whether we believe in a more or less well-regulated economy, a fairer one or a freer one, a large single market can help to achieve either objective. I cannot possibly support an amendment that bemoans arbitrary trade barriers from a political party that imposed and raised those arbitrary trade barriers by taking us out of the European Union and ripping up young people's freedoms in the process.

The global trade system, as it stands, remains far too tied to the inheritance of colonial injustices. If we seek to change that and to build a fairer global trade system and a fairer world, we will have to recognise that the change that is required is deep and that it will not be done with one cup of coffee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Neil Bibby has a similarly generous six minutes.

16:33

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to close the debate for Scottish Labour and to support the amendment in the name of my colleague Colin Smyth. It has been a positive, constructive and, if I may say so, relatively pleasant debate. It is clear from the speeches that there is significant support across the chamber for fair trade. It was good that, in his

opening speech, the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture acknowledged the long-standing place of fair trade and Jack McConnell's role in this Parliament.

It is also evident that there is significant support for fair trade across Scotland. We heard many positive examples of work that is being carried out to promote it. We heard powerful testimony from my colleague Foysol Choudhury, who spoke about the impact that fair trade is having in Bangladesh and how marginalised women have the opportunity to make a fair wage by creating products from upcycled saris, which are sold right here in Edinburgh.

Murdo Fraser mentioned Aberfeldy, which became the first Fairtrade town in Scotland, in 2002, and Willie Rennie mentioned St Andrews. Colin Smyth highlighted the work of Holy Cross high school in Hamilton, and I am pleased that pupils and staff from the school have joined us in the gallery and stayed for the duration of the debate—I thank them for that.

We heard many other examples from across the chamber of good work, and there are great examples in my area, too. George Adam spoke a great deal about Paisley becoming a Fairtrade town in 2003. I pay tribute, as George Adam did, to the late Provost John McDowall, who was a champion of the fair trade movement.

One of the organisations that John McDowall worked with was Rainbow Turtle, which George Adam also mentioned and which I had the pleasure of visiting earlier this year. Based in Paisley town centre, it is an excellent fair trade shop that has been operating since 2002. It was great to meet the staff and volunteers and see the variety of products that they stock and the work that they do to sell fair trade products.

I also want to highlight the work of True Origin, a wholesaler in Paisley that I also visited a few weeks ago. It works with a network of smallholder farmers and producers in the global south in order to source the finest ethical foods.

It is important to recognise all the efforts that are being made to make Scotland a fair trade nation. I echo members' thanks to all those who have volunteered their time and played a vital role in Scotland achieving that status. As Colin Smyth and the cabinet secretary said earlier, thanks must go, in particular, to Scottish Fair Trade, which was led by former chief executive Martin Rhodes and is now led by Louise Davies.

It is also important for us to acknowledge that such work is being replicated in other parts of the United Kingdom, which is what makes us one of the biggest fair trade markets in the world. We heard from Murdo Fraser that, in 2023, £28 million

was paid in premiums from Fairtrade products sold in the UK.

I have always believed in people getting a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. That is one of the main motivations that brought me into politics, and it is why, for example, I support the new deal for working people, which will strengthen employment rights and increase the national minimum wage in the UK. However, that principle must apply to fair trade internationally, too. Fair trade and Fairtrade premiums play an integral role in ensuring that farmers and workers in the developing world receive fair pay for their produce and safer working conditions.

The Co-operative Party, of which I am a member, has been and continues to be hugely supportive of fair trade. In fact, long before it was fashionable, the co-operative movement was an early adopter of fair trade products, and the Co-op was the first supermarket to stock fair trade goods. The United Nations has designated 2025 as an international year of co-operatives, and the theme is "Cooperatives Build a Better World". I associate myself with the Scottish Co-operative Party's belief that supporting fair trade will contribute to creating that better world.

We are right to celebrate Scotland's efforts to promote fair trade, but, as we look to the future, we can and should do more—members across the parties called for that.

George Adam made very valid points in his speech, and I agree with him on sports equipment and the opportunity to expand Fairtrade products in that sector. Bala Sport's footballs, which, as the Presiding Officer will know, the Scottish Parliament football team has used from time to time, are produced in Pakistan. The premium that is paid on them is used by Bala's partners in Pakistan to provide discounted groceries for their workers. Sports bodies and clubs should do more, and some schools have purchased Fairtrade sports balls, but more can and should be done to help more schools to follow suit.

That leads me to Colin Smyth's point about procurement. We should have a standardised definition in law of "fairly traded goods" in order to enhance transparency and accountability. Alongside that, we should consider removing existing barriers. As Colin Smyth said, £16 billion is spent on public procurement in Scotland each year, but, despite Scottish Fair Trade's best efforts, we have little idea how much of that is spent on fair trade. I say to the cabinet secretary that if the Scottish Government is serious about the issue, it should get serious about measuring it. I hope that he will respond to those points in his closing speech.

This has been a good debate, and we are right to mark Scotland's renewing its status as a fair trade nation, but we can and must do more to ensure that people around the world get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby. Sadly, the quality of the footballs that the Scottish Parliament team uses is not matched by the quality of the performances.

16:38

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): We do not want to talk about football in the chamber today, given the weekend's events.

I was grateful to hear that John Mason considers my friend Murdo Fraser to be a "relatively pleasant" Tory, although Patrick Harvie demoted that estimation to "allegedly" pleasant Tory. I suppose that it falls to me to become the relatively unpleasant Tory in the estimation of my colleagues. I hope not, but it would not surprise me in some cases. I am not looking in any particular direction when I say that.

I thank the cabinet secretary for his really good speech to open the debate. He rightly talked about the awareness of fair trade and the reputation of our country as a fair trade nation. It was in the spirit of the debate—largely—that he quoted former First Minister Jack McConnell, or Lord McConnell, who talked about our duty to be "good neighbours" and to play our part in meeting global challenges. That is right, because Scotland has always been an outward-facing and global nation.

The cabinet secretary was right to point out that the global trading situation is deteriorating. I might come back to that point if I have time. He also commented on the work that is done through the public and private sectors working together to promote fair trade.

My colleague Murdo Fraser highlighted the level of consumer awareness of, and support for, fair trade, which is a point worth making. Alexander Stewart mentioned that 97 per cent of Scots are aware of fair trade. I do not know whether there are many things, if we are being honest, that such a high percentage of the public are aware of. That is a credit to the Scottish fair trade movement.

I say to Colin Smyth that one of the hazards of being an elected member is the enticement of too many cakes. We all feel obliged—rightly so—to taste as many baked goods as we can consume. Unfortunately, I have taken advantage of that once too often.

Colin Smyth raised the issue of a definition of fair trade, which is pertinent to the debate, because I heard some extraordinarily perverse definitions of, and very slanted perspectives on,

free trade. I will come back to the issue of free trade in a moment.

Patrick Harvie's recollection of history is very challenged. He talked about the Conservatives applauding the cuts in international aid, which, by the way, are being made in order to re-arm our country in the face of the global tensions that we have to deal with. That is now the reality. He said that the Conservatives had said that the cuts did not go far enough. In fact, it was the Conservatives who delivered the policy of spending 0.7 per cent of gross national income on aid. We kept the commitment that was made by Tony Blair to get to 0.7 per cent. That was a very important commitment that the British Government kept, regardless of the colour of the rosette of the party that was in power. Blair might have set the target, but the Conservatives delivered it.

Willie Rennie gave a disturbing speech, because he appeared to be rather too willing to agree with Patrick Harvie. I am deeply concerned for my friend Willie Rennie, so perhaps we need to catch up after the debate and have a chat.

George Adam, who is a tremendous champion for Paisley—no one could possibly deny that—mentioned sporting goods, but he did not mention St Mirren strips. I look forward to talking to him at our committee meeting on Thursday about whether his call for fair trade in sporting goods extends to St Mirren strips.

George Adam: Will the member give way?

Stephen Kerr: I am happy to give way to George Adam to hear that it does.

George Adam: I am as predictable as ever. I agree with Stephen Kerr. During my speech, I said that sporting clubs need to lead from the front in relation to the shirts on players' backs, which are bought by young people. They should be helping with that process and educating as part of that.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to George Adam for making his point very clearly. That includes St Mirren Football Club, of which he is a great fan—he is perhaps the number 1 fan of St Mirren Football Club of whom I am aware.

Alexander Stewart was derided by Patrick Harvie for mentioning the importance of every step in the journey towards fair trade. I am completely flummoxed by Patrick Harvie's attitude towards the comments of my colleague Alexander Stewart, because Alexander Stewart is absolutely right: every single step in that journey is critical. Getting more and more people to take more and more single steps is how we will achieve fair trade.

John Mason: Does the member accept at least the general point that we need to raise the standard and the bar a bit more? If it is just one

cup, we should be going up a bit more than that, surely.

Stephen Kerr: I do not think that anyone will disagree with John Mason's point. I am sure that we are all in favour of seeing fair trade as part of an increase in the size of the free trade basket.

I was perplexed when I listened to Karen Adam. I like her—I have known her for a while, and she is undoubtedly one of the most genuine people in this Parliament. However, to try to wheedle in references to the powers of independence when we are talking about international aid was a bit of a stretch.

Foysoyl Choudhury gave us a good potted history of fair trade globally, in Scotland and in Edinburgh. He specifically mentioned Bangladesh.

Christine Grahame got mixed up with her historical references when she talked about Great Britain. I think that she got us mixed up with Belgium when she was talking about the attitude of the country.

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Kerr: I am happy to give way.

Christine Grahame: Is the member saying that the British empire did not exploit the assets of many countries that are still very impoverished? It is rather ironic that we are having to compensate—we should compensate—by fair trade, but it is the very least that we can do.

Stephen Kerr: It is undeniable that there was a British empire, and it is undeniable that there were things that were good about that period of our history and there were things that are to be regretted about it. However, the kind of cover-all statement that Christine Grahame presented as historical fact in her speech was unwarranted.

John Mason introduced us to the “relatively pleasant” Tory, Murdo Fraser.

Emma Roddick is right when she says that we do not need to be rich in time and money to make good choices. People need information to make good choices, and that is exactly what the Scottish fair trade campaign is all about.

Finally, we get back to Patrick Harvie and the dichotomy that he created that it is somehow not possible to have fair and free trade. I completely refute that, because it is no exaggeration to say that free trade has done more to lift humanity out of poverty than any aid programme, subsidy or well-meaning bureaucratic intervention that has ever been devised. We must look to our own Scottish genius, Adam Smith, who gifted the world the idea of comparative advantage, which is still to this day the most powerful idea in economics and should underpin the system of global trade.

According to the World Bank, the percentage of the global population that is living in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 a day fell from almost 42 per cent in 1981 to just 9 per cent before the pandemic. That is more than 1 billion people lifted out of destitution, not through protectionism or tariffs but through trade, capitalism and enterprise. The examples that I would call on are Vietnam, where trade liberalisation helped to reduce poverty from more than 70 per cent in the 1990s to less than 6 per cent in recent years, and Ethiopia, where exports of coffee, which have been mentioned a number of times, and textiles opened the door to millions of jobs, opportunities and, crucially, dignity.

The most unfair trade practice of all is protectionism—tariffs, quotas and barriers. They do not help the poor. They keep the poor locked out. They are walls that are built not to keep danger out but to keep opportunity from flowing in. We are seeing the resurgence of that failed ideology, from the European Union's labyrinth of agricultural tariffs to Trump's White House's indiscriminate use of punitive tariffs.

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

Stephen Kerr: We must not be shy in opposing protectionism. We have seen the damage that it can do.

To conclude, I reiterate that trade is not theft. As has been said by a number of speakers, trade is co-operation. It is the peaceful exchange of value between people, nations and cultures, and it is one of the greatest achievements of civilisation.

16:49

Angus Robertson: I thank all members who joined me here today to shine a spotlight on the incredible work that is happening in their constituencies and to raise the profile of fair trade here, in Scotland. That has been fundamental to Scotland gaining and retaining its fair trade nation status.

I will begin by making the Government's position on the amendments clear. We have had a relatively agreeable debate, with relative consensus. It is important that we aim for maximum consensus on an issue such as this. I would signal—in exactly the same way as Colin Smyth did—that, although I probably would not have drafted the Opposition parties' amendments in exactly the way as they did, the Government is going to accept the Opposition amendments today.

On the Labour amendment, it is a fair challenge to consider issues around definitions, procurement and education. Labour states in its amendment

that the Government and the Parliament should look at those and that we should be involved in a process of constant improvement. I see absolutely nothing objectionable in that.

On the Conservative amendment, I do not really want to get involved in a debate about the relative balance of free and fair trade, but I think that we should aim for maximum freedom and maximum fairness. Is that simple? No, it is not. Is it easy to achieve? No, it is not. We can be critical of any number of trading practices in any number of countries and territorial organisations and find fault in all of it.

I draw particular attention to something in the Conservative amendment that I think it was right to raise, which is the spectre of trade wars and the dangers of tariffs. We should be very concerned about that. The people who will be harmed most by that are the poorest in countries everywhere in the world. They are the ones who are hit because they pay, through the increase in costs for that which is imported. However, although I would not have chosen the exact wording in the Conservative amendment, members of my party will support it.

Patrick Harvie: Clearly, I am not expecting to change the cabinet secretary's mind on his voting intention at this late stage in the debate—he has made his decision—but would he at least acknowledge that, far from being a positive, "trade liberalisation", which is mentioned in the Conservative amendment, has far too often been forced on developing countries and has had an effect that is the opposite of what the fair trade movement seeks to achieve? Further, will he tell us why fair trade is not referenced in the Government's trade document "A Trading Nation"?

Angus Robertson: I agree with Patrick Harvie on the first point that he made, but I have chosen to deal with that question by saying that it is worth pursuing a balance of maximum freedom in trading arrangements that are fair. I appreciate the warnings from both history and the present day about what might be in the future if one does not get the balance right, and I agree with Patrick Harvie on that. We need to work towards that.

I was going to come to the specific point that Patrick Harvie made about the lack of an appearance of fair trade in Scottish Government trade-related documentation. He understands that trade is a reserved subject, but that is not a reason why the Scottish Government should not make more reference to fair trade online and in its documents. I will definitely take that point away, officials will take it away, and we will have a very close look at that.

There was one thing in Mr Smyth's opening speech on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party that

I noted down in particular, in relation to definitions and the law. I say directly to him that I want to take that point away and better understand what can be done there.

I was challenged on a particular subject by Willie Rennie, who is not in the chamber at the moment—actually, I see that he is: he has simply defected to the Scottish Labour Party benches for the moment. There is not a good future in that, Mr Rennie. He raised a question with me about the UK Labour Government and the purchase of solar panels, a significant number of which are produced in parts of the People's Republic of China inhabited by the Uyghur community. I appreciate Willie Rennie's point. I have had a look at the issue over the course of the debate, and I have already said to him privately that I want to learn more about it. These are challenges for us all. He referenced previous challenges and supply chain questions for the Scottish Government with regard to ensuring that we are doing the right thing on trade and understanding the conditions in which goods are produced and then exported to these shores. We need to be mindful of that, and I agree with him on it.

I thought that Alexander Stewart's contribution in relation to education was sensible. It was fantastic to have had school students in the public gallery during parts of the debate. The more that we can do to encourage learning about fair trade in schools across the country, the better. We should all be supportive of that in our constituencies and regions.

Foysol Choudhury receives my praise for singling out Edinburgh, our great capital that we both have the joy of representing, as well as a country that he knows a lot about—Bangladesh—and the connections between Scotland and Bangladesh in the challenging opportunity around fair trade.

Other colleagues have spoken—Emma Roddick talked about Inverness and the Highlands; I could go on—with all contributors having much to say about what has been achieved in relation to fair trade and noting that there is more that we can do. Some of it can be done with small steps—one cup of coffee at a time—but I agree that we can aspire to do more.

It is right that, in the three-and-a-half minutes that remain for me to speak, I pay due praise, as other colleagues have done, to all those people—the small local groups, the churches and the community organisations—who have worked hard in their local areas to make a difference in the world as well as in their communities. Since the fair trade movement took hold, it has grown substantially, and it is clear that none of the enthusiasm or dedication of those involved has been lost along the way—quite the opposite.

For a long time, we have placed great value on the role of civil society in Scotland and the appetite for global citizenship in our local communities, whether in places of worship, schools or businesses, to name but a few. That local effort is an important part of how Scotland contributes globally to the delivery of the United Nations sustainable development goals. It has an important place alongside the work of Governments, Parliaments and others; that point was reflected on in a recent article in the *Edinburgh Evening News* ahead of this debate, which I commend all members to read. It was especially wonderful to hear about the initiatives that are being taken forward to engage more young people in fair and sustainable global issues such as fair trade. It is vital that the fair trade movement remains relevant and sustainable into the future.

At the end of the debate, I want to leave colleagues with three key messages that we are all in agreement on, regardless of how we vote at the end of our proceedings. The first is our long-standing commitment to being a good global citizen. It is an increasingly contested and volatile space for international development. Scotland is a nation that seeks to lead by example. That means standing up for the values that shape our domestic and international work, ensuring that fairness, equality and inclusion are at the heart of everything that we do and that the voices of those who are less privileged than us are heard and acted on. That is why today's debate is so important. It is not just about what we are doing and saying in Scotland to promote fair trade; it is about amplifying the voice of the producers, workers and enterprises in the global south and standing in solidarity with them to build a fairer and more sustainable trading system.

The second message that I want to leave us all with is our steadfast commitment to delivering for our African partner countries. Our international development fund has been led by our partners to ensure that our portfolio is aligned with their national priorities to maximise impact. That has resulted in our programming focusing on often neglected and underfunded areas such as inclusive education, non-communicable diseases and tackling gender-based violence, delivered through grants rather than loans. That is key, given the debt repayment crisis that many African countries, including our partner countries, face at this time. As the world shifts and strains around us, we remain resolute in our commitment to our partners, and fair trade is a key part of that.

Lastly, I leave us all with a call to action. As I said at the start, fair trade nation status is not just a title. The assessment report challenges us to go further, not only to maintain that status in future but to set the next generation an example of what

good global citizenship is and to show the important role that fair trade plays in that.

I thank members for their input today and look forward to working across the chamber to deliver for Scotland and for our partner countries.

Point of Order

17:00

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In less than 22 hours' time, Parliament will have its stage 1 debate on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. Paragraph 3A of rule 9.6 of standing orders states:

"The lead committee shall report to the Parliament in time to allow the report to be published not later than the fifth sitting day before any date allocated in a business programme for the Parliament to consider the general principles of the Bill under paragraph 4."

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee published a report on the bill as introduced on 19 March. Based on my calculations, that does not meet the timescale that is set out in paragraph 3A of rule 9.6.

Furthermore, there has, as yet, been no Government response to the committee's report. In rule 41 of the protocol on the handling of committee business, in the section entitled "Responses to committee reports", it is stated:

"The Scottish Government should normally respond to any committee report not later than:

- a. two months after publication of the report; or
- b. where exceptionally the debate is to be within the 2 months of publication, a week before the Chamber debate the report."

The committee gave the Government advance sight of its report to try to avoid the situation that we now find ourselves in.

Presiding Officer, I am sure that you will agree that those rules and protocols are in place to ensure that we can have meaningful debate and that members will have had time to read both a committee's views and the Government's response. In the light of the fact that rule 9.6 of standing orders has not been met, and of the fact that there has been no response from the Government in line with rule 41 of the protocol on the handling of committee business, can you confirm whether the debate that is scheduled for tomorrow can indeed take place?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I thank Mr Lumsden for his point of order. I will look into the issues that he has raised and will respond as quickly as possible.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-16923.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16923, in the name of Angus Robertson, on "Scotland—a fair trade nation", 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.

17:02

Meeting suspended.

17:05

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-16923.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16923, in the name of Angus Robertson, on "Scotland—a fair trade nation". Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)

Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 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)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16923.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 107, Against 8, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16923.2, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16923, in the name of Angus Robertson, on “Scotland—a fair trade nation”, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-16923, in the name of Angus Robertson, on “Scotland—a fair trade nation”, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This normally never happens to me. My computer failed to connect to the award-winning platform. I would have voted yes.

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

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Unfortunately, I was unable to connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Macpherson.

Alex Rowley: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 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)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16923, in the name of Angus Robertson, on “Scotland—a fair trade nation”, as amended, is: For 108, Against 7, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes Scotland's renewed status as a Fair Trade Nation; recognises the dedication and hard work of Fair Trade campaigners, businesses and communities across Scotland in sustaining this achievement; congratulates Scottish Fair Trade for its leadership in promoting and strengthening Scotland's Fair Trade commitment; acknowledges the vital role of Fair Trade producers, workers and enterprises in the Global South in building a fairer, more sustainable trading system; recognises that Fair Trade is a partnership that supports the rights, dignity and livelihoods of those throughout the supply chain; commits to uphold and advance Scotland's role as a Fair Trade Nation as part of its broader commitment to global citizenship and international solidarity; recognises that free and fair trade is the most powerful engine for poverty reduction and global prosperity; affirms that open markets, trade liberalisation and the entrepreneurial spirit are central to Fair Trade; believes that protectionism and arbitrary trade barriers harm the very producers and communities that Fair Trade seeks to support; calls on all MSPs to actively champion global agreements that allow Scotland's businesses to compete, innovate and lead on the world stage; further calls on the Scottish Government to support the full potential of, and critical work already performed by, local producers by properly accounting for them in its public sector procurement rules and guidelines; notes Scottish Fair Trade's strategy, which includes the aim of increasing the consumption and production of Fair Trade products, and calls on the Scottish Government to continue to support Fair Trade by establishing a standard definition and measurement framework for Fair Trade in public sector procurement, embedding Fair Trade in education and lifelong learning and supporting Fair Trade and ethical supply chains in Scottish business practices.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Clydeport Conservancy Fee

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16854, in the name of Stuart McMillan, on Peel Ports' conservancy fee plans for Clydeport area. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges reports that Peel Ports Clydeport is planning to introduce a conservancy fee for leisure craft sailing in the Clydeport area; understands that the boating sector has expressed concerns that such a charge could impact the marine tourism economy, including in the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency, as it could discourage boaters from sailing in Clydeport's waters; believes that boaters have also expressed their anger at what it understands is Peel Ports' lack of meaningful dialogue with the sector about these plans; further believes that this has led to questions arising over how the fee will be spent; understands that members of the Cross-Party Group on Recreational Boating and Marine Tourism have agreed that their collective position is that these plans should be abandoned, and that a public petition has been launched to attract support for this view, which, it understands, has attracted over 4,600 signatures so far, and notes the view that Peel Ports should scrap its proposal and work with the sector to address any issues.

17:12

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank colleagues from across the chamber for supporting the motion for debate and my previous motion on the matter.

The issue is important and needs to be debated, and the support for my motion demonstrates the widespread opposition to Peel Ports' conservancy fee plans. That reflects the dialogue that I have had with the boating sector, as everyone who I have spoken to rejects the proposed conservancy fee for the Clydeport area—a view that is also held by many people who are not sailors or boaters. In today's polarised world, it is rare to find an issue that unifies everyone, but it is clear that people think that this proposal is not appropriate and must be abandoned. The Clyde belongs to the people of Scotland, not to corporate interests.

I established a cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism in 2009 and we were pivotal in delivering Scotland's first marine tourism strategy, "Awakening the Giant", in 2015 and the refreshed strategy, "Giant Strides", in 2020. We are an active cross-party group.

I will provide some background to the motion. In August 2024, Peel Ports presented to a group of Clyde-based marina operators its initial plans to levy a conservancy fee on all leisure vessels between 6m and 24m long using the waters within

the Clydeport authority area. The plans were subsequently released on social media.

Although it was proposed that the fee would be introduced on 1 April 2025, Peel Ports did not publish a detailed plan setting out the rationale for the fee, the services to be provided and the administrative arrangements. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the sector began to come to its own conclusions about the motives for introducing such a charge.

Peel Ports has attempted to justify the levying of conservancy fees by citing examples from elsewhere in Scotland where harbour charges are applied to leisure craft. However, the Clydeport area is 450 square miles, is not regarded as a harbour and contains numerous remote waters with negligible commercial traffic—the Kyles of Bute and the entire length of Loch Fyne, to give just two examples. Consequently, it is an area with many leisure craft, both local and visiting, with estimates stating that it sees up to 50 per cent of Scotland's leisure vessels.

It is interesting, therefore, that none of the examples of conservancy fees that Peel Ports has given are applied to leisure vessels under 50 gross tonnage, plus they all relate to charges for the use of specific facilities such as piers, jetties and moorings that belong to the port authority in the relevant areas. However, Peel Ports will not provide additional specific services and facilities and, therefore, claims that the proposed conservancy fee is comparable with existing charges from other harbours and ports really are disingenuous.

I brought the debate to the chamber because Inverclyde stretches along the west coast of Scotland and is home to several boat clubs and two first-class marinas. Many of my constituents are recreational boaters, and we frequently welcome visitors to our beautiful part of the country. Boating benefits my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency—it creates and safeguards jobs and is a draw for visitors.

Marine tourism has grown locally and nationally thanks to the work of businesses and communities that want to show what our shores have to offer. However, the implementation of a conservancy fee will damage my local economy. The volume of correspondence and the level of anger regarding the conservancy fee proposals is like nothing that I have seen before. I have received emails from constituents and representations from boat clubs and marinas from across the United Kingdom. In addition, the petition that I started on the Change.org website has more than 4,600 signatures. Quite simply, people will stop coming to the Clyde and the west coast of Scotland.

Members of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism are particularly frustrated that Peel Ports has twice turned down invites to one of our meetings to explain its proposals. That has further led to those in the sector feeling that the fee is going to be imposed on them without their input.

Fundamentally, the recreational boating sector contributes significantly to Scotland's coastal communities, as other MSPs will recognise with regard to their own constituencies and regions. The last thing that the sector needs, therefore, is recreational boaters being targeted with an unjustified and extortionate fee. In addition, it is unclear how such fees will be collected. Who would pick up the administrative burden, and who is responsible for enforcing such a charge? Peel Ports has simply not answered those points, and many more, in any dialogue that it has had with individuals or with representatives from the various boating clubs and marinas. The more the proposals are scrutinised, the more questions there are, which has led the sector and the public to conclude that the proposals are quite simply a cash grab.

In conclusion, I emphasise that the issue is not that recreational boaters are unwilling to pay for their pastime. Sailors have always expected to pay for harbour, berthing and mooring fees. They are happy to pay, and want to pay, for what they should be paying for. Every MSP in the chamber recognises that this is not the action of the Scottish Government but the action of a private company. Nonetheless, my ask of the Scottish Government is, first, to continue the dialogue with Peel Ports, to ensure that this cash grab does not come to fruition, and, secondly, to look at the harbour authority powers, either via revision orders or by replacing the Harbours Act 1964. That act was designed for a different time that is unlike now. The Clyde belongs to the people, and it should be managed for the people, not for a private enterprise.

17:18

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Stuart McMillan on bringing this important matter to the chamber and on his work over nearly two decades in supporting the recreational boating industry

The Clyde is important to the history and identity of the west of Scotland. Many Glaswegians fondly remember travelling "doon the watter" on Clyde steamers to visit or holiday in one of the many picturesque seaside towns such as Largs, Millport and Saltcoats, in my constituency.

Since the mid-1800s, yachting has been very popular in the Firth of Clyde, when it became

famous worldwide for its significant contribution to yacht building, with notable designers such as William Fyfe of Fairlie.

When it was first reported that Peel Ports planned to introduce a conservancy fee—or rather, a Clyde estuary tax—for leisure craft sailing in the Firth of Clyde, I was contacted by dozens of constituents, who expressed their outrage at the proposal. Those included sailing club members, hobby boaters and marina representatives. All rightly view the potential annual fee of £100 plus VAT as an unjustified and harmful imposition that will negatively impact leisure activities, tourism and the health and wellbeing of many—often elderly—boaters. One constituent said:

"This fee could in time become the deciding factor on whether to keep a boat on the Clyde or not with the knock-on economic impact on the tourism and marine industries."

Indeed, several small sailing clubs depend heavily on membership subscriptions to survive, and they could well struggle or close if members decide not to keep their boats in the water. Boaters say that they have not seen any valid reasons whatsoever for the fee and that they feel that Peel Ports is exploiting leisure boat owners as an easy source of income.

Next Tuesday was to be the date for the introduction of the Clyde estuary tax. However, Peel Ports did not publish any reasoning for its introduction, why it is being imposed now and what services would be delivered to boaters from the resources obtained. The ostensible justification for the fee is that it will support the on-going management and upkeep of the port area under the provisions of the Clyde Port Authority Confirmation Order Act 1965 and the Harbours Act 1964, both as amended.

The principle of a statutory harbour authority charging leisure vessels a reasonable fee for harbour dues when mooring is accepted normal practice within the more limited area of an actual harbour. However, in this case, imposing the fee on the 1,150 square kilometres of the entire Clyde estuary would go way beyond that, stretching from Glasgow's Albert bridge all the way to the Isle of Arran.

Boaters feel that Peel Ports has a monopoly over the entire cruising area but provides minimal benefit in return. For instance, Peel Ports Clydeport claims that the fee will contribute to covering the cost of dealing with accidents, despite that being the job of the marine accident investigation branch.

At the November meeting of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism, which I attended alongside the convener, Stuart McMillan, and Clare Adamson, members of the leisure boating community and sector

representatives convincingly expressed their concerns about Peel Ports' proposal and its failure to engage with the CPG about its plans. One showed us a communication from Peel Ports suggesting that boats whose owners did not cough up would be boarded—that is piracy, no less. It is my strong belief that the Clyde's waters belong to the people of Scotland—as Stuart McMillan indicated—and not to corporate interests that are looking to squeeze money from those who enjoy and rely on those waters.

In January, it was reported that the billionaire Whittaker family behind Peel Ports recently saw their earnings increase, despite a fall in profits at the group, with the family enjoying a dividend of £153.9 million, up from the previous year's more modest £138.9 million. They do not need the Clyde estuary tax. The proposed levy is at any time—let alone at a time of record shareholder earnings—an unfair and ill-conceived imposition on the boating community's activities, and it must be abandoned immediately.

Failing that, I trust that Scottish ministers will today commit to work with the sector, and with the UK Government if required, to identify legislative steps that can be taken to challenge this unwanted Clyde estuary tax.

I thank my colleague Stuart McMillan once again for bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:22

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. My colleague Jamie Greene had hoped to participate, as the area that is covered by Peel Ports falls within his West Scotland region rather than mine. Nonetheless, I know many owners of leisure craft in my South Scotland region who will be affected by the proposals, and Mr Greene and I are aligned in our views on them.

I am grateful to Stuart McMillan for bringing the debate to the chamber and for his efforts, through the CPG on recreational boating and marine tourism, to highlight this unfair, ill-thought-through and ignorant proposal from Peel Ports, to which—as members might have gathered—I am utterly opposed.

Although I recognise that Peel Ports has the right to impose reasonable fees and charges to cover its costs relating to services and upkeep within the Clydeport area, the proposals are far from reasonable. More than that, they have the potential to cause significant harm to the area, damaging marine tourism, deterring investment and, in my view, potentially impacting public health by creating barriers to access. The lack of public engagement and public consultation by Peel Ports is hugely disappointing and only serves to

reinforce the view that it is acting in a high-handed way with no consideration for the wider impacts that the decision will have.

Turning to my point on the public health impact of the proposal, many of the smaller craft that will be impacted by the proposals are not superyachts or gin palaces; they are small sailing craft that are crewed by members of the public who enjoy a day out on the water as a way of being active or to relax. Many of them are coastal rowing skiffs that are built by members of the community and rowed for fun or competition.

I am particularly aggravated by the idea that community groups such as coastal rowing clubs could be affected by the plan. Those are exactly the kind of community groups that I want to see more of. They offer a welcoming environment in which people of all ages and abilities can learn new skills, make new friends and keep fit. Sadly for them, their main rowing skiffs are longer than 6m, so they will now have to stump up to Peel Ports if they want to regularly row anywhere north of Irvine. The dozens of other clubs in Scotland that might visit the area to compete in a regatta will be hooked for a visitor fee.

I understand the position that Peel Ports is in. Its costs are rising and it argues that it has issues dealing with abandoned vessels and wrecks. However, all those vessels belong to someone and those individuals should be pursued for the costs. Responsible owners and seafarers should not be punished for the negligence of a few.

Scotland is an island and seafaring nation. Whether for leisure or commerce, seafaring is an important part of our history and culture. Leisure boaters take to the sea for many reasons: some for the challenge of pitting themselves against the elements or fellow sailors in competition, some for the camaraderie of meeting others with a shared passion, and many simply for fun. Whatever the reason, we should be encouraging more people to enjoy the pleasures that boating has to offer, not putting up barriers.

Peel Ports does not have to listen to the outcry from organisations such as the Royal Yachting Association or a number of local boating organisations that have objected to the plans. However, if it does not listen and if it does not change course, it will do profound harm to communities up and down the Firth of Clyde. I once again thank my colleague Stuart McMillan for bringing this issue to the chamber.

17:26

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I extend my congratulations to the member for Greenock and Inverclyde on securing this members' business debate. It is an important issue, and I am sure that

the minister will agree that it brings into sharp focus a public policy failure that has loomed large in the west of Scotland for the past 35 years.

The Ports Act 1991 was a disaster for the west of Scotland's economy, and the surreptitious privatisation of what was a public body has presented long-term strategic, economic and social challenges for the development of the west of Scotland.

I had the opportunity to venture into the Clydeport building a few weeks ago to discuss some matters with Peel's property side about development on Clydeside. I had the chance to pop my head into what was once the trustees' chamber of the Clyde Navigation Trust building. The trust was a public body that was established under statute to democratically manage a public asset, the Clyde navigation, which is a man-made channel from Glasgow city centre down to the Firth of Clyde. It was also established to undertake port improvements, build shipbuilding facilities, enable trade and enable public access.

The reality is that it was privatised like something out of Yeltsin's Russia. It was an appalling act of surreptitious privatisation of public assets. The continuing lack of regulation that prevails over port authorities in Scotland, particularly the private port authorities, is simply unsustainable. This is another symptom of the wider disease of public policy failure in Scotland.

The issue that we have to contend with is not simply the conservancy fee, although that is an example of the monopolistic behaviour that we have become all too familiar with in relation to the Clyde; it is a symptom of a wider lack of regulation and a lack of balance of control.

I offer the cabinet secretary the example of bus privatisation in the 1980s and the steps that have been taken by the Government to introduce greater regulatory scope to address the imbalance that it caused. Perhaps similar consideration could be given to how we can deal with port management in Scotland by introducing a similar process of greater public oversight, regulation and accountability for harbour and port authorities.

The process does not necessarily need to be the more extreme example of nationalising assets. It is about how we bring the assets under a greater degree of public control. That is what we all seek to achieve. Whether it is developing and maximising the opportunities of port infrastructure or facilitating democratic access to the river, it is important that we get this right.

I extend the point that was made by Mr Gibson about the sheer scale of the Clydeport area. It covers 450 square miles of the west of Scotland and it is the biggest harbour authority in the UK by a considerable distance. It is not just a contained

port facility; it is a vast area of territory, extending from Glasgow Green and the Clyde tidal weir right down to the Isle of Arran.

As the cabinet secretary will be familiar with, the reality is that there is not much vibrancy or leisure traffic on the upper part of the Clyde beyond the Erskine bridge. One of the longer-term challenges is how we develop that vibrancy around the river if another charge is imposed without any commensurate development plan.

Where is the marina for Glasgow, for example? Liverpool has the Albert dock, with myriad pleasure craft and a vibrant riverfront. Glasgow has the Scottish exhibition and conference centre and Pacific Quay, but the area is a desert. Apart from the Waverley plying its lonely trade up and down the Clyde in the summer season, there is not very much else going on.

There is a broader concern in that regard. The port facilities are underutilised, and economic development on the river banks has not been achieved because of the monopolistic behaviour of the port authority. We are seeing a private tax being levied by the port authority on pleasure craft for no obvious benefit, and there is no clear plan for the development of infrastructure on the upper Clyde. If I were to take a small craft to the Riverside museum, I would pay an annual conservancy fee of £120, yet there is barely any berthage, and there are very few amenities there.

We really need to get a grip on the issue, as it is a bigger problem. As the member for Greenock and Inverclyde hinted, the Harbours Act 1964 is ripe for revision. In addition, consideration could be given to how, in addressing the issue, we extend greater public oversight and accountability, perhaps through the Clyde mission and Glasgow City Region programmes. We could also go back to the idea of having a Clyde Navigation Trust that is accountable to other public authorities along the river.

17:31

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw (SNP)): I grew up virtually on the banks of the Clyde, just beside Strathclyde park, and "Song of the Clyde" was one of the first songs that I remember being taught when I was a youngster. The Clyde was integral to our leisure and to the community in North Lanarkshire, and it borders most of my Motherwell and Wishaw constituency along the south side.

Much has been said about what the Clyde has meant to people, and how it belongs to the people. I think that it is worth remembering some of the things I have seen that might be lost if the proposal goes ahead. I think of Mr Savage, who founded the then Clyde Humane Society and

volunteered for years, saving people in distress in the Clyde and being there to rescue people who were in trouble, and unfortunately bringing many bodies back when there had been a tragedy in the Clyde. All the work that the society still does, now as the Glasgow Humane Society, might not have happened.

I have also seen work done with drug and alcohol interventions that involved people building coracles to go on the Clyde. Those interventions often involved work with young people to help them to understand that rivers are a great source of leisure and sporting activity, and are for everyone's use.

To see that use curtailed in the way that is proposed, therefore, is absolutely at odds with Scotland's tradition of the right to roam. I know that we are talking about waterways, but I ask members to imagine if a charge were suddenly to be imposed on people accessing Glencoe or other hillsides and walking areas across Scotland. There would be outrage, so I absolutely understand why so many people are against the imposition of fees.

I am a member of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism as a result of my involvement in the cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness. Given the amount of water safety work that we do in those groups, I understand the complexities of Scotland's waters. We have one of the longest coastlines in Europe, and the nature of that coastline means that the proposed fee area vastly encroaches into our waterways, including Loch Fyne and all the places that are traditionally known to us as areas for leisure boating and where people can access the water. The proposed area covers a whole section of the coastline of the Isle of Arran, and people will not be able to sail round there or around the Isle of Bute, or to Millport, without incurring the fees.

The relevant legislation has existed since 2003, and only now is the company coming forward with its proposals to impose a fee on leisure and tourism in Scotland. We have a proud history of protecting the rights of people to roam in Scotland, and that should extend to our waterways. I understand that ports need to be maintained, but that comes with a responsibility to provide services, too.

I feel that, as the area that is involved is unique and vast, the impact of the proposals will be detrimental to the whole of it. I have holidayed many times in Rothesay and, while we were on holiday, it was always a joy for our family to spot the Waverley whenever we could. It would be absolutely appalling for Scotland if that environment were to change as a result of people deciding not to come to the west of Scotland.

17:35

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Stuart McMillan on securing the debate, and I congratulate every member who has spoken. I agree that the proposed fees are far from reasonable, and I hope that a strong, unified message goes from the chamber today that the proposals are unacceptable.

A number of speakers have said that the Clyde belongs to the people of Scotland, and I agree. However, we must accept that the operating model fails to deliver on that statement. The Clyde Port Authority was formed as a public trust by an act of Parliament in 1966; it was then privatised in 1992 and became Clydeport. Clydeport was floated on the stock exchange in 1994, subsequently becoming part of Peel Holdings. Despite the fact that Peel Ports' assets are strategic national assets, its shareholders are a number of investment groups, and decisions are consistently taken that are not in the public interest. I agree with the speakers who have said that we need to re-examine the model, whether by considering ownership or, perhaps, as a first step, regulation. Internationally, it is highly unusual for a private company to be a port authority; that is only the case in the UK because of the ideological privatisation that we experienced in the 1990s.

As many speakers have said, Peel Ports is proposing to levy a fee on all leisure vessels between 6m and 24m long that use the waters in the Clydeport authority area. The fee is to be introduced very soon—on 1 April 2025—and I hope that there is a way to ensure that that does not happen.

The scale of the Clydeport area is unique in the UK—it is estimated that up to 50 per cent of Scotland's leisure craft operate there. Many people in our boating communities have been lobbying us and have been very clear that they believe that the unconstrained and weakly justified nature of the fee makes it look like a tax on recreational boating. That imposes an economic detriment on the marine tourism industry, which many coastal businesses depend on and which many of our constituents enjoy.

So far, Peel Ports' justifications for the fees do not seem to stand up to scrutiny, and it appears increasingly difficult to see how the fee might benefit the community or visitors. The briefings that were given to members before the debate indicate that Peel Ports does not investigate and respond to accidents in the Clyde, except at the request of the owner or operator. The aids to navigation that are maintained by Peel Ports have been installed for the benefit of large vessels carrying cargo rather than that of the leisure or passenger vessels that would be captured by the fee, and there is no evidence that Peel Ports

conducts regular environmental surveys or considers environmental protection.

Paul Sweeney: My friend has made very powerful points about the lack of accountability. Does she agree that one of the key challenges on the upper Clyde is the lack of regular dredging of the river? That has been the case for many years, and it is severely constraining navigation on the upper part of the river—it is, in effect, sterilising much of it for navigation.

Katy Clark: Lack of maintenance has been an issue in many areas. Indeed, some of us are very aware of the situation at Ardrossan harbour, where the failure to maintain the port is having devastating economic consequences.

The proposed conservancy fee represents just one of a number of decisions being taken by this multinational that I put to the Scottish Government are not in the public interest. I am pleased to support the motion and, on this particular issue, I call on the Scottish Government to take direct and immediate action to intervene and urge Peel Ports to scrap its plans for implementing the fee.

17:40

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I congratulate Stuart McMillan MSP on securing the debate. I know that he has done a lot of work to get Peel Ports to abandon its proposal, because the decision, if taken forward, will negatively affect boaters along the River Clyde, including those in Clydebank, which is part of my constituency.

The plan to introduce a conservation fee—I mean “conservancy”; I cannot say the word—for leisure craft in the Clydeport area has caused real concern among my constituents as well as for British Marine and British Marine Scotland, which have been working to represent members’ interests in opposing it. Indeed, responses from a recent British Marine Scotland members survey suggest overwhelming opposition to the proposal.

As Stuart McMillan has rightly put it, the move will affect not just boaters in Scotland, but people sailing from other parts of the UK or even Europe to enjoy the Clyde, and there are massive concerns that the fee will put them off. Although I realise that it is not possible for the Scottish Government to dictate the business decisions that are made by a harbour authority on how to manage a harbour, I am nevertheless grateful to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport for taking into consideration the concerns of vessel owners across Scotland and writing to Peel Ports on the issue.

The decision, if introduced, could damage Scotland’s marine tourism industry and the

economies of coastal communities that rely on the sector. Indeed, Stuart McMillan’s petition, which has attracted more than 4,630 signatures so far, captures people’s feelings on this issue. It is concerning that, despite its being invited twice to outline its plans to the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism, Peel Ports has declined to participate. As such, the CPG unanimously agreed on 27 November 2024 that members’ position was that the plans should be abandoned. Unfortunately, the failure of Peel Ports to attend and be held accountable only adds to the boating community’s frustration and the feeling that the decision is being put upon them without their input.

However, I understand from correspondence with the cabinet secretary that Peel Ports has assured her that a wider consultation process with all relevant stakeholders is proposed to take place in the coming months, with an outcome on that consultation expected later this year. I hope that as many people as possible are able to take part in that, and I will put it on my socials and encourage my constituents to respond to it, too.

Unfortunately, there is no doubt that the decision will put boaters off sailing on Clydeport’s waters. Stuart McMillan has also expressed another worthwhile concern, which is that a conservation fee—I cannot say the word; it is just not happening tonight—will result in a progressive increase in charges. In my opinion, such a decision places another financial burden on people at a time when they are already facing higher costs. As British Marine has made clear, it will restrict freedoms to sail in Scottish waters, harm marine tourism and impact on small coastal communities.

Alongside the fact that the fee could deter boaters and harm small coastal communities, the rationale behind it remains questionable, with no clear provision of services or facilities in return. As has been mentioned, it also unfairly targets small leisure craft rather than larger vessels.

It is not that boaters are unwilling to pay for their pastime; as the chief executive of RYA Scotland has stated, sailors have always expected to pay for harbour berthing and mooring fees. This is about the imposition of a fee with no clear provision of services or facilities across a huge part of the recreational boating community.

The recreational boating sector contributes significantly to our coastal communities, and we cannot burden it with unjustifiable fees. It is quite clear that this is a wrong decision, and I join my colleagues in calling for it to be abandoned immediately.

17:44

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): I thank Stuart McMillan for his work in highlighting a number of issues of importance to the maritime sector, both in Parliament tonight and through his role as convener of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism. I found members' contributions on the issue to be thought provoking and considered, and I will reflect on them.

MSPs have highlighted the strength of feelings on a subject that is important to Scotland as a seafaring nation. Scotland's waters are vast and unique, and the use of our seas for the movement of people and goods, fishing and recreation and to facilitate the increasing offshore energy demand shows that the issue will remain of huge importance in years to come. There will be challenges as a result of competing and changing demands, and ensuring that our waters remain safe for those at sea and that they are maintained and protected for future generations is crucial.

The port sector comprises a combination of ownership models, but the overarching principles of how a port can operate remain the same, regardless of whether a port authority is privately owned, in trust or operated by a local authority. Scottish ministers have no legal powers to instruct the decisions that a port makes, and that is legally enshrined in the Harbours Act 1964 and the local harbour order legislation that each port operates under, as Stuart McMillan and others have acknowledged. Harbour authorities are independent, self-governing bodies that are responsible for the safety and efficiency of marine operations within their jurisdiction, and their duties include managing ports and harbours for safe navigation, protecting the environment and ensuring overall operational efficiency. Therefore, the Scottish Government has no say in the day-to-day running of their business, nor can it dictate business decisions on how to best utilise their resources. Ports are held to account by their own legislation rather than by the Scottish or UK Government.

Brian Whittle: I appreciate what the cabinet secretary says about these being private companies in which the Scottish Government cannot intervene, but does the Scottish Government not give grants to some ports to help with their development, the docking of ships and so on? Is there no leverage in that respect that the Scottish Government can potentially use?

Fiona Hyslop: The role played by that area of Government is limited and tends to apply to the marine sector and marine operations.

Due to the importance of the issue that we are discussing tonight to a wide range of small vessel

owners, I wrote to Peel Ports to highlight stakeholders' strength of feeling, and it confirmed that it is in the preliminary data collection phase of a community consultation process to assess the possible introduction of an annual conservancy fee for leisure vessels on the Clyde. We have been advised that no decision has been made on how to proceed at this point in time. It noted that any formal decision to implement a licence fee would be preceded by a thorough public consultation, ensuring that the perspectives of all marine users are taken into account, and it also confirmed its view that any proposed conservancy fee would, if introduced, be in compliance with its legal responsibilities as set out in its local legislation and the 1964 act.

There is a potential role for Scottish ministers in the future if a fee or charge is in place and a user invokes section 31 of the 1964 act. That section provides for a right of objection to Scottish ministers against the imposition of

"ship, passenger and goods dues".

The Scottish Government will process any objections lodged under that section, and any person considering making such a formal challenge should take independent legal advice.

If the section 31 procedures were to be invoked, ministers' role would, in effect, involve adjudication of a dispute. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for me, as minister at this time, to discuss the potential substance of any dispute or to offer any view on it, the parameters of the right of objection under the 1964 act or how ministers may carry out their decision-making function. Those are matters for objectors to consider and to take a view on without any input from ministers as potential decision makers. There is no scope for the issue to be dealt with, other than by way of a transparent, impartial and even-handed consideration of an objection duly made.

However, at this stage, there is no fee or charge in place, and I understand that Peel Ports is exploring all options. We understand that a wider consultation process with all relevant stakeholders is proposed to take place in the coming months, with an outcome on the consultation expected later this year.

The importance of charges to the viability of ports and harbours and the safe management of our waters, and the principle of users contributing to those costs, are well recognised, but it is also right that the levying of such dues be proportionate. Although statutory harbour authorities are independent bodies governed by their own legislation, proper consultation with users and interested stakeholders on proposals is important.

Paul Sweeney: I appreciate the cabinet secretary's points regarding the provisions of the 1964 act, but could she also allude to the need for greater regulatory oversight of ports, particularly on things such as dredging and maintaining the navigation channel? Surely such activity is integral. Should that not be a legal obligation on harbour authorities to ensure that they are held to account for such fundamental things?

Fiona Hyslop: In closing, I would encourage anyone with views on the specific issue being debated tonight to engage fully with any forthcoming consultation, but I also thank members for raising wider and more general issues surrounding it. The issue has brought to the fore some of the historical nature of the regulation that is currently in place on this area, and that is something that, as I have said, I will take away and reflect on. Other important points have been made; for example, the issue of standards and expectations has, rightly, been raised in a variety of contributions, and I will reflect on that, too.

I hope that, in setting out my legal responsibilities, I have been able to indicate why I cannot give an opinion on what has been said today. However, I have certainly listened carefully to the well-considered and well-crafted points that members have made.

Meeting closed at 17:51.

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