

Declaration of a Nature Emergency

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-23383, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on declaration of a nature emergency.

16:00

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Today, I will move my motion to declare a nature emergency in Scotland and commit to an emergency response, reversing the decline and restoring nature to its former abundance and glory. I thank the more than 8,000 people who, in the past three days alone, have taken action to add their voices to declaring a nature emergency in Scotland. We live in days of great crisis and uncertainty. The health, climate and nature emergencies have formed a perfect storm, but in addressing those crises together there are opportunities to grow a green recovery that supports new livelihoods while building up our resilience in the face of devastating climate change.

We are in a global nature emergency, but we cannot ignore the fact that the emergency is real in Scotland, too. One in nine of our species are in danger of extinction and last year's "State of Nature" report showed that we have lost the vast majority of our wild flower meadows and species such as the great yellow bumblebee with them. Half of our skylarks are gone and many of our wetlands and other precious habitats, too. The abundance of species in Scotland has collapsed by nearly a quarter in the past 25 years and there has been no slowing in that catastrophic rate of decline in the past decade: 265 plants, 153 fungi and lichens, 92 vertebrates and 132 invertebrates are all at risk of extinction from the threats of intensive farming, industrial development, invasive species and climate change.

That crisis demands the same level of attention and action as the climate emergency and the first step is to declare it for what it truly is—a nature emergency. The second step on the journey to recovery must be legislation. Just as our legally binding climate targets have brought focus and scrutiny, so, too, are nature recovery targets needed in law to commit to halting the decline within a decade and fully restoring nature soon after. The Scottish Government must put targets for nature recovery on a statutory footing, with clear milestones, giving certainty to everyone that they will be delivered and that the funding and planning will follow.

Part of that recovery must involve designating new protected sites. We have already seen both

the United Kingdom and the European Union commit to a target of 30 per cent of our land and sea being protected by 2030. However, because of weak legislation and no targets we have seen minimal progress here in Scotland. Take the designation of marine protected areas, for example. The 2016 programme for government committed to 18 new protected areas for seabirds by 2017, but so far not a single one has been delivered and discussions are still on-going. Time is running out for many birds such as the Arctic tern.

Those protected sites must be delivered, but simply drawing a line on a map is not enough. They cannot be paper parks but must come with meaningful protections, monitoring and investment. Designating marine protected areas without fisheries management measures and proper licensing of other activities is weak. One in five of our protected features in Scotland are in an unfavourable condition—they are not recovering. The nature emergency is worsening and action is needed.

Alongside those designated sites, we need corridors of habitats for species to flow along. The need for an ecological network that spans landscapes, and the whole country, is critical. Two years ago, Parliament supported my motion to back the formation of a national ecological network, but two years on I see no urgency from Government to set that up. That national infrastructure is the very nature of Scotland itself, and it must be the centrepiece of the next national planning framework.

There is an opportunity for a partnership that links the recovery of both nature and the economy through a green new deal to improve the health of our environment, which already provides more than £20 billion in ecosystems services—from crop pollination to recreation—to our economy every year.

The sectors that are holding back progress in restoring nature need to be challenged by strong agencies, with the force of the law behind them. Government must lead the change rather than papering over issues with false consensus. The salmon farming sector, for example, continues to plan rapid expansion in MPAs, which threatens maerl and flame shell beds with pollution and directly contravenes the recommendations of the Parliament's salmon farming inquiry.

At the same time, however, there are wonderful crofters, farmers, foresters, estate owners, charities and communities driving forward their vision of habitat restoration, rewilding, agro-ecology and species reintroduction in practical and exciting ways. There are kelp harvesters, creelers, scallop divers and eco-tourism operators who are working with our communities to show us what is

hidden beneath the waves and to protect it. There are young people who are desperate to join them and tackle the nature emergency. Today, we should declare that nature emergency, both for them and for the shared future of our planet.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with grave concern the catastrophic collapse in biodiversity globally and in Scotland, with one in nine species threatened with extinction from Scotland, and therefore declares a nature emergency; believes that restoring nature should be a central component of green economic recovery and future rural support, stimulating the economy and creating jobs; calls for urgent legislation to halt the loss of biodiversity and to enable nature to recover through a coherent national ecological network, including well-managed, protected sites in good condition comprising at least 30% of Scotland's sea and land by 2030, a third of which should be fully protected; calls for an end to driven grouse moor management practices, large-scale peat extraction and damaging fishing practices in sensitive marine environments, and further calls on the Scottish Government to introduce a moratorium on salmon farm expansion until the concerns raised in the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's 2018 report on salmon farming in Scotland are fully addressed.

The Presiding Officer: Opening for the Government is the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, who joins us remotely.

16:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Internationally, a new global biodiversity framework is being developed, and Scotland is adopting a leadership role in contributing to that process. The new framework will be agreed in China in 2021. In leading the Edinburgh process, we have mobilised a global network of national Governments, cities and local authorities and are feeding their views into the process to develop the new framework.

In May last year, Scotland became the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency. In my statement to Parliament at that time, I highlighted the global crisis for biodiversity alongside the global climate emergency. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services had published the most comprehensive global assessment of biodiversity for many years, bringing the on-going decline in biodiversity into sharp focus. In response, the First Minister stated in Parliament that

"biodiversity... is as important as the challenge on climate change"

and that we would

"ensure that our actions produce the transformative change that is needed"—[*Official Report*, 9 May 2019; c 24-25.]

to address biodiversity loss.

Our document "The Environment Strategy for Scotland: vision and outcomes", which we published in February, also explicitly recognises the twin global climate and nature crises.

Scotland's natural environment is our greatest national asset. It provides the foundations on which our society and economy depend and improves our physical and mental health. It is also crucial to Scotland's businesses, brand and reputation.

While most Governments obviously continue to prioritise their response to Covid-19, it is clear that the other global emergency, climate change, has not gone away. Climate change and biodiversity loss are twin crises and must be tackled as such; I restate that, in one form or another, practically every single day.

Building a green recovery is at the heart of our response to the pandemic. The programme for government announced a new national mission to help create new green jobs and dedicate £100 million over the next five years to a green jobs fund. That includes boosting youth employment opportunities and targeting future skills and capacity requirements in nature and land-based jobs. We will do that by expanding existing apprenticeship and undergraduate schemes in public agencies, including in Scottish Forestry and Forestry and Land Scotland, which will double their existing commitments. We are also developing a green workforce and skills development package with an initial skills gap analysis being undertaken by NatureScot.

Projects that address biodiversity loss are a key element of our climate change adaptation plans. Nature helps to regulate our climate, and the changing climate is a major factor affecting the state of nature. Both require us to address the impact of our choices on the health of our natural environment.

Supporting biodiversity and nature-based solutions is an essential part of the action that this Government is taking to put us on track to a just transition to net zero by 2045, and the forthcoming update on the climate change plan will say more on that.

We have significantly increased funding for peatland restoration, committing £250 million over 10 years to restore 250,000 hectares of peatland by 2030. That will help the sector to develop, with an aim to create about 200 new jobs over three to five years, mostly in rural and remote areas. Multiyear funding means that contractors have greater confidence to invest in skills and machinery, and landowners are already coming forward to discuss potential large-scale projects.

Scotland's forests and woodlands have an important role to play in our green recovery and in

delivering our commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2045. Woodland creation, including native trees, is a key component of that. We aim to increase woodland cover to 21 per cent of the country's total area by 2032, and the target for woodland creation is increasing to 18,000 hectares a year by 2024-25. That will deliver economic, social and environmental benefits, including by helping to develop new networks for nature.

As members will be aware, our recent programme for government announced that we would publish a high-level statement of intent on biodiversity before the end of the year. That is against the backdrop of the on-going delays to the negotiations on a new global biodiversity framework, which are provisionally to resume next year and to conclude in May.

We are already doing a great deal, but we acknowledge that more is required. We are continuing to support existing projects and to seek out biodiversity improvements pending the revision of our Scottish biodiversity strategy to reflect the new global biodiversity framework.

My colleague Mairi Gougeon will reference the remaining parts of the somewhat overburdened Green motion at the close of this short debate. I have to say that a cynical person might assume that the motion has been designed to fail.

I move amendment S5M-23383.4, to leave out from "therefore declares" to end and insert:

"calls for the continued treatment of climate change and biodiversity loss on a twin-crises basis as set out in the Scottish Government's Environment Strategy; believes that restoring nature should be a central component of recovery; welcomes therefore the Scottish Government's commitment to a green recovery that captures the opportunities of a just transition to net zero, creates good, green jobs and leaves no one behind; further welcomes the advice of the Just Transition Commission and others in this regard; recognises that 34% of Scotland's waters are already covered by MPAs, including the West of Scotland MPA, which is the largest in European waters and is accepted as 'internationally significant' by the Convention on Biological Diversity; further recognises that, while Scotland constitutes only 32% of UK land mass, it accounts for 54% of the UK's nature-specific protected areas; acknowledges the Scottish Government's multi-annual commitment of £250 million to restore peatland and commends NatureScot for its contribution to restoration via PeatlandACTION; commends the work of Professor Werritty and the Grouse Moor Management Review Group, and expects the Scottish Government's response to this imminently, and notes the Scottish Government's commitment to protect the marine environment and support sustainable growth in fishing and fish farming while maintaining the right balance across Scotland's economic, environmental and social responsibilities."

16:11

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful to the Greens for bringing this debate to

Parliament, first because it is all too easy in these pandemic days to ignore the other huge issues of our time, and secondly because of the imminence of COP26—the 26th conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity—at which Scotland has the opportunity to demonstrate that she is a world leader in shaping both climate change and biodiversity. That will also be a key moment for scrutiny of the Scottish Government's environment record—more on which we will hear later from my colleague Maurice Golden.

We can agree with the first part of the Greens' motion, because it highlights the key issues in biodiversity. However, it will not be a surprise to the Parliament that we cannot agree with the second part of the motion, specifically about the demand to end driven grouse shooting and controlled muirburn, which is why I seek to amend the motion accordingly.

It goes without saying that Scotland starts from a good place, as I think the cabinet secretary said in her speech, given how rich our biodiversity and natural landscapes are, and there is no question about the unanimity on parliamentarians' duty to maintain and restore them to the highest environmental standards. We need to understand those landscapes and to safeguard and enhance them. We know—perhaps even more so because of Covid—just how important our wild lands, nature parks and green spaces have become, as well as our farms, aquaculture and plantations, especially because of the vast array of ecosystems that have such positive benefits for our wellbeing.

The changing attitudes in large swathes of public opinion are most encouraging, with much more understanding and appreciation of the role that nature has to play. Set against that, however, are some very worrying warning signals, many of which Mark Ruskell spoke about in his opening speech. For me, one of the most frightening was a United Nations report published last year, which revealed that a million species of plants and animals are at risk of extinction. In the United Kingdom, 56 per cent of our species have declined over the past 50 years. That situation could hardly be more serious.

I cannot deal with every theme that I would like to mention in the very short time that I have in the debate, but there are some important ones. First, the focus must be on scientific facts. Not only do we have a wealth of natural landscapes in Scotland; we also have a wealth of ecological and scientific expertise, and it is vitally important that policy is underpinned by the facts rather than by the hyperbole and raw emotion that sometimes dominate environmental debates. For example, the recent abuse that has been directed at landowners and gamekeepers as they seek to

improve biodiversity is completely unacceptable and unwarranted, especially because the facts show that so many of them have done so much to protect and enhance the land on which they work, particularly in recent years.

Only two weeks ago, Scottish Government-commissioned research, led by Scotland's Rural College and the James Hutton Institute, concluded that driven grouse shooting hugely benefits Scotland's rural economy, especially by sustaining jobs.

On that theme, there is encouraging evidence that several species have increased as a result of carefully controlled muirburn—golden plovers, merlins and curlews, to name some—and we know about the encouraging results to enhance ecosystems from the Langholm study.

Secondly, NFU Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation all make important points about a holistic approach to biodiversity—for example, agriculture has done really well recently on the reduction of emissions and the harnessing of renewable electricity—but they want to see a joint approach, especially when it comes to regional land use and clusters, which are working well in England.

Those farmers who want to be involved in peatland restoration, tree planting or the development of wildlife habitats, because they know that it is the right thing to do, need support and financial incentives to ensure that we have rural jobs and investment. They need help too, by way of grants, to prevent the spread of invasive species, such as rhododendron, giant hogweed or beavers, which cause extensive riparian damage. My colleague Finlay Carson will speak about aspects of our water quality, which—we should not forget—is so important for our beaches, lochs and rivers.

Another concern is about the small, but nonetheless growing, minority of people who, through their selfishness and irresponsibility, choose to make life much harder for our land managers by their deliberate disregard for the countryside and national park codes. Those people dump rubbish, destroy trees, despoil our beaches and lochs and encroach in many other ways on our ability to increase biodiversity. The point is therefore not necessarily just about the improvement of our biodiversity, but about ensuring that everybody understands its importance and that far fewer people are in a position to scar our nature.

I move amendment S5M-23383.1, to leave out from “at least 30%” to end and insert:

“as much of Scotland's sea and land by 2030 as is achievable in relation to managed agricultural land use; acknowledges the good progress that has been made with controlled muirburn to increase carbon capture in peatlands and to enhance natural habitats, and calls on the Scottish Government to address the concerns raised in the 2018 Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee report regarding damaging practices in salmon farming and to work more closely with inshore fisheries groups to help preserve sensitive maritime areas.”

16:16

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Mark Ruskell for raising this important issue for debate. Biodiversity is far more important to our country than many people might realise. It underpins a healthy environment and is the foundation for many jobs, a key part of Scottish tourism, an inspiration and a joy for us all and for Scotland's great cultural figures, past and present.

Scottish Labour stands for many points in Mark Ruskell's motion. Scottish Labour, like the Greens, has long stated that we face a nature emergency, which goes with the climate emergency. However, we cannot support the Green motion unless it is with our amendment, which recognises the need for rapid change, while respecting the challenges that rural and coastal communities face, through an urgently needed just transition, which would bring support for that change through our communities.

The Tory amendment shows that, frankly, the Tories do not recognise the urgent need for change, so we cannot support it. It is a serious cause for concern that the Scottish Government is not prepared to recognise the need for the declaration of a nature emergency, which is inextricably fused with the already declared climate emergency. Thus, we cannot support the Government amendment.

It is regrettable that, under the SNP, it looks as if we have now missed many targets for biodiversity, some of which are legally binding, although I acknowledge that other countries have done so, too. That should come as no surprise when we see that, according to Scottish Environment LINK, funding for environmental bodies has been slashed by 40 per cent in real terms since 2010. There simply must be a turnaround in the 2020s, and a robust and well-funded biodiversity route map and action plan is the Scottish Government's responsibility. Scottish Labour wants targets for nature recovery to be set into legislation, and I look forward to arguing for my amendments to take effect in the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill.

Most urgently, focus must be turned to a green recovery for those who work with and for nature in rural and remote parts of Scotland. Some of those sectors already face precarious futures. Planning

for the future also needs to happen so that we have skills for long-term projects, such as planting native woodlands and the restoration of precious peatlands, which are in such need of our protection.

I highlight that, in several weeks, conservationists hope that the heart of the flow country—an area of 1,400km² of almost pristine peatland—will have taken a significant step to becoming the first peatland globally to win world heritage site status. Let us all be sure to highlight that to the UK Government as it comes forward.

We need to enhance, connect and expand all habitat and look to build a nature network, which RSPB Scotland states would create 300 direct jobs. The NFUS highlights the good work that farmers can do as custodians of our environment and the need for advice and support to build a sustainable future for them. Will the cabinet secretary tell us in closing what action is being taken in response to the just transition commission's recommendation 4, which is for a green recovery to promote investment and to protect and grow the rural economy and employment?

Of course, that also applies to coastal communities and marine environments, which just as urgently need a blue recovery. Investing in marine nature and its recovery and taking on illegal and inappropriate fishing activity now will develop widespread benefits and help to create more resilient economies. I ask the cabinet secretary to protect the iconic flapper skate, which is so close to extinction. Often overlooked, it is very disappointing to see that the recovery of our seas has been completely absent from the Scottish Government's economic recovery implementation plan.

There should also be more locally led action involving communities, local authorities, landowners, farmers and more. More equitable land ownership will improve management of land in the public interest and in the face of our dual emergencies. Many local authorities across the UK are working with Plantlife to plant wild flowers on verges and much more. There has been a 20 per cent drop in floral diversity along our road verges since 1990, and that simple act can save money, save bees and brighten our communities.

I welcome the debate. Our environment deserves strategy and funding from empowered local authorities and communities, and from a bold Government. Let us not forget that, as human beings, we are part of those ecosystems as well.

I move amendment S5M-23383.3, to leave out from "calls for an end" to end and insert:

"calls for an urgent and robust licensing scheme for driven grouse moor management, the phase out of large-

scale peat extraction and addressing damaging fishing practices in sensitive marine environments; further calls on the Scottish Government to urgently address the concerns raised in the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's 2018 report, and letter from the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, on salmon farming in Scotland; recognises the multiple benefits of a holistic approach to land use planning, through regional land use partnerships and more equitable forms of ownership; understands the need for nature skills development for now and the next generation of rural jobs; recognises the contributions of communities and individuals to improving biodiversity, and acknowledges the need for further support for these and local authority action."

The Presiding Officer: I remind all members that speeches should be of four minutes. Mr McArthur joins us remotely.

16:22

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Our planet is on the brink of irreparable damage, and Parliament recognised that in declaring the climate emergency. The Scottish Liberal Democrats agree that it is time to do likewise in response to the existential threat facing so many species and so much of our biodiversity and declare a nature emergency. I therefore thank Mark Ruskell for enabling the debate. Although our amendment was not selected, I am pleased that the amendment in Claudia Beamish's name captures much of what we had proposed and I confirm that we will support it at decision time.

Members will recall that, in the pre-pandemic age, we entered 2020 with the spectre of apocalyptic wildfires in Australia, which were declared among

"the worst wildlife disasters in modern history".

Since then, large parts of the US have similarly been ablaze. Extreme weather, and the fires, floods and droughts that follow, are becoming more common, and take a heavy toll on nature. Meanwhile, an estimated 1 million animal and plant species are now at risk of extinction because of human activities. As Scottish Environment LINK and others point out, 49 per cent of species in Scotland have declined, and one in nine is threatened with national extinction.

The climate crisis and biodiversity loss are not separate issues. As others have observed, they are deeply intertwined, in sickness and in health. There is no doubt that human actions lie at the heart of the degradation of the natural world that we have seen, but human actions can also help to repair, restore and revitalise. The good news is that the natural world is on our side. Despite all the technologies that we will invest in, a biodiverse ecosystem offers us the surest means of storing carbon and reducing emissions. That is why, as the motion makes clear, nature jobs and skills

must be at the heart of the Government's green recovery plans.

Scotland's peatlands, for example, could and should be one of our greatest assets. They deserve protection, with a phasing out of large-scale extraction and long-term support for restoration efforts that have already proved their value. It is time, too, for legislation to introduce licensing of grouse moor management, ensuring that all practices are sustainable and compatible with declarations of a climate and nature emergency. Legislation is also needed to halt the loss of biodiversity and to allow for the creation of more coherent nature networks.

However, as our amendment highlighted, addressing the nature emergency will not simply happen in rural areas, which is a challenge for all parts of Scotland, as it is around the world. That is why the Scottish Government's continuity bill must be amended next week to provide greater confidence that funding, high environmental standards and robust independent oversight will continue after the UK leaves the European Union next year.

Like the climate, nature does not care about the constitution. It cannot afford to wait as we embark on more drawn-out and divisive navel gazing over independence. The nature and climate emergencies require us to use the considerable powers, resources and ingenuity that we already have to deliver the change that we need. Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to playing our part in delivering that change.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for your good timekeeping, Mr McArthur.

16:25

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The Government's amendment would remove the call from the Scottish Greens for the Parliament to declare a nature emergency. In the amendment, the Government prefers to use the word "crises" and to blow its own trumpet, yet one in nine species in Scotland faces extinction. Every other party in the chamber accepts that we face a nature emergency, and thousands of our constituents support our call, as do nature conservation groups such as RSPB Scotland, Wildlife and Countryside Link, WWF Scotland and Open Seas. They recognise the severity of the situation and the need for action.

The mountain hare, which is one of our most iconic native mammals, is regarded as "near threatened" on the first red list of UK mammals. Its population status is reported as "unfavourable" by the Government's nature agency. It is therefore no surprise that despite this Parliament's vote—five months ago yesterday—to make the mountain

hare a protected species, which was warmly welcomed by the huge number of people who campaigned to that end and by the overwhelming majority of people in Scotland who support an end to the indiscriminate culling of mountain hares, we are still waiting for the Government to commence the power to bring the protection into effect.

Time and time again, the Scottish Government has the power to act, but chooses not to. The persecution of birds of prey continues with impunity, and we are still waiting for an official response to Professor Werritty's review, which was the Government's can-kicking response to raptor persecution that was announced in May 2017. The process has taken years. Beavers, which the Government pledged to protect, are being killed, or even exported, in huge numbers—anything to get rid of them.

Much of the cruelty inflicted on wildlife in Scotland is wholly legal—snares, traps and stink pits abound. Scotland's driven grouse moors account for much of the killing; they are burnt and managed to the point of monoculture, despite the fact that we are in the midst of a nature and climate emergency. *[Interruption.]*

I cannot take an intervention, as I have less than one minute left in which to speak.

Our motion calls for an end to driven grouse shooting. That activity, which is enjoyed by the few, takes up an area that is half the size of Wales. It stifles nature, to put it mildly, and its contribution to Scotland's economy is minuscule. It is a relic of a bygone era, so let us consign it to the dustbin of history, where it belongs. It is holding back alternative land uses, of which there are many and better, including forestry, rewilding, repopulation and eco-tourism, the latter of which already brings in five times as much to the Scottish economy as grouse shooting. Thankfully, people are far more interested in shooting Scotland's animals on film than they are in shooting them with guns.

Those alternatives would enable nature to thrive and would provide many more well-paid jobs than the grouse industry. Liz Smith will be aware that the average job in the grouse industry attracts a salary of £11,000 below the minimum wage. Licensing the grouse industry will not address the fact that that cruel activity is a shocking waste of space and is one that, in the face of the mass extinction of species and the climate emergency, we should no longer tolerate.

I support the Green motion.

16:28

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Our environment is a subject that is close to the hearts

not only of people who live in rural Scotland but of those who live in urban Scotland, including many parts of my constituency, Cowdenbeath.

I am proud of the Scottish National Party Scottish Government's determination to protect and promote our environment. As we have heard, Scotland was the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency; we have world-leading climate change targets; and we have undertaken to proceed with a build-back-better post-Covid-19 green recovery. As the cabinet secretary said, we have recognised the key importance of biodiversity, and we have adopted a twin approach of tackling biodiversity loss right alongside the climate emergency.

On the important issue of biodiversity, I welcome the Scottish Government's recently announced plans to commission a new Scottish centre of expertise in biodiversity. That forms part of a new draft strategy for the environment, natural resources and agriculture research programme, which is currently out for consultation—the consultation will close on 14 December, I think. I encourage my constituents and others to have a look at that, to make their views known and to indicate what priorities and delivery mechanisms they would like to see in the five key areas of plant and animal health, sustainable food systems, human impacts on the environment, natural resources, and rural futures.

That work builds on the current research programme, which has involved £48 million of funding from the Scottish Government. It has supported 1,500 jobs and helped research institutes in Scotland to leverage in £28 million of additional funding. That approach demonstrates that the Scottish Government wants Scotland to play a key role in developing environmental solutions that are based on the best possible scientific evidence.

We can also see that determination in the very significant investment in peatland restoration, with £20 million allocated in this year's budget and a commitment to invest £250 million over the next 20 years. We can see it, again, in forestry. Scotland has delivered more than 80 per cent of all new tree planting across the UK, with 22 million trees planted over the past year or so.

A lot of progress has been made in the area of sustainable fish farming, in particular, further to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's comprehensive report, which was published in November 2018, on the future of salmon farming in Scotland. I note that the Scottish Government has established a 10-year farmed fish health framework, under which a wide range of specific work streams are under way.

Further, the salmon interactions working group was set up, under John Goodlad as independent chair, to look at the issues surrounding the interaction of farmed and wild salmon. It recently reported—I believe in May of this year—with more than 40 recommendations. It would be interesting to hear from the minister as to where matters stand on that, taking into account of course the fact that the report was published during lockdown and we have seen the global pandemic play out since that time. I also refer to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's detailed plan on future regulation, which was published in 2018.

Those issues are of course very important to my constituents. Mowi, which is based in Rosyth, has more than 600 jobs at the site. The call from the Scottish Green Party, in its motion today, for a moratorium on expansion is likely to be a cause of considerable concern to all those workers and their families, who will obviously be worried about the consequential impacts on their jobs and livelihoods.

There is a range of initiatives across Scotland, in many different sectors. Four minutes is not nearly long enough to do them all justice.

One final issue that has not been discussed is the impact of Brexit on our high environmental standards. With, I think, 43 days to go, we still do not know what on earth the position is going to be. What a shambles on the part of the UK Government! The Tory MSPs are all sitting there, grinning away, as if that is good news for our environment, but it is very bad news for our environment.

16:33

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): The danger that Scotland's wildlife faces is summed up in what is arguably the most important line in today's motion:

"one in nine species"

is

"threatened with extinction from Scotland"

That statistic should give us all reason to pause.

The latest Scottish biodiversity strategy report shows that the average abundance of some 352 terrestrial and freshwater species has plummeted—down 24 per cent since 1994. Of particular concern is the fact that Scottish seabird breeding populations have dropped dramatically—down 32 per cent between 1986 and 2017. In total, according to the "State of Nature Scotland Report 2019", of those species that show either strong or moderate changes in numbers, 49 per cent have decreased.

There is a clear need to act, as the First Minister seemed to agree last year, when she told Scottish Environment LINK:

“The challenges facing biodiversity are as important as the challenge of climate change, and I want Scotland to be leading the way in our response.”

I want that too, but the First Minister made that commitment knowing that her Government was failing to live up to it.

A 2017 Scottish Natural Heritage report found that the SNP was failing to deliver 13 out of the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets. On some 16 out of 30 of the SNP’s biodiversity indicators, the position is worsening or stagnating. In fact, over the past 10 years, there has been no significant change in the rate of species decline.

The SNP has no plan. The biodiversity strategy is seven years out of date and the wildlife strategy was never published. That lack of direction comes at the worst time, when protecting our natural heritage gives us the best shot at building back better because, as WWF points out, our natural heritage is worth up to £23 billion to the economy—not to mention the climate change benefits.

Nowhere is that more evident than in rural communities, where farmers and rural businesses are working hard to protect the countryside and create jobs. By working alongside them, we can help them to go further.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Many of those farmers benefit from LEADER funding. Does the member know what the UK Government will replace LEADER funding with?

Maurice Golden: The UK Government has been quite clear that it plans to ensure that the funding relating to Europe continues and that processes will be more streamlined, so that more funding goes directly to the people who need it. I whole-heartedly agree with that approach. It is no surprise that SNP members cannot come up with an intervention on biodiversity and would prefer to talk about Brexit and other matters. Natural heritage is important and it is disappointing that the SNP—indeed, the convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee—is unable to speak about biodiversity and natural heritage.

The Scottish Conservatives propose a package of financial and technical assistance to create up to 15,000 hectares of high-quality woodland each year, restore peatland and create new hiking and nature trails, thereby saving habitats, creating carbon sinks and generating green jobs. A programme of school farms would enable children to learn about wildlife, environmental protection and food production, bringing knowledge of such efforts to the next generation in our cities. Cities

present the greatest opportunity to enhance biodiversity and boost health and wellbeing, as WWF points out. New green spaces and networks would create wildlife corridors, help to reduce pollution and give residents more access to nature.

It is unfortunate that the SNP is not delivering for Scotland’s biodiversity and natural heritage. I hope that the measures that I have proposed can be a starting point for consensus, and I hope that there is consensus on action before more of our biodiversity disappears.

16:38

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I very much welcome the chance to debate our nature emergency, but I must say that I am surprised and disappointed that the Scottish Government proposes to delete the term “nature emergency” from the motion. That is especially shocking given the need to ensure that we not only protect our natural environment as we tackle the climate emergency but take a joined-up approach to creating green jobs and green infrastructure. Those things have to go together. The removal of the reference to an “emergency” seems like the removal of the priority to invest in the environment on equal terms so that, now and beyond the pandemic, we address the stark social inequalities in Scotland and deliver a green and just transition. This is absolutely not the time for more of the same economic arguments.

Several members mentioned peatlands. Peatlands cover more than 20 per cent of Scotland’s land area and play a vital role in carbon storage, thereby combating the effects of climate change. They play a vital role in maintaining Scotland’s water quality and rich biodiversity. They also reduce flood risk and support farming and crofting. As Claudia Beamish said, it is vital that our peatlands are properly protected and invested in. As with the national parks, we need a joined-up approach to land use management that brings wider benefits.

That is why our amendment highlights the need for a joined-up approach and making sure that regional land use planning is at the centre of that. A joined-up approach would mean that we have community land ownership and that people are involved in delivering biodiversity. As several members have said, we are currently failing on biodiversity targets, and that is not good enough. We need to link biodiversity and tackling the nature emergency as part of the key policy framework in the upcoming national planning framework; it is vital that we deliver that as a core policy, not as an add-on.

It is also important that we focus on improving our communities as we improve our biodiversity. Several colleagues have mentioned that, in our urban areas, we need to recognise the importance of involving communities in integrating the biodiversity where they live, through our parks and green spaces and providing more allotments and community gardens. Our local authorities have a crucial role to play in that. It is important that, while we promote biodiversity, we also promote health and wellbeing, access to affordable healthy food and access to safe exercise. All those things are about bringing our communities together by respecting and protecting biodiversity. We need to make sure that the Scottish Government has a leadership role but works in partnership with local authorities and communities to make sure that we are all involved in the process.

I want to thank constituents for their lobbying on the issues of grouse moors, biodiversity and animal welfare. Those issues have to be part of our biodiversity challenge and tackling the nature emergency. I thank the League Against Cruel Sports for its briefing.

We need action now; it is over a year since the Werritty report and we do not have time for further delay. We need to be pushing together to get action. Next year, COP meets in Glasgow, so we should be setting an example as a developed nation with fantastic landscapes, nature and resources; we need to protect and enhance them as part of a strategy to retain and generate new employment. We need to create new jobs that respect nature and give everyone the opportunity for access to jobs while meeting our low-carbon ambitions.

Across the globe, we can see the direct links between nature, biodiversity and climate change. Lives are being lost and economies destroyed because of drought, forest fires and loss of habitats. Virus transmissions are now having an increasing impact on health across the globe, so we need leadership and action on our nature emergency now. Let us call it like it is, let us get going and I hope that Parliament supports Claudia Beamish's amendment.

16:42

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The decline of species, habitats and biodiversity in Scotland is due to a multitude of factors, but human impacts through land use, pollution and habitat destruction have been key. In Scotland, species have been driven to extinction through persecution, habitats have been obliterated through overgrazing, native forests continue to degrade, propped up by public subsidies, and our marine ecosystem is being systematically destroyed. As was revealed earlier this month by

Open Seas in *The Ferret*, a leaked Government report concluded that

"marine habitats in five regions have shrunk between 2011 and 2019."

The report states:

"The target of no loss ... has not been achieved in the Moray Firth, West Highlands, Outer Hebrides, Argyll and Clyde regions."

That includes a loss of 10 per cent of the Clyde's maerl beds, 53 per cent of Argyll's flame shells, 27 per cent of Outer Hebrides seagrass and more than 90 per cent of the Highlands' serpulid reefs. The report blames those declines on dredging, trawling, anchoring, overfishing and engineering works as well as climate change, ocean acidification and pollution from fish farms.

The dredging damage in Loch Carron in 2017 was a wake-up call, but ministers have been unwilling to limit the continued damage, even inside marine protected areas. Although the scientific evidence and advice is for action, the Government apparently prefers to sidle up to the vested interests of that damaging industry instead. In the small isles marine protected area, scallop dredging continues even today, six years after designation. What is the point of a protected area if it is going to be carved up to prop up environmentally damaging practices? Remember, the seabed is publicly owned—it belongs to us all.

Efforts to reverse those trends of decline have been compromised by the willingness of Government ministers to cosy up to the industrial shooting, farming and fishing lobby, whose interests have been consistently privileged in policy development. There exists a structural blindness to the long-term elite capture of public policy, but, sometimes, the mask slips. In 2013, at the centenary dinner of the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the then cabinet secretary, Richard Lochhead, stated, without a hint of embarrassment:

"It is an honour to serve as your minister in the Scottish Government."

He then went on to say that he had the honour of being their representative in Government. However, Mr Lochhead was not the farmers' minister and he was not their representative. That blurring of the subtle but important distinction between agriculture policy delivered in the public interest and the vested interests of producer groups is now so well entrenched that nature's voice is almost never heard, and the trend has been continued by the current cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing, in his own incorrigible style. In 2018, he stated publicly that, to his way of thinking, no industry was more precious than the salmon farming industry, and that he would deal with the industry's detractors.

A nature emergency has been in existence in Scotland's seas and land for decades. It is time to put nature, not vested interests, first.

16:46

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): As we have seen from the First Minister's declaration of a climate emergency, making a bold statement can galvanise policy and indicate commitment to the country. It sends a message of intent and it makes headlines. However, as everyone here knows, it is action that matters. The creation of marine protected areas, peatland restoration programmes and woodland restoration programmes are just three significant actions that have been taken in response to the climate emergency and the biodiversity loss that we recognise.

The RSPB sent us a briefing that calls for a nature recovery plan that prioritises five areas that should form part of a green recovery, and I agree with them all, in principle. The areas are: expanding Scotland's native woodlands; restoring peatlands; tackling deer management; delivering a Scottish nature network; and delivering nature and climate friendly farming. A lot of that is in line with the environmental strategy that the cabinet secretary outlined, and it also echoes recommendations from the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee and the outcomes of the work that the committee has been doing in inquiries and scrutiny over this parliamentary session.

The Scottish Government's multiannual commitment of £250 million to restore peatland is hugely significant in terms of both the world-leading net zero ambitions and tackling the biodiversity crisis that the "State of Nature" report identified last year. That investment and the investment in the forestry grants scheme will not only go a long way to delivering on those aims but will also create nature-based jobs in rural Scotland.

However, sadly, we are set to lose vital dedicated nature funding from the European Union's LIFE programme as the UK exits the EU. Further, as I mentioned in my intervention earlier, we are losing LEADER funding, which many community groups used to drive local programmes that enhance our natural environment and, with it, human wellbeing.

EU LIFE funding was given to Auchnerran farm, a demonstration farm outside Logie Coldstone, in Alexander Burnett's constituency of Aberdeenshire West. The farm is run by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and is designed to influence and inform farmers, land managers and

Government about sustainable game and wildlife conservation in the countryside.

We cannot overstate the cumulative impact of the many LEADER-funded smaller programmes that create opportunities for individuals businesses and communities that have supported rural development and environmental protection throughout Scotland. In my constituency, LEADER funding has supported a huge tree-planting operation on the flood plain at Uryside park in Inverurie and funded two green space and biodiversity development officers for the local authority, who create and maintain green spaces across the whole of Aberdeenshire, to increase biodiversity and the types of recreation spaces that are available for residents. LEADER also funded support for farming businesses to diversify and build in resilience, and helped farmers and crofters make their businesses more sustainable, as is the case with the eco-bothies in Newburgh. In other cases, LEADER has supported farmers as they convert areas of the land for activities that promote biodiversity and sequester carbon.

Where is the shared priority fund that the UK Government promised would replace that EU funding? *[Interruption.]* I do not have time; I am in my last minute.

With only seven weeks to go to the end of transition, the silence of the UK Government is extremely worrying.

My final word is on just transition. Last Friday, I represented Scotland on a panel on the green recovery that was hosted by the Bildu party of the Basque Country. My fellow panellists were from Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, all of which are small EU member states. The other panellists made much mention of the EU's just transition fund, which is worth €100 billion, and the €1 trillion European green deal investment plan. Those are more funds that we do not have access to. Liam McArthur might call it "navel gazing", but I call it our only way back into the EU, which takes green recovery seriously and has money to back it up.

The Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:50

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to close for Labour in this important debate on the declaration of a nature emergency.

Our amendment calls for the urgent provision of a robust licensing scheme for driven grouse moor management, the phasing out of large-scale peat extraction and the addressing of damaging fishing practices in sensitive marine environments. I agree with Gillian Martin that actions speak louder

than words. That is why it is so baffling that the SNP cannot bring itself to support that approach. It is a sensible approach, which I would have hoped could begin to build consensus for action. As the coalition for grouse moor reform has stated:

“Promoting a widescale change from driven grouse moor management towards sustainable, multiple land uses in a more wooded landscape would make a major contribution to addressing two of the most significant environmental issues of our time: the climate emergency and catastrophic biodiversity loss.”

My colleague Claudia Beamish made the point that we must recognise the need for rapid change, while respecting the challenges that are faced by rural and coastal communities with regard to the urgently needed just transition by providing support for that change as it happens. I would have thought that the Green Party would have recognised that and would have been more willing to work with others so that we can make the rapid changes that are required. An all-or-nothing approach of the kind that the Greens are proposing will end with nothing, but they seem determined to proceed in that way.

Today, the SNP Government has told us that it will respond to the Werritty report soon, but it has been telling us that for months. Why does the Government not just make a decision and bring forward a proposal for a robust licensing scheme? Why is the SNP not willing to recognise the need for a nature emergency to be declared? Our proposals are a commonsense approach that recognises the need for change and displays a willingness to bring it about in a manner that allows the transition to take effect with minimal disruption.

Huge swathes of land in Scotland are managed for grouse, and if land use change is desired, the arguments need to be made to ensure that we bring people with us. Industry figures show that, on average, grouse shooting adds fewer than 3,000 jobs, which have an average salary of £11,500 per year. Therefore, the economic contribution is relatively small in comparison with the value of forestry and tourism to our rural economy.

We should be far more ambitious when it comes to tree planting. Woodlands can provide a range of environmental benefits, including reduced erosion of the soil and the landscape, increased carbon storage, increased biodiversity, improvements in water quality and flow, and resilience to climate change, pests and disease. Tree planting has the knock-on effect of delivering skilled and well-paid jobs in forestry and tourism. Greater ambition on tree planting would bring about a natural transition from land that is managed for grouse to reforested land, with all the previously mentioned benefits that that brings.

In Scotland, we have an abundance of land that could be managed more effectively. Much of Scotland's land is in private hands and is managed for private interests. Increasing community ownership, building on our plans for a greener economy and delivering much-needed jobs in rural communities should surely be our goal. Therefore, I again appeal to members to take the commonsense approach and support the Labour amendment.

16:54

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries)
(Con): Much of my speech repeats and reinforces speeches that have already been made, but I make no apology for that, given the importance of the topic.

Scotland has long traded on its image as a country with a clean and vibrant natural environment. However, while it is green on the outside, it is—sadly—not as healthy as it could be. Species are declining both on land and at sea, and habitats are fragmenting while soils degrade. The Scottish Wildlife Trust has warned that nearly half of the country's species have declined and one in nine is threatened with extinction. It has rightly called for the Scottish Parliament to declare an emergency and reverse the continued deterioration of what is fundamentally our life-support system. That move has been echoed by Scottish Environment LINK, which warns that nature is in crisis, with dramatic declines in wildlife and habitats happening at unprecedented rates.

Last year, as navel-gazing Gillian Martin mentioned, the First Minister acknowledged that

“The challenges facing biodiversity are as important as the challenge of climate change”.

She added:

“I want Scotland to be leading the way in our response.”

What Gillian Martin failed to mention is that, time and time again during the SNP's 13 years in power, it has talked the talk but missed targets and failed to deliver.

In 2017, a report by Scottish Natural Heritage found that the Scottish Government had failed to meet 13 of 20 international biodiversity targets. Under the SNP, 12 species of national conservation importance have been found to be at serious risk, including the Scottish wildcat, the ash tree, the great yellow bumble-bee and the freshwater pearl mussel. The SNP has also broken its promise to designate four new marine protected areas in 2020.

Perhaps it is little wonder that the SNP has not published a biodiversity strategy in seven years, and the same goes for its commitment to publish a

wildlife management strategy. We are still waiting for that.

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 made it imperative for all public bodies to report on their biodiversity compliance, yet only 66 of Scotland's 139 public bodies responded and produced a report for the period 2015 to 2017.

Other environmental shortcomings by the SNP include missing its legal emission targets and ditching its flagship climate change commitment to ban biodegradable landfill waste in Scotland, and all of that while our streets are failing to meet legal standards for clean air. However, hundreds of thousands of jobs depend directly on Scotland's natural environment. Indeed, the sector was estimated to be worth £17.1 billion a year to the Scottish economy in 2008.

The Scottish Conservatives will lodge amendments to the continuity bill to strengthen environmental protection, because there are areas where it needs to be strengthened considerably in order to deliver the results that we want to achieve. One area of concern is the lack of data collection in order that we can accurately see which targets are being met, how they are being achieved and the actual results.

I believe that there needs to be a fit-for-purpose database for biodiversity and natural capital in Scotland. That view is shared by the eminent British economist Professor Dieter Helm, who says that the data should be made available to everybody. He said:

"I would regard that as an essential public good that the state can provide to everybody in society".—[*Official Report, Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee*, 8 September 2020; c 35.]

The Scottish Government needs to spend considerably more than it is spending to make that happen and allow us to move forward positively knowing that our actions are helping species and habitat diversity.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many rural areas in Scotland have seen a sharp increase in visitor numbers, with people escaping the towns and cities to discover the great outdoors. That is one reason why I believe that it is vital that funding is found to improve the network of countryside rangers, who should be able not only to patrol and protect rural areas, but to help to educate people and allow them to learn more about our wonderful biodiversity.

There is, unfortunately, little time available to me to highlight our precious marine wildlife, although that is an important subject, particularly given the decline in a number of seabed habitats in recent years. However, I must comment on how disappointing it is, given the co-operation that was required to introduce trial satellite tracking on

fishing vessels and the welcome co-operation of our fishermen, that a leaked document from the Scottish Government was used to attack the fishing industry and undermine the trust that is needed. We need all stakeholders, and not just opinion holders, to come together to find the right solutions to protect those vital habitats and fishing grounds for the future.

As with so many policies from this SNP Government, its ability to grandstand and make ambitious, impressive announcements far outweighs its ability to deliver. However, as with our climate, when it comes to biodiversity and our natural environment, it is crucial that we act now to halt any further loss before it is too late, because when it is gone, it is gone.

16:59

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): I was going to start off by saying that I was grateful to the Greens for lodging their motion and to everyone for their passionate contributions, but it is a shame that a lot of those contributions completely altered the tone of the debate. That was especially the case with Andy Wightman's comments. I will not bother repeating them, but I absolutely refute them. They showed a complete lack of understanding of how we have to work in government in a responsible way.

Maurice Golden: Does the minister agree that ending driven grouse moor management would lead to a decimation of the rural economy and therefore actually threaten biodiversity?

Mairi Gougeon: I think that the member might have referenced this in his speech, but we published research on grouse moors just last week. We will be issuing our response to the Werritty report in due course.

Alison Johnstone talked about mountain hares, which is a case in point. An amendment to the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill was lodged at the 11th hour, with no previous discussion. It had not been raised before and the Government—let alone Parliament—had not had the chance to scrutinise it. The Government and the Parliament agreed, quite rightly, to that amendment, but we were then left with a lot of groundwork to do after the bill was passed. We need to be able to undertake that work if we want a scheme that will work efficiently, properly and well—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry that I cannot take an intervention, but there is so much to cover today, as can be seen from the variety of issues that have been raised in the motion and in members' speeches.

We disagree with elements of the motion that pre-empt decisions that the Government is yet to

announce and those that relate to matters on which a number of pieces of work are under way.

Nobody here is in any doubt about the crisis or the urgency with which it needs to be tackled. We are all absolutely united on that. The Government announced a climate emergency because we recognise, as we have said many times previously, that our climate and biodiversity are intrinsically linked. We cannot consider one in the absence of the other.

Nature-based solutions such as woodland restoration and tree planting, peatland restoration and protection for salt marshes and sea-grass beds will mitigate climate change and flooding and improve water quality and biodiversity. We are already taking bold action to deliver that.

Biodiversity is a priority for this Government in its own right—not just because of the links to climate change. Biological diversity underpins the functioning of the ecosystems that provide the natural benefits that we rely on. Those benefits—from creating and sustaining both the soil in which we grow our food and the insects that we rely on to pollinate our crops, to water purification and carbon sequestration—are fundamental to our survival.

Our existing strategy delivers many projects that contribute to the restoration of biodiversity and, importantly, to ecological connectivity. Many of them are undertaken in partnership with our brilliant nature conservation organisations. I am keen to highlight one of those projects: NatureScot's new species on the edge project, which has been co-produced in partnership with seven of Scotland's nature conservation organisations. It will address the need to focus the right action in the right places, and it will provide £6.2 million over the next five years to protect around 40 of our nationally and internationally vulnerable species.

We continue to deliver our biodiversity strategy and to develop many new measures to address the loss of biodiversity in Scotland. Our 2018 programme for government commitment to a biodiversity challenge fund has awarded £1.8 million since 2019. A further £2 million was committed in the 2019 programme for government, and a further £3 million for biodiversity has been committed for 2021-22. That helps to enable targeted action for priority habitats and species, which will accelerate our efforts to meet international biodiversity commitments.

I want to cover the Werritty report and acknowledge the work of Professor Werritty and the grouse moor management review group, which was mentioned by Alex Rowley and many other members today. I know that there is a frustration at the fact that we are still to issue our

response, but in response to those criticisms and complaints I would say that there was not just one recommendation in that report. There were many recommendations, all with far-reaching implications, which we want to consider fully. That is all in the context of a pandemic, the fact that we have had to take various pieces of legislation through the Parliament, and the fact that we have had to deal with Brexit at the same time.

As we have said, we will deliver our response later in the autumn. That is why I cannot support the Green motion as it is drafted. We commissioned that work and it is important that we are allowed to announce our response to it and our conclusions.

The motion refers to salmon farming. A great amount of work is going on in that regard. Annabelle Ewing talked a lot about that and she outlined the importance of that sector to various communities across Scotland.

We are improving the regulatory processes, based on the application of available evidence and continued enhancements in the scientific base, to provide more benefit to the communities in which aquaculture is based. We carefully considered the recommendations from the parliamentary inquiry, and a range of actions are under way, including through the salmon interactions working group and through the farmed fish health framework. SEPA has launched its new regulatory framework and sector plan for fin fish aquaculture, including measures to improve environmental compliance to ensure that the size of fish farms is better matched to environmental capacity.

We want to lead globally on all those issues, and we have been clear that, in line with most other countries around the world, we think that there is more to be done to improve the condition of biodiversity in Scotland. We are rising to that challenge. We are contributing to international considerations of how best to proceed, and we will respond rapidly when the outcome of those negotiations is clear.

That is why it is frustrating to see the Greens' motion. Like other motions and amendments, there is a lot in it that we can all support, but the Greens have thrown the kitchen sink at the issue, knowing that a lot of that work is under way and knowing about the sheer impossibility right now of meeting the demand for "urgent legislation", for example. I do not think that they sought or expected parliamentary support for their motion. That is what is disappointing about it. We will work with anyone across the chamber who seriously wants to work with us to tackle our climate and biodiversity crisis, but I have to ask whether the Greens can seriously say the same.

17:06

Mark Ruskell: I thank members for their engagement in the debate and for their rapid and strongly emotional contributions on supporting our environment and wanting to declare a nature emergency. However, I am very disappointed that the Scottish Government is attempting to delete from the motion a declaration of a nature emergency. That is despite the fact that the motion was shared with the Government in advance of the debate—as it was shared with all the other parties.

The cabinet secretary said in her opening speech that the motion is “designed to fail”. We reached out to the Government, as we often do with legislation and in debates in the chamber, and we asked it to engage with us. Obviously, it is very disappointing when it does not. I think that that disappointment is shared across the Opposition parties.

Sarah Boyack spoke very well about the urgency of the nature emergency and about how we need not just to agree and declare that there is an emergency, but to agree the basic actions that we need to take to tackle it.

The cabinet secretary talked about the Government’s twin-crises basis; it will deal with climate change and the nature emergency at the same time. However, the reality is that, for climate change, we have climate law in place. We have a legislative underpinning to our action on climate change, we have scrutiny of the Government, we have targets, and we have the UK Committee on Climate Change. We do not have a commitment to a legislative approach when it comes to the nature emergency.

We do not have a legislative approach to setting of targets and the action that is needed. Finlay Carson highlighted that when he reeled off the biodiversity strategies that we have had from successive Scottish Governments over the years. However, they have not been underpinned by legislation, and have been largely ineffective. That is why every Opposition party in the Parliament recognises the importance not just of declaring an emergency but of pinning down the importance of putting into legislation targets and underpinning environmental strategies. That is why they have sought not to delete the first half of the motion. It is disappointing that the SNP aims to delete it, with its amendment.

We need legislation because we need planning and funding to deliver action on targets. Gillian Martin made a point about the situation that we are now in post-Brexit, when there is funding uncertainty.

We need to prioritise nature. Of course there are jobs that we can create in a green new deal. I

applaud the work that the Government has done and its commitment to restoring peatlands and reaping the benefits that can come from that. However, I say to Liz Smith that burning peatlands is not the best way to create a carbon sink. If we are going to restore peatlands and restore biodiversity, we need to make peatlands wet so that they do not burn—so that they are still alive, restore nature and act as an important carbon sink.

Alison Johnstone put things well in relation to the future of the driven grouse industry. Far more people are interested in shooting wildlife on film than in shooting guns, at the moment. The eco-tourism industry is five times bigger than the driven grouse sector. If I thought for one minute that the sector actually wanted to reform and to adopt a licensing regime, there would be a very different conversation. However, the fact is that it has had years to reform, but has done nothing.

The Green Party is fed up with the waiting game. We have waited for marine protected areas to be designated, and we have waited for action on hare protection and for additional powers for the Scottish SPCA. The whole Parliament is still waiting for a response from the Government on the Werritty review, and we are still waiting for the Government to act fully on the recommendations of Parliament’s inquiry into salmon farming. If Annabelle Ewing really cares about jobs in Fife in salmon processing, she should ensure that that industry has a sustainable future and that it is able to continue in the future.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: No. I do not have time.

At the moment, the salmon farming industry is threatened with a market ban on exports to the United States, which should be something that concerns Annabelle Ewing as much as it concerns me. This is the danger that Andy Wightman talked about: the more the Government papers over the consensus, and the more that it is captured by the corporate sector and does not balance that with science and the interests of conservation and other stakeholders, the more it stifles progress, change and our ability to tackle and act on the climate emergency.

Parliament will have another opportunity, with the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill, to lay out its strong objectives for protecting the environment, and to lay out the environmental principles for a strong watchdog—environmental standards Scotland—that can hold the Government to account.

Although we have been unable to find consensus in the debate, I hope that we can find it when the bill comes to the Environment, Climate

Change and Land Reform Committee next week—certainly among the Opposition parties and maybe even the Government—to make it stronger so that we can protect the environment and act on the nature emergency. That will be the second opportunity; we might have failed today, but we will be back next week.

Business Motions

17:11

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-23403, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 November 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Ministerial Statement: COVID-19

followed by Health and Sport Committee Debate:
The Supply and Demand for Medicines

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Period Products
(Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.45 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 November 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Economy, Fair Work and Culture;
Education and Skills

followed by Ministerial Statement: Rollout of Testing
Programme

followed by Scottish Conservative Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.40 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 November 2020

12.20 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

12.20 pm First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Health and Sport

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Making
Scotland Equally Safe: Marking the
Annual International Day for the
Elimination of Violence Against Women

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Tied Pubs (Scotland)