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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 10 September 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON BILL [LORDS]

Motion made,

That the promoters of the Transport for London Bill [Lords], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2010-12 on 24 January 2011, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of Bills).—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 17 September.

SPOILIATION ADVISORY PANEL

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Supplementary Report from Sir Donnell Deeny, Chairman of the Spoliation Advisory Panel, dated 10 September 2015, in respect of an oil painting by John Constable 'Beaching A Boat, Brighton' now in the possession of the Tate Gallery.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Hedgehogs

1. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What plans the Government have to protect hedgehogs. [901266]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): The hedgehog is a priority species. As such, it is protected under the terrestrial biodiversity group, but fundamentally we rely on the countryside stewardship scheme to protect the habitat on which this iconic relative of the shrew depends.

Oliver Colvile: What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the damage that badgers do to hedgehogs? Will he join my campaign to try and protect the hedgehog?

Rory Stewart: Badgers have been identified as one of a range of factors that can have an impact on the hedgehog population which, as Members will know, has declined from about 30 million to about 1.5 million

over the past 50 years. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work on hedgehogs and to the British Hedgehog Preservation Society.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I hope the Minister is aware that there is some black propaganda being put around about badgers and hedgehogs. In respect of the badger cull, I have always believed that we should use science and good research methods to find out what is going on. There has been a dramatic fall in the population of a much-loved species which is very important to our countryside. May we have the science on this, not some black propaganda blaming badgers?

Rory Stewart: A national hedgehog survey is currently being conducted, looking at exactly this issue. As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, in relation to hedgehogs badgers are not a black-and-white issue.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is an experienced parliamentarian and he will know from the exchanges so far that the range of four-footed animals to which reference can legitimately be made in this question has now been expanded, albeit only by one.

Mr Hollobone: It is a pretty miserable life being a hedgehog—they are covered in fleas, they are asleep for most of the year, when they do wake up, they are splattered on the road, and they are the favourite food of badgers. Will the Minister use his good offices with the hedgehog society and its national survey to ensure that alongside the badger cull there is a detailed survey of the impact of the increase in the hedgehog population in those parts of the country where badgers are being culled?

Rory Stewart: This is a scientific issue that is the responsibility of Natural England. We will look very carefully at the conclusions of the national hedgehog survey.

Broadband (Rural Areas)

2. **John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on ensuring broadband roll-out in rural areas. [901267]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): I spoke to the Culture Secretary earlier this week. He confirmed that we have now rolled out superfast broadband to 83% of properties. Earlier this summer with the Chancellor, I launched the rural productivity plan, which is all about making sure that rural people have the same access to connectivity and opportunities as those in urban areas.

John Woodcock: That is all very well, but the Minister must understand what is happening in places such as Cumbria, where people are being told on the one hand that their properties do not meet the commercial criteria for BT to go in, and on the other hand that Connecting Cumbria, the body set up to roll out rural broadband, does not have the funds available. These people do not

care where their fast broadband is to come from, but they want to know that the Government are going to get a grip, so will the right hon. Lady work with the Culture Secretary to address this problem urgently and give some hope to my constituents?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that it is vital that we have superfast broadband across rural areas, including Cumbria, and I note that in Barrow-in-Furness it should be available to 96% of properties by early 2018. The Government's digital taskforce, of which I am a member, is looking at how we connect those final properties and ensure that everyone has access to this vital service.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): The Churches are keen to offer their buildings to help address better rural broadband provision. Would the Secretary of State be willing to convene a roundtable of interested dioceses and suppliers to share the findings of the rural superfast broadband pilots?

Elizabeth Truss: I would be extremely keen to discuss that with my right hon. Friend. In fact, I recently visited a church in Feltham in my constituency that has linked up to superfast broadband and offers services to the local community in the church, which I think is a fantastic model.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): My question is along the same lines as the previous question. Has the Secretary of State thought about working with rural schools as hubs to ensure that superfast broadband is concentrated there, where it is incredibly important?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We are looking at all possible options, including schools. We already have broadband connections through the transport networks, and we are looking at what more we can do, such as having smaller boxes to access more remote properties and using satellite connectivity. We are looking at all those options and further announcements will be made in the autumn statement.

9. [901278] **Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con):** Residents in the rural parts of my constituency, such as Affetside and Holcolme, which after all are just a few miles from Manchester city centre, are 100% unconnected to superfast broadband. Some of them are trying to run small businesses, and for them it is cold comfort to know that nearly everyone else has a good internet connection. I urge my right hon. Friend to ask her colleagues across Government to ensure that superfast broadband is rolled out to rural areas, especially those near big cities.

Elizabeth Truss: I note that in Bury North superfast broadband should be available to 99% of premises by 2017, and I will be working very hard to ensure that the 1% also have access to high-speed services.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): A recent study by the Oxford Internet Institute has shown a growing gap in broadband access between urban and rural communities, with 1.3 million people in rural Britain being excluded from high-speed broadband and

a further 9.2 million having a poor connection. Will the Secretary of State tell the House by what date superfast broadband coverage will be universal?

Elizabeth Truss: I point out to the hon. Lady that in 2010 only 45% of properties were connected to superfast broadband. We are now up to 83%, and we have a commitment to get to 95% by 2017. By the end of this year, we will have universal access to broadband of 2 megabits per second. We will be making further announcements on the issue, because it is vital that rural areas have that connectivity.

Maria Eagle: I do not think that is good enough. The Secretary of State is letting the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and BT get away with a super-slow broadband roll-out in our remote rural areas. It seems she is too busy trying to bring back foxhunting, letting down our dairy farmers and allowing culling and pesticides to destroy our wildlife to do her job of championing rural areas across Government. When will she start punching her weight across the Cabinet table and get an end date for the superfast broadband roll-out? Until she does, remote rural areas will increasingly be put at a great economic disadvantage.

Elizabeth Truss: Frankly, I think Conservative Members will treat that statement with some derision, given the previous Labour Government's failure to deliver for rural areas over many years. This summer we launched a rural productivity plan, which is all about ensuring that rural areas get good connectivity, good transport links and affordable housing. Under this Government we have seen the gap in productivity between rural and urban areas closing for the first time in years.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) suggested, it is often in the last 5% that we find some of the most enterprising people, although at the moment they live in areas that are inaccessible to rural broadband. Will my right hon. Friend consider a survey of such areas to see just how many small businesses there do not yet have broadband access?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I recently opened a new cabinet in Mundford, a village in my constituency where I found a textbook publisher who works internationally, a software company, and a company that produces databases internationally. We have some of the most amazing businesses in rural areas. In fact, two of the fastest growing sorts of businesses are consultancy and IT. That is why getting superfast broadband roll-out is a real priority for this Government, and that is why we have set up the digital taskforce.

Food and Farming (Use of Data and Technology)

3. **Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con):** What assessment she has made of the contribution of data and technology to maximising the potential of the food and farming industry. [901268]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): We have some of the most innovative farmers in the world using technology to improve yields and reduce inputs like water and

fertiliser. DEFRA is committed to helping them by opening up 8,000 rich datasets that will help to give farmers the information they need to improve their businesses.

Daniel Kawczynski: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. I am also very pleased that she has accepted an invitation to come to Shropshire next year, to the Minsterley show or the Shropshire county show. I hope that when she comes she will spend time speaking to Salopian farmers about the tremendous opportunities for using data and technology in farming, because, as she knows, we are at the cutting edge of farming in Shropshire.

Elizabeth Truss: I am very much looking forward to visiting my hon. Friend and some of those innovative farmers in Shropshire. Shropshire is home to Harper Adams University, the National Centre for Precision Farming, and the mechanical engineering centre, which is a global centre for excellence in terms of modernising farming techniques.

Dairy Farming

4. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What support she plans to give to the dairy farming industry. [901270]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): I understand that our farmers, particularly in the dairy sector, are facing serious issues with low prices and cash-flow problems. That is why I am pressing the European Union to relax controls so that we can pay farmers promptly as well as working to build the British dairy industry of the future.

Dr Whitford: Given that many consumers pay a premium on Fairtrade goods to support farmers across the world, would the Secretary of State support regional and national source labelling on milk, cheese and other farm products, and perhaps a fair trade scheme here to support our farmers?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is absolutely right about better labelling. I want better labelling in our supermarkets so that consumers know what they are buying. We are working with supermarkets on that at the moment. I am pleased to say that some supermarkets are now moving to cost-price contracts not only for milk but for products such as cheese, yogurt and butter.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Usually it is the dairy industry that is doing the milking, but not when it comes to selling its products to supermarkets and some wholesalers. A pound for four pints sounds wonderful for hard-pressed families, but dairy farmers should not be part of the welfare system. We have introduced a supermarket supremo who is supposed to ensure that dairy farmers are getting a fair price. Can we ensure that she gets into action as a matter of urgency before more dairy farmers go to the wall?

Elizabeth Truss: Earlier this year, we announced that she will have fining powers, which is giving her the teeth she needs. We have also announced a working group looking at contracts, through AHDB Dairy, which will

talk about how we share risk better along the supply chain so that it is not just farmers who are facing the consequences of low prices in the global markets.

16 [901285]. **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Will the Minister support calls from the Scottish Government for retailers and food services to buy, and therefore support, local dairy produce?

Elizabeth Truss: We are working on that with the supermarkets, and I recently met my Scottish counterpart to discuss it. It is an important issue. It is also important that the public sector shows leadership so that we show where we source from and give transparency to new contracts that come up in order that local farmers can bid to supply these public sector contracts.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): I very much welcome the improvements to food labelling that the Secretary of State has promoted so that consumers can have confidence that they are buying British, but clearly we need to encourage consumers to be equally discerning. What plans do the Government have to promote the importance of supporting our farmers by buying British?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have a fantastic "Great" brand, which we use very successfully to promote British products overseas. I would like us to use that more in Britain, both in the public sector and in organisations such as supermarkets, so that consumers know when they are buying British products. Although most of the milk we buy is British, we import the majority of yoghurt, cheese and butter, and I think that is where the real opportunities are for our dairy farmers.

Calum Kerr (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): As the pricing crisis in not only milk but other sectors continues to get worse, will the Government make specific proposals to increase the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator so that she can look at the whole supply chain and our farmers can get a fair price for a quality product?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree that this is a serious situation. I have been pushing for a groceries code adjudicator across the European Union, because many of the dairy companies that operate in the UK do not just operate here. I want better transparency across the supply chain across the EU.

Flood Defence Programme

5. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): How many flood defences the Government plan to build under their six-year flood defence programme. [901271]

12. **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): How many flood defences the Government plan to build under their six-year flood defence programme. [901281]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): The Government plan to invest in 1,500 schemes over the next six years. This £2.3 billion investment will provide extra protection to an additional 300,000 households.

Matt Warman: All my colleagues in Lincolnshire and I have been working closely on this issue. Will the Minister commit to protecting not only the excellent Boston barrier scheme, which will protect Boston, but the agricultural areas of Lincolnshire, and to working with the Environment Agency, Natural England and the drainage boards, to make sure we get the best possible result for the county?

Rory Stewart: I absolutely give that assurance. In addition to the Boston barrier, which is a £97 million programme, Lincshire is protecting 30 km of the Lincolnshire coast, with £7 million a year over 20 years providing additional protection to 16,000 homes, as well as to the farmland my hon. Friend has mentioned.

Rebecca Pow: The future of flood management on the Somerset levels—Taunton Deane covers quite a lot of the Somerset levels—depends largely on the establishment of the new Somerset Rivers Authority. Will the Minister provide an update on progress and give assurances that there will be adequate funding to ensure flood protection and management in the future?

Rory Stewart: Somerset has been a serious priority for the Government. More than £1 million has been invested in setting up the Somerset Rivers Authority. We have committed more than £15 million over the next six years to Somerset exactly to achieve the objectives laid out by my hon. Friend.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): Despite the completion only a couple of weeks ago of a first-class, Rolls-Royce flood alleviation scheme in my constituency, the residents are still terribly anxious about insurance. Will the Minister update the House on where we are regarding insurance premiums for flood alleviation schemes?

Rory Stewart: Flood Re was launched in May and will become operational in May next year. The House will have an opportunity to debate the regulations with me next week.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Will my hon. Friend reassure me that, as well as the hard engineered projects that will be funded by the large sum of money he has mentioned, there will be soft engineered projects that build on the experience in Pickering, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), which uses natural features such as woodland and coastland wetland areas, which protect coastal communities from flooding? Such schemes can be cheaper and more effective in certain circumstances.

Rory Stewart: My hon. Friend has an enormous amount of experience in this area. We can do much more to help on flooding, including restoration of peatland, woodland and wetland areas, which not only benefits flood alleviation, but considerably benefits habitats and the biodiversity that depends on them.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): My hon. Friend has mentioned the Lincshire scheme, which is vital to protecting the Lincolnshire coast, and he will know that the deadline to ensure next year's use of the scheme is this November. Will he meet me and my hon.

Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) before November to discuss the final funding details for the scheme?

Rory Stewart: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the final details of the Lincshire scheme, to which the Environment Agency is committed. The work, particularly the movement of sand, has taken the level of protection from one in 50 years to one in 200 years. That is something of which the House should be very proud.

Food Waste

6. **Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab):** What steps the Government plan to take to meet the UN target of halving food waste by 2030. [901272]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her extraordinary work on this matter, and for her private Member's Bill, which she introduced yesterday. As she is aware, the Waste and Resources Action Programme, through Courtauld 2025, is taking considerable steps towards the achievement of that target.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the Minister for the interest he has so far shown in my ten-minute rule Bill. Under previous Courtauld commitments—the first three phases—80% of the reduction in food waste has come from households. There is still the real problem that more than half of food waste is in the supply chain. Does the Minister agree that we should leave it not to the voluntary action of food companies, but place a legal requirement on them to help us meet the target of halving food waste?

Rory Stewart: I am happy to sit down with the hon. Lady and look closely at the details of the Bill. Certain retailers, such as Tesco, are beginning to make huge progress, as she knows. Recently, there have been studies on, for example, bananas in the supply chain, and an app has been launched with FareShare to enable charities to get food from supermarkets. That is a good example of progress, but I am happy to learn more.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I am encouraged to hear that more than 90% of the food retail and manufacturing market have already signed up to the code voluntarily. Does the Minister agree that that is the best way to get the whole industry on board?

Rory Stewart: I agree strongly with my hon. Friend. Courtauld has been very impressive. This has been a cross-party activity, led by the extraordinary achievement of the Labour Government in bringing in the landfill tax. With 90% of retailers signed up, the significant reduction in food waste is genuinely impressive.

Discussions with the Scottish Government

7. **Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** When she last had discussions with her counterpart in the Scottish Government and what the subject was of those discussions. [901273]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): I spoke to my Scottish counterpart on Monday at the European Union Council. We have met several times since the election. I work very closely with him, as well as with my counterparts in the other devolved Administrations.

Marion Fellows: I acknowledge the constructive approach taken by the Scottish and UK Governments, with the help of Kent police, in establishing a fast track at the height of the Calais disruption. Will the Secretary of State continue to work with colleagues in the Government and the devolved Administrations to ensure that future disruption is avoided?

Elizabeth Truss: We should absolutely continue to work together. I know that there has been a number of issues, particularly with exports. We are committed to increasing exports from Britain and to ensuring that they are minimally affected.

Mr Speaker: I call Fiona Bruce. Not here.

Badger Cull

10. **Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** What consultation she undertook before her recent announcement on extending the badger cull. [901279]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): We are committed to implementing our 25-year strategy to eradicate bovine TB. The strategy has been the subject of extensive consultation. The issuing of a licence to Dorset is a measured approach to extending this policy, building on experience from previous years. There was a local consultation and an opportunity-to-comment procedure at the beginning of the licensing process.

Mr Hanson: This folly has now cost the taxpayer £17 million, and it is so far not proving as effective as the approach taken by the Assembly in Wales. Will the Minister give a commitment not to extend the cull beyond Dorset until there has been a proper evaluation of what is happening in Wales and of the folly of spending £17 million to date on something that is totally ineffective?

George Eustice: If we were to do nothing to tackle this disease, it would cost us about £1 billion over the next decade. The reality is that no country in the world has successfully eradicated TB without also dealing with the issue in the wildlife population. That is why a cull will continue to be part of our balanced strategy, alongside tighter cattle-movement controls and other measures, such as vaccination.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): The hard-pressed dairy farmers of south Devon, which is a bovine TB hotspot, are keen for the cull to be extended into our part of the world. Can the Minister give any hope in respect of when such a cull might come our way?

George Eustice: We decided this year to have a cautious roll-out by adding one cull area in Dorset. In the light of that cull, we will review things again. There were

applications and expressions of interest from north Devon and Herefordshire this year, and there are many other interested parties that I am sure will be considered in future years.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Has the Minister taken cognisance of the ongoing trials in a specific area of Northern Ireland? Has he had any discussions with the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland about those trials?

George Eustice: I regularly discuss this issue with Northern Ireland. It is trialling an alternative approach called “test and vaccinate or remove”, whereby badgers that are not believed to have the disease are vaccinated and those that are believed to have it are culled. There are limitations on that because of the limitations of the diagnostic tests. However, we liaise closely with all the relevant devolved Administrations.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): In a written parliamentary answer that was published on Monday, the Minister stated:

“Natural England has authorised badger culling in Dorset this year in addition to Somerset and Gloucestershire.”

Will he explain to the House whether the new Dorset culling area is part of a roll-out of culling or another pilot area? If Dorset constitutes the start of a national roll-out, how can that be justified on the performance of the pilot culls? If it is another pilot area, what monitoring and evaluation will be put in place by his Department?

George Eustice: The extension to Dorset, as I explained earlier, is part of a cautious roll-out of the policy. We piloted the culls in the first year in Somerset and Gloucestershire. Our experience last year demonstrated that a cull along the lines that we are pursuing could be successful. It was successful and that is why we are continuing.

Promotion of British Food and Drink

11. **Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to promote British food and drink. [901280]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): We are committed to expanding exports and promoting British food and drink, which is a £100 billion-a-year industry. We want to make better use of the GREAT brand and will be running trade missions this autumn to Germany and China.

Nigel Mills: The Secretary of State saw on her visit to Matthew Walker in Heanor the importance of exports to delivering growth, as well as the great attraction that great British products have overseas. What more can her Department do by working with UK Trade & Investment to help small businesses start to export their food products?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend both for his question and for the excellent puddings that we enjoyed at the Matthew Walker factory. We certainly filled our boots that day! I was amazed to hear that that company supplies 96% of the UK’s Christmas puddings, and

ships puddings all the way to Australia. I want to champion fantastic businesses such as that through trade missions and the Great British Food Unit, as well as integrating more closely with what UKTI does.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): In view of the need for further promotion of food and drink, and in light of the volatility in milk prices, what further markets will be explored by the Secretary of State and her ministerial team, as Northern Ireland exports some 85% of its milk products?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that Northern Ireland has a great record in exporting. On my last visit to China, I had Northern Irish representatives with me to promote its products. There is more that we can do, particularly on dairy, to get products into the Chinese market and across the world.

Helen Whatley (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Fruit farmers in mid-Kent support the living wage, but they expect it to increase production costs. Has my right hon. Friend had any discussions with supermarkets about their willingness to pay more for British fruit or talked to colleagues at the Treasury about the impact of the living wage on fruit farmers?

Elizabeth Truss: The farming Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), has discussed that matter with the industry. Of course, to help firms with the increased cost, the employment allowance will increase from £2,000 to £3,000 in April 2016, which means that a farmer will be able to employ four people full time on the national living wage and pay no national insurance contributions.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): New Zealand lamb producers are in direct competition with Welsh and British farmers in this season. New Zealand lamb is sold as fresh alongside Welsh lamb in supermarkets, despite undergoing a 17,000-mile sea voyage in refrigerated containers, which means that the meat can take up to three months to reach the supermarket shelf. What steps are the Government taking to allow consumers to make an informed choice about the freshness of lamb meat, at a time when Welsh sheep farmers are selling their animals at market at a loss?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. I have discussed this matter with my Welsh counterpart, and we are working on how we can better use the GREAT brand with supermarkets and work with them to ensure we are promoting our British produce.

EU Exit (Potential Effects)

13. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the potential effect on her Department of a vote to leave the European Union in the forthcoming referendum. [901282]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): The Government believe that our relationship with the European Union needs to change. That is why we will negotiate a new settlement with the EU and put it to the people in a

referendum. In the meantime, DEFRA will continue to press for reform and simplification of the common agricultural policy to ease the burden of regulation on our farmers.

Peter Grant: The question explicitly asked what assessment had been made of the potential impact of leaving the European Union. We can only assume from the Minister's lack of answer that the answer to that question is: none whatever. The Minister will be aware that, thanks to our links with Europe, the world-class food and drink industry in Scotland—some of our products are almost as healthy as Walker's Christmas puddings, I may add—is well on track to reach a seemingly impossible target, set by the Scottish Government, of a £1.65 billion contribution to our economy by 2017. Will the Minister give an assurance that he personally, and his ministerial colleagues, will campaign vigorously for Scotland and the UK to remain in the European Union?

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. We have some fantastically successful Scottish exports, not least Scotch whisky. Increasingly, Scottish salmon is doing well in international markets. We have a very informative debate to look forward to. There will be two sides of the debate once that negotiation is concluded. I am sure all Members will be rigorously involved in those debates.

Farm Inspections

14. **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): What plans she has to reduce the burden of farm inspections. [901283]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): I want to see farmers farming, not form-filling. That is why, by June 2016, we will have a single, co-ordinated farm inspection force and a single point of contact for farmers.

Peter Heaton-Jones: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that assurance. At the North Devon Show at Umberleigh in my constituency last month, I met a delegation of farmers. There is still concern about the burdensome nature of some of the inspection regime. Does she agree that a balance needs to be struck between the importance of those inspections and making sure that farmers are not distracted by the time they take up from running their businesses?

Elizabeth Truss: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We are working to make our inspections more efficient and to use technology better, such as satellite imagery and light detection and ranging data, so that we do not have to go traipsing around farms. We are looking at things we can do online. Over the previous Parliament, we cut guidance by 80% and we reduced farm inspections by 34,000 every year, but we want to do more in this Parliament.

Farm Produce (Fair Pricing)

15. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What steps she is taking to ensure farmers receive a fair price for their produce from retailers. [901284]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): We introduced the Groceries Code Adjudicator to ensure that there are fair contract arrangements between supermarkets and their suppliers. That will be reviewed next year and we continue to work with retailers and farmers to ensure we can help them through the current difficulties

Patrick Grady: I am sure the Minister will join me in welcoming new figures showing record turnover for sales of Scottish food and drink surpassing £14 billion for the first time in 2013. Will he work with the Scottish Government to make sure that producers feel the benefit of those sales and take up the call from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment to introduce a fairer framework for all those involved in the supply chain?

George Eustice: Yes, I can. I am a huge supporter of our Scottish exports. They do incredibly well. I discuss this regularly with Richard Lochhead, my opposite number in Scotland. We work with some of the lead Scottish agencies, such as Scottish Food and Drink and Quality Meat Scotland, to help to promote Scottish exports.

Topical Questions

T1. [901246] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): The Department's priorities are a cleaner, healthier environment, a world-leading food and farming industry, a thriving rural economy, and a nation well protected against natural threats and hazards. Over the summer, we published our first ever rural productivity plan to unleash the potential of the countryside by investing in education and skills, improving infrastructure and connectivity, and simplifying planning laws for rural businesses and communities.

Bob Blackman: Over the summer, we have all been depressed by the refugee crisis across north Africa and the middle east. What consideration has my right hon. Friend given, along with her EU counterparts, to using surplus food stocks, or possibly even increasing food production, to feed those who are starving having fled violence?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We have given £1 billion of aid to the region, and 18 million food parcels.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): In the infrastructure debate, the Government promised they would safeguard our groundwater and sites of special scientific interest from the dangers of fracking. These promises have now been abandoned. The Government now permit fracking in SSSIs, and four out of five of the old water protection zones are no longer frack-free under the new water protection areas. Was the Secretary of State consulted by her Cabinet colleagues about this U-turn on fracking in protected areas, and if so, why did she agree to downgrade these important protections?

Elizabeth Truss: We are clear that we have one of the best environmental protection regimes in the world, through the Environment Agency, which makes sure that groundwater sources are protected. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the study produced by the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering—both independent bodies—he will see that it is perfectly possible to frack safely and in an environmentally friendly way.

T2. [901247] **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I welcome the work done by the Secretary of State and the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) on food exports and dealing with retailers, but there is a huge crisis in farm gate prices for milk, beef, lamb and all other sectors. It will be important this year that we get the single farm payment out early or at least on time. Will the Secretary of State reassure me that the Rural Payments Agency is capable of making those early payments?

Elizabeth Truss: I can assure my hon. Friend that we hold regular discussions with Mark Grimshaw to ensure that we keep our commitment to the majority of farmers being paid by the end of December and the vast majority by the end of January. I am also pushing the European Commission to relax some of the inspection controls to make sure we can pay farmers properly. We need to do that to make it happen, otherwise we will be subject to fines.

Mr Speaker: I call Ian Blackford. [*Interruption.*]

T7. [901254] **Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): We are all aware of the challenges affecting the farming industry. In 2013, the EU gave the UK a convergence dividend of £230 million, largely as a result of Scotland's low payments per hectare. Despite being required by article 23 of EU regulation 1307/2013 to use objective and non-discriminatory criteria, the UK Government chose to spread the dividend across all four parts of the UK, meaning that Scotland got just 16.3% of the funding. This was funding meant primarily for Scotland but which we are not getting. In the spirit of fairness, will the Minister instigate an immediate review and ensure that Scotland does not get ripped off but gets its fair share?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will understand if I say we are now fully informed. We are grateful to him both for his quick reflexes and for his full information.

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): We do not accept that the allocation was done unfairly. Scotland gets slightly less per hectare, but because the average holding size is much larger, the average per farm is the highest in the UK. Nevertheless, we have committed to review the allocation in 2016-17 and have made it clear that part of that review will compare land types between the constituent parts of the UK.

T3. [901249] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome DEFRA's focus on connectivity in the rural productivity plan. This week, Rural Action

Yorkshire said it was nigh on impossible for a rural business to be in business without decent broadband and mobile phone coverage. The final 5% and the “not spots” will require innovation and investment. What comfort can the Secretary of State give to businesses trading in those areas?

Elizabeth Truss: This is an absolute priority for the digital taskforce. We will get to 90% geographical coverage for voice and text by 2017, and we are currently consulting on taller mobile phone masts to enable better coverage for things such as 4G in rural areas as well.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The Minister will be well aware that the Labour Welsh Government have introduced regulation to improve conditions in dog breeding. Does he have any plans to introduce similar legislation in England to tackle some of the horrific conditions that back-street dog breeding gives rise to?

George Eustice: Yes, we have looked at this, because there was a misunderstanding on the part of some local authorities that a licence to breed dogs was not required provided that people were breeding fewer than five litters a year. We clarified that last year with local authorities because anyone in the business of breeding puppies requires a licence, but we continue to keep this under review.

T4. [901250] **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): When on 9 August two cattle visited a supermarket in my constituency, they will have been disappointed to note that the only lactose-free milk was imported from Denmark. There is no such product made in the UK. Does the Secretary of State agree that this is an opportunity for import substitution, to use British milk, and an export opportunity?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right: there are new products where British producers could certainly innovate and also huge opportunities for import substitution of many existing products such as butter and cheese, the majority of which we import at the moment. One thing we want to do is to get supermarkets labelling things more clearly, so that consumers know whether a product is British.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Given the volatility in Northern Ireland’s milk market—the price is the lowest across the United Kingdom—and its dependence on the export market, will the Secretary of State give urgent consideration to treating Northern Ireland as a special case when it comes to the targeted aid scheme that the EU will be talking about tomorrow?

Elizabeth Truss: The details of the €500 million scheme have yet to be decided, but I am clear that it has to go to immediate help for farmers. We know that many farmers are struggling to pay bills and have serious cash-flow issues, so as well as long-term measures such as getting a futures market for dairy to give more confidence and promoting exports, we need to help with cash flow, which I am clear is a real issue in Northern Ireland.

T5. [901251] **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): May I thank the Secretary of State and her team for the efforts they made to help to eliminate the cryptosporidium virus that affected households across Lancashire for up to five weeks, leaving them without clean drinking water?

Will she look into the levels of compensation, which I believe are currently completely inadequate, being offered by United Utilities to the homes and businesses affected?

Elizabeth Truss: I welcome the fact that the final boil notices were lifted on 6 September and that compensation has been offered, but I understand that for many businesses this really was a difficult period in which they incurred many additional costs. I would be happy to discuss the issue further with my hon. Friend.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): What benefit can my constituents in the dairy sector in west Wales expect from the €500 million emergency fund brokered in Brussels this week and, critically, what share of that funding could the Welsh Assembly Government and other devolved Administrations reasonably expect?

Elizabeth Truss: The answer is that we have yet to find out the details of that fund. We are pushing for details, because I am clear that we need to make it immediate so that we can help with the cash-flow issues that farmers are facing. We shall obviously have discussions across the UK about how it is distributed. I also want to see action from the European Union on things such as inspections to make sure that we can get BPS payments out as early as possible, and we have not heard the details on that either.

T6. [901253] **Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I met a delegation of local dairy farmers during the summer regarding the problems in their industry. One of their suggestions was that the Government do more to market dairy products as part of a healthy diet. Will my hon. Friend take that suggestion on board and perhaps resurrect some of the “Drink milk” television commercials that I fondly remember from my childhood?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The dairy part of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board does some promotion of milk already and will continue to do so, and we should also note that the Department of Health spends around £63 million a year buying milk for infants.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The dairy industry in Cheshire is one of the great drivers of the rural economy in my county, which is why I was pleased to support dairy farmers in the actions they were taking to defend their livelihoods. Did the Minister also support those protests?

Elizabeth Truss: I am about making sure that we have practical solutions that actually deliver for dairy farmers who are facing cash-flow issues, while also ensuring that we have a viable national industry for the future. We do not want to lose really important dairy capacity when we know that there are lots of long-term opportunities—huge opportunities for import substitution, for example. My focus is on practical solutions that can help to achieve that.

T8. [901255] **Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): With the crisis in the price of liquid milk, one way to help our farmers increase their income is through products—dairy, cheese and additional products. I understand what my

right hon. Friend says about labelling, but what specific initiatives do the Government have for developing these products and developing new markets?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes a good point. In the long term, we want to develop processing capacity so that we can export some of our fantastic cheeses more widely around the world. That is why we are investigating the potential to use the European Investment Bank and rural development funds to support the development of that processing capacity.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues who wish to speak, but we must now move on.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Climate Change

1. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to support the Church of England's international efforts to tackle climate change. [901256]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): The Church of England, along with the wider Anglican Communion, is actively tackling climate change in four ways: assessing its investment strategy and, where necessary, divesting in the context of our climate change policy; actively engaging with public policy; attending the forthcoming Paris conference; and encouraging its parishes to reduce their carbon footprint and their parishioners to do the same.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the right hon. Lady for that response. As she mentions, the Church has made some progress and is divesting £12 million from highly polluting coal and tar sands investment, but there is still quite a significant degree of investment in companies such as Shell, in respect of which there are still concerns about involvement in fossil fuels and the exploration of the Arctic, for example. Does the right hon. Lady feel that the Church could go further?

Mrs Spelman: I would encourage the hon. Lady to come to a reception with the Church Commissioners that I have organised for Members to discuss the ethical investment strategy that now applies to Church investment. She is right that divestment of investment in thermal coal and tar sands has occurred, and there are no direct investments in any company of which more than 10% of its revenues are derived from the extraction of thermal coal or from tar sands.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Church should be spending its time looking at ways to increase the size of church congregations rather than trying to control the world's climate?

Mrs Spelman: Our commitment to climate change in no way detracts from the central mission of the Church, which is to encourage people to faith. As part of our faith, however, we have to demonstrate environmental stewardship. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has said, the Anglican Communion has an unrivalled network through which to encourage laggards in the quest to tackle climate change and to play a positive role at the conference in Paris.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly refers to the Anglican Communion. What discussions and consultations does the Church of England have with the worldwide Anglican Communion to listen to them about the impact of climate change in their own countries?

Mrs Spelman: The Church of England devoted a whole day of its General Synod in York to a debate on climate change, in which the Archbishop of Canterbury and I spoke, outlining the ability of our worldwide network to help the nations that are worst affected by climate change. Sadly, they are the poorest nations in the world. That is why the Government's commitment to an ambitious outcome in Paris is so important.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission was asked—

Number of MPs (Proposed Reduction)

2. **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed reduction in the number of Members of Parliament on the scrutiny of Government. [901257]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The next review of UK parliamentary constituencies—a subject of interest to one or two Members—will be based on a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament from 650 to 600, and it will be undertaken by the UK's various boundary commissions, and not the Electoral Commission. As such, neither the Speaker's Committee nor the Electoral Commission has made any assessment of its potential impact.

Mr Bone: Of course, one of the advantages of reducing the number of MPs is that fewer Whips will be required, but the first job of a Member of Parliament, who is not part of the Government, is to scrutinise the Government. By taking 50 out of these Members, the Government will not be scrutinised so well. Does my hon. Friend have a view on whether the size of the Government should be reduced proportionately to the reduction in the number of MPs?

Mr Streeter: My hon. Friend speaks powerfully and with a modicum of common sense, as always. He may well have half a point, but this is not a matter for the Electoral Commission and it is not a matter for me.

Mr Speaker: Shame!

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Is my hon. Friend confident that the new boundaries will be in place in time for the next election?

Mr Streeter: As I have indicated, it is not a matter for the Electoral Commission, but from my next-door knowledge of the Boundary Commission I am confident that this will be in place. I am sure that will be of great encouragement to my hon. Friend.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Use of Church Buildings

3. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to encourage churches to use their buildings to offer more services to the community beyond worship. [901258]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): The Church of England's Cathedral and Church Buildings Division developed the open and sustainable churches initiative five years ago, and now 80% of churches provide a function beyond purely worship, with 54% of Anglican parishes running at least one organised activity to address social need.

Bob Blackman: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. What is the Church of England doing in ethnically diverse areas, where large numbers of people are not of the Anglican faith, to open up the buildings so that they are used regularly by the whole community, rather than just by those of that faith?

Mrs Spelman: I can reassure my hon. Friend that we are opening up churches to the social needs of the community and using them for a wide range of purposes. For example, churches are being used as citizens advice bureaux, post offices, shops, night shelters and food banks. Let me give the example of two churches in his area of Harrow: St Paul's has a job club open to people of all backgrounds; and All Saints' Harrow Weald provides not only an art exhibition facility but a forest school. These facilities are open to all.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is precisely the sort of issue where local leadership in the Church can make a difference? She might therefore understand the confusion in the Oxford diocese, where it has been many months since we had a bishop and it could be a year before one begins his or her new role.

Mrs Spelman: I am aware of the circumstances in the Oxford diocese. The Crown Nominations Commission did convene on 11 and 12 May but was unable to discern who the right candidate for the Bishop of Oxford should be. A number of bishop appointments need to take place in sequence, so the next time the Commission convenes will be on 4 February. We all hope that in short order the right candidate will be found, but Bishop

Colin, the acting bishop, is doing a splendid job and he is confident, as are his senior staff, that the needs of the diocese will be fully met.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): My right hon. Friend made a good point about the use of churches for community activities. Last Friday, I helped launch one such activity that was taking place at St Simon's, and I would be grateful if she would come to Plymouth to see for herself how very good that is—perhaps she would come to a breakfast meeting.

Mrs Spelman: What a splendid invitation—how could I refuse? The example that my hon. Friend gives might prompt all Members here to look at the Church's website, where there is a toolkit to help any church wishing to broaden its use in the ways we have described to find out how that can be done and to share best practice.

Mr Speaker: I call Chi Onwurah. She is not here.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission was asked—

Individual Electoral Registration

6. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the potential effect of individual electoral registration on preventing fraudulent electoral registration. [901265]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) The Electoral Commission recommended in 2003 that individual electoral registration should be introduced in Great Britain. Requiring all electoral registration applications to be verified makes it harder to create false register entries, and helps to prevent electoral and other types of fraud.

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. As he said, the Electoral Commission recommended the adoption of IER in 2003. Does he agree that it is long overdue and that the ability to register online will make it much easier for many people to engage with the democratic process?

Mr Streeter: As usual, my hon. Friend is right: IER has been a long time coming, but it has been carefully and successfully introduced in the past 12 months. We must pay tribute to all the electoral registration officers all over the country for their hard work. As a champion of youth engagement in democracy in his constituency, he makes an important point about online registration. There is no question but that a lot of young people have exercised their ability to register online, so making sure that our register is as full as possible.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): What is the Electoral Commission's view of the Government's attempt to bring forward the date of the full implementation of IER to December 2015?

Mr Streeter: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. The Electoral Commission recommended that the original date of December 2016 be maintained. The Government disagreed with that, and have now

decided that December 2015 is the appropriate date. Ultimately, however, it is a matter for the House to decide, and the Electoral Commission has not changed its mind.

Business of the House

10.30 am

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): The business for next week will be as follows.

MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Trade Union Bill.

TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the National Insurance Contributions (Rate Ceilings) Bill, followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to tax credits, followed by a motion relating to the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER—Remaining stages of the Education and Adoption Bill.

THURSDAY 17 SEPTEMBER—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 18 SEPTEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 12 October will include the following:

MONDAY 12 OCTOBER—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

The House will be aware that the new arrangements involving the Petitions Committee and the allocation of time for matters raised in petitions begin from now. I therefore wish to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 14 September and 12 October will be as follows:

MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER—Debate on an e-petition relating to contracts and conditions in the NHS.

MONDAY 12 OCTOBER—Debate on an e-petition relating to making the production, sale and use of cannabis legal.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business. May I first warmly add my voice to the tributes paid yesterday to Her Majesty the Queen for her exemplary 63 years and 216 days of service to this country, which is ongoing?

Following the Prime Minister's revelation on Monday that he authorised a lethal drone strike against a British citizen and ISIL terrorist in Syria, we welcome the establishment of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which will now rightly be able to scrutinise the Government's actions in this case. The Defence Secretary has stated that there may be similar drone strikes in future, and the media have speculated about the existence of a "hit list" of targets. It is clearly not possible or desirable to discuss individual cases across the Floor of the House, but can the Leader of the House assure me that the Government will publish the criteria that they are using to justify such operations, and will he set time aside so that Parliament can debate them?

Yesterday, in his evidence to the Procedure Committee, the Leader of the House confirmed that he would bring his plans for so-called English votes for English laws back to the House in October. These partisan and unworkable proposals have been criticised throughout the House and in the other place, which has passed a motion calling for a Joint Committee of both Houses to examine the issue. Will the Leader of the House tell us if and when the Government intend to respond to that motion? I welcome the work that the Procedure Committee

is doing in considering the implications of the Government's plans, and look forward to the publication of its report, but does the Leader of the House not recognise the widespread controversy that his divisive proposals have created? Instead of rushing ahead in a partisan manner, will he now reconsider, and agree to pilot them first?

Next Tuesday, for just 90 minutes, the House will debate a statutory instrument on working tax credits which will make 3 million families at least £1,000 a year worse off. Single parents in work will be hardest hit, and 5 million of Britain's poorest children will be pushed further into poverty. Even the right hon. Gentleman's own Back Benchers are waking up to the scale of this huge attack on working people, and the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) has described the cuts as "eye-wateringly painful". Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that 90 minutes is just not long enough to debate a change which will have such a detrimental effect on so many working people, and will he grant more time for the debate? Given that increases in the minimum wage and a cynical rebranding exercise will not nearly compensate for the loss of working tax credit, can he explain how on earth these changes fulfil the Government's promise to "make work pay"?

Next week's business completely exposes the Tories' ludicrous claim to be some kind of workers' party. Their Trade Union Bill is designed to undermine basic rights at work and prevent effective collective action for better pay and conditions, while their fees for employment tribunals have made legal protections at work practically unenforceable. Meanwhile, Liberty and Amnesty International have condemned the Government's plans to force trade unionists to register with the police and share social media comments in advance as

"a major attack on civil liberties".

Can the Leader of the House confirm that there are now serious concerns that the Government's proposals on workers' rights violate this country's legal obligations as a member of the International Labour Organisation?

While the summer recess has been a calm and uneventful time for the Labour party, the Government are facing troubles of their own. We have had the ongoing farce of the Prime Minister's renegotiations and negotiations over Europe—that is negotiations with his own MPs. He has also already given in on collective Cabinet responsibility during the referendum campaign—much to the Leader of the House's relief, I am sure. He has also given in on the date, and on Monday no fewer than 37 of his MPs, including five former Cabinet Ministers, joined us in the Division Lobby because they just did not trust their own Government not to misbehave on purdah. It makes our leadership election process look orderly and smooth by comparison.

Despite my party's sterling attempt to banish silly season entirely this summer, it seems that it still exists on the Conservative Benches. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway) has uncovered a new angle on the refugee crisis. He claimed he could not get his hair cut because his barber had gone home to Iraq. I can reveal to the House that his barber was actually on holiday in Great Yarmouth.

It has emerged through Labour's extensive and unrivalled vetting process that Baroness Altmann has in fact been a member of the Labour party since 2014. Apparently, she renewed her membership just before the election, and was actually a member of all three major parties.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): She is not a member of the Scottish National party.

Ms Eagle: Have you asked her? [*Laughter.*] The Minister for Pensions obviously decided she had to take out some third-party insurance.

Chris Grayling: May I start with some words about the shadow Leader of the House? As she highlights, over the next three days some changes are afoot in the Labour party. We have followed quite closely the campaign for her party's deputy leadership; I think she has fought a very decent campaign and I wish her all the very best for the outcome. If it transpires that this is her last day at the Dispatch Box for business questions, may I say that, although we have sparred with each other for only a few weeks, I have very much enjoyed working with her, and I hope that it is not the last time we work together? I wish her all the very best in the changes over the next few days.

I echo the hon. Lady's remarks about Her Majesty the Queen. I have the honour of having served first as Lord Chancellor and now as Lord President of the Council. In those two roles I have had dealings directly with Her Majesty and that has been one of the greatest—if not the greatest—honours of my career. I continue to regard her as a fantastic monarch for this country and I think yesterday's tributes from this House were absolutely right and proper and appropriate.

The hon. Lady made reference to the drone strike. The Prime Minister has been very clear that he will discuss how to bring the details to the scrutiny of the ISC when the new Chair of that Committee is appointed. No Prime Minister would ever take a decision such as that lightly. Ultimately, surely, the first job of the Prime Minister of this nation is to protect its safety and security and that of its citizens, and I am absolutely certain that that is at the front of our Prime Minister's mind as he deals with these very difficult, sensitive and challenging issues.

The hon. Lady mentioned English votes for English laws. I listened to the evidence that she gave yesterday to the Procedure Committee, in which she described how our proposals departed massively from those of the McKay commission. That is nonsense. Our proposals are consistent with the recommendations and principles set out in the McKay commission report. They are measured and sensible, and they provide a balance to our devolution settlement. I think they are the right thing to do, and we will bring them back before the House shortly. The hon. Lady asked about a pilot. I have committed to reviewing the process after 12 months. Over that period, we can take input from the Procedure Committee and other Committees on how the process is working. I look forward to seeing the Procedure Committee's recommendations shortly.

The hon. Lady referred to next week's debate on tax credits. We have had to make some tough decisions in the interests of this country, both in this Parliament and in the last one, to get our economy back on the straight and narrow. I make no apology for that, and I remind her that one of the reasons we are sitting on the Government Benches and Labour Members are on the Opposition Benches is that the people of this country recognised that it was right and necessary to take those tough decisions to ensure that future generations can live in a

country that is founded on strong economic foundations. She talked about the time allocated for that debate. This issue was extensively discussed in the days of debate that followed the summer Budget. Next week's debate will provide an opportunity to confirm the statutory instrument necessary to bring the measures into effect, and I am confident that Members will give it their support.

I am also confident that the House will support the Trade Union Bill when it comes before the House next week. The hon. Lady talks about looking after the interests of working people. I would like to look after the interests of people who find their working lives disrupted on the days when our transport system is massively interrupted by a minority of workers. We are on their side, which is why the Bill is necessary.

The hon. Lady mentioned the issue of Labour membership. I suspect she will find that a number of people who have voted in the leadership contest reflect a broader membership than any of the parties represented in this House, and that that might have something to do with the likely outcome. Mr Speaker, you might not know that this week marks the 30th anniversary of the release of that great movie "Back to the Future". You might think that we are about to see a new sequel to that film this weekend, but I think we are going to see a new version of the "Tom and Jerry" show.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): My constituent, Sergeant Jay Baldwin, served with distinction in Afghanistan and during active service unfortunately lost both his legs. He has apparently been denied further NHS treatment because he sought alternative medical advice in Australia. We will not have Health or Defence questions during these two weeks, but I should like to raise this issue and bring it to the attention of the Government in the hope of reaching a swift resolution.

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's constituent and to all those who have served our country with such distinction in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom suffered dreadful injuries. It is right and proper, and the duty of this country, to make sure that we look after them. The circumstances that my hon. Friend has described are very difficult ones, because we have tight rules in the NHS on these matters. However, my colleagues in the Department of Health are well aware of the importance of this issue and they are giving it careful consideration.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I also thank the Leader of the House for providing the business for next week. I, too, am unsure whether to pay a premature tribute to the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). We do not yet know whether she is going to be leading her party, whether she will be sitting on the Front Bench or the Back Benches, or whether she will be in some kind of Social Democratic party mark II. I have very much enjoyed working with her, and I hope that she manages to retain her place on the Front Bench. As we watch the results of the Labour leadership contest this week, however, let us remember never to ask the Labour party to organise an over-indulgent evening on the premises of an alcohol beverage manufacturer.

[Pete Wishart]

It is good to see that the Leader of the House has regained his usual cheerful disposition, following his irritable and bad-tempered performance in the Procedure Committee yesterday, in which he shouted down individual Members and challenged others to bar-room brawls. His incredible behaviour included the ridiculous assertion that there was no such thing as Barnett consequential, contrary to what everyone else says. It is pretty clear that the Leader of the House is not a unifying character, but somehow he has managed to unite every single party in the House—he has even managed to unite the House of Lords—against his mad plans for English votes for English laws. We are hearing expert witnesses telling him how absurd some of those plans are, but according to him everybody else is wrong, and he is right. In the light of what he has heard, will he now review those plans and ensure that they do not come back to this House in their current condition?

That brings us on to friends in the House of Lords. Over the recess, we acquired 41 brand new parliamentarians, who will now have a role in scrutinising and initiating our legislation, and what a motley crew they are too—former party donors, former apparatchiks, former MPs, and people who seem only to have qualified for a place because they can give significant sums of money to one of the major Westminster and UK parties. What an absolutely ridiculous thing. The only plan that this Government have for the House of Lords, which has become so discredited in the eyes of the people, is to increase that bloated place even further, with even more new Members. That is the only plan that this Conservative Government have for that absurd and ridiculous circus down the corridor.

The House has been at its best this week in discussing the refugee crisis. The way in which these debates have been conducted has been a credit to the House. The only issue that I have with the way in which things have transpired was the unfortunate statement from the Prime Minister on Monday. A common feature of this Government, especially with the Prime Minister's statements, is this bundling together of a number of different issues. I do not know what counter-terrorism had to do with the refugee crisis. I think the British public expected us to focus exclusively on the refugee crisis, and they wanted to hear leadership from the Prime Minister, which they did not get. What they got was a counter-terrorist statement with a bit on refugees. Can we ensure that such a thing does not happen again? The British public expect better than that. Will the Leader of the House take a look at that and vow to come back on important and significant issues such as the refugee crisis and ensure that they are not bundled together with other matters? In that way, the British public will get what they deserve and require, which is a statement on issues that concern them.

Chris Grayling: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the House with his usual understated performance. He tends to return to the same issue week after week. I know that the Scottish National party has come to this place wanting to whip up a great row between England and Scotland. There is no doubt that it will do that week after week. Once again I say to him that our proposals on English votes for English laws are measured and sensible. They provide fairness in our devolution

settlement. It is not realistic to say that we will provide much more devolution to the people of Scotland, which we are doing, but that England will have no part of it. Our measures are balanced, sensible, proportionate and fair, and we will bring them before this House shortly and I am confident that the House will back them.

On the House of Lords—another issue that the hon. Gentleman returns to week after week—the reality is that the new appointments contain people whose views we wish to hear. I am talking about disability campaigners and senior business people. The House of Lords has a vast wealth of expertise. It contains people who bring to the law-making process in this building experience of all aspects of our national life. I know that the Scottish National party does not like it, but actually those people add a quality to debate that is immensely valuable to our law-making process.

The hon. Gentleman talked about Prime Minister's statements. We have just had a recess. There were a number of important issues to discuss. The Prime Minister was in this House for two-and-a-quarter hours answering questions. In what world is that not sufficient? We have a Prime Minister who has come into this House to take questions on a variety of related issues. He is doing the job that we expect him to do. Although I absolutely respect and like the hon. Gentleman, who has a wonderful style in this Chamber, he was still talking a lot of nonsense.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Given the integrationist and dictatorial speech made by Mr Juncker yesterday, why has my right hon. Friend chosen not to announce a debate on the Floor of the House on the opt-in decision on the relocation of migrants, for which the European Scrutiny Committee, anticipating the present immigration crisis, called in July? The Committee unanimously agreed yesterday that the debate was imperative, irrespective of other debates this week. Will he arrange it for this week or next, as I called for in my letter earlier this week?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, and I intend to sit down and talk to him about how we address it. I am well aware of his Committee's concerns and of the importance of ensuring that these matters are properly heard. I also heard the speech yesterday, and to me it underlines the need for us to see radical change in our relationships with the European Union. That is why the referendum is so important. I do not believe that Britain needs the degree of more Europe that was on offer yesterday—in fact, I think we need just the opposite. We really must address this issue, and I am delighted that this Prime Minister has given this country the chance to vote on our future in the European Union.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen early-day motion 378, which stands in my name?

[That this House condemns Ellis David Ezair, owner of Flint Glassworks, Jersey Street, Manchester for failing over a period of several months to respond to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton regarding complaints from the right hon. Member's constituents whose homes are suffering serious damage because of the failure by Mr Ezair to rectify a situation for which he is entirely

responsible; and calls on the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to investigate and, if possible, rectify this unacceptable situation.]

It is in regard to serious antisocial activities being conducted in my constituency by Ellis David Ezair of Flint Glassworks. He does not live in my constituency, and for his own private profit he is wrecking the homes and environment of a considerable number of my constituents. Does the Leader of the House agree that that is unacceptable, and will he draw the matter to the attention of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government? Will he give time in the House for the matter to be discussed?

Chris Grayling: I commend the Father of the House for, notwithstanding his long years of service, having retained his zeal in representing his constituents on what are clearly serious matters. The issues he raises today are important, although I obviously cannot comment on the individual circumstance. I will ensure that my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government are aware of his comments and of his early-day motion. I am sure that a man of his experience will seek to bring these matters before the House in the variety of ways that are available to him.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we have a debate on the way in which Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs deals with small businesses? When I speak to small businessmen in my constituency, such as those at Bur-Low Engineering, I frequently hear complaints about the way in which they are treated, which is often bureaucratic and high-handed.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend raises an important point. It is, of course, of paramount importance that in the interests of our national finances, HMRC secures payment of taxes that are due. It is equally important that it does not treat business people as guilty until proven innocent, rather than the other way round, and that it treats them fairly and with respect. I am sure that those working in HMRC will have heard my hon. Friend's comments. He makes a valuable point and is, as ever, an effective champion of small business.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving notice that the first day back after the conference recess will be for Back-Bench business. However, there is a problem, given that the last meeting of the Backbench Business Committee before then is this Monday, so Members who want to put in bids have until the end of play tomorrow to get them in. On Monday, the Committee sat and was unaware that next Friday had been allocated to us as a Back-Bench business day, and we consequently informed Members that we did not anticipate any time to be allocated before the October return. Time is tight, so I ask Members to get their act together, and please to put in bids by the close of play tomorrow.

Chris Grayling: The House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments, and I hope that Members will accede to his request. I am sorry that we had the confusion at the start of the week, but decisions about business are not normally taken before the end of Monday. I gather that he is looking to move the date of his meetings so that they coincide with the allocation of

business for the following week. We will work with him carefully to ensure that we make the best use of the time that he and his Committee have at their disposal.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): May we find time to recognise the accomplishments of Paula Radcliffe—not only her multiple accomplishments in athletics, but also the inspiration that her dedication to her sport has provided to generations of athletes, and her courage in standing up against the current trend of media innuendo, leading to presumptions of guilt? Her inspiration and courage are why I, as the Member for Bedford, am proud that we have a stadium in our town that proudly carries her name.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend's comments say it all. Paula Radcliffe was and is one of our great athletes. I share his concern about the fact that in this and other areas we as a society believe that media innuendo is a sign of guilt. That is a step in the wrong direction and one that we should reverse.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Last night I chaired a meeting in the House on refugees. At the end of it a children's rights lawyer who had spent two weeks on Lesbos handed me two things. The first was a child's exercise book picked up from the sea, as Members can see, with English language words on one side and Arabic on the other. The second was a so-called life vest, which would not save anybody's life. We are offering 4,000 places for refugees in one year. The Greeks receive 4,000 a day. May we have a statement next week on any further thoughts that the Government may have on increasing the number of refugees? We must do more.

Chris Grayling: We have debated the matter extensively this week, and the Government will of course continue to update the House as this matter develops. The point that the right hon. Lady makes is important, but everyone has to realise that we are dealing with a very large number of refugees in the countries around Syria and that those numbers of refugees cannot all be resettled elsewhere. That is why this Government are spending far more than any other European country on providing support for people close to home. The challenge for us is to find a long-term solution in Syria for us to help rebuild Syria and enable the people to return home.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It has always been understood that Members will not have their communications intercepted. That was established by the Wilson doctrine. Considering the answer that the Prime Minister gave yesterday at Prime Minister's questions, may we have a written statement next week on how many Members' communications have been intercepted over the past 10 years?

Chris Grayling: This is an important issue. Although there are legal questions involved, I am not aware that the approach has changed at all. I would not wish it to change, nor do I believe that this Government would condone such a change.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Clinical commissioning groups in Worcestershire are recommending that their GPs refer patients not to Worcester and Redditch but to Birmingham because

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

the waiting lists in Worcestershire are reaching unacceptable levels. Out-of-area referrals other than for clinical reasons are unacceptable and distort the system. May we have a debate on how, post-Lansley, management of the NHS as a national service is becoming increasingly difficult?

Chris Grayling: There will be Health questions on 13 October so the hon. Lady will have an opportunity to put that point directly to the Health Secretary. I believe that her party supported patient choice; whether it will do so in future, I do not know. It would be a retrograde step to move back to a position where people were not able to move to areas where waiting lists were shorter or treatments of a different kind were available.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): The Government recently announced a consultation on the closure of 90 courts across England and Wales. The inclusion of Bath magistrates court and county court is causing a lot of concern for my constituents, who are worried that they will not be able to access the justice system. Will my right hon. Friend set aside time to debate this later in the parliamentary Session?

Chris Grayling: I see that my hon. Friend is already proving an effective campaigner for his area. I regret the decisions that we have had to take in many areas to deal with the financial crisis that this country has faced in recent years. We have had to take difficult and tough decisions and changes have had to take place. I am acutely aware that there are concerns when institutions such as local courts are lined up to be closed. I know my hon. Friend will make strong representations to the Ministry of Justice and he can bring forward an Adjournment debate on the subject. This Government will do their best to do the right thing for this country and for individual constituencies, but there will have to be tough decisions in the months ahead.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Leader of the House will know that, as a consequence of the House's rightful discussion of Her Majesty's reign yesterday, Welsh questions have been deferred until next Wednesday and Northern Ireland questions have been deferred until after the conference recess. Given the live prospect either that the Northern Ireland Assembly will today vote to adjourn, or that all my colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive will resign from their ministerial posts, what consideration has he given to allowing the House an opportunity to hear from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland either this week or next?

Chris Grayling: This is a matter of the utmost seriousness, and it is one of great concern to the Government. Indeed, I had discussions with ministerial colleagues about the matter this morning. I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that the Secretary of State will return to the House before the conference recess to provide an update on development in Northern Ireland, so there will be that opportunity for scrutiny.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): May I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) in calling for a debate on the Government's programme of court closures? As the Leader of the House said, it is right that we get value for money for

the taxpayer in our justice system, but it is also right that these decisions are based on facts. The consultation claims that Burton court, which is threatened with closure, is a four-room court, but in fact it has three rooms. Today I have heard that in order to work out the court's usage, the consultation used a period when it was closed because the cells were being refurbished. That is simply not good enough. May we please have a debate so that we can get the facts right?

Chris Grayling: I am sure that my hon. Friends in the Ministry of Justice will have noted my hon. Friend's comments. I refer him to what the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee said a moment ago about seeking subjects for debate in the coming days. If my hon. Friend feels strongly about these matters, there is an opportunity to bring them to the House's attention through that route.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Following previous comments, would it not be appropriate to have a statement, preferably as soon as possible, on how the Government can possibly justify trying to reduce the number of Members of the elected House of Commons by at least 50 while increasing the number of Members of the House of Lords, which is totally unelected, to 825? Is that the Tory conception of modern democracy? Talk about back to the future!

Chris Grayling: I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that the coalition Government brought forward plans for House of Lords reform in the previous Parliament, but they could not proceed because the Labour party obstructed the programme motion. If he wants to know why the House of Lords was not reformed, he should look to his own party.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be concerned to hear that the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital is no longer offering to my constituents in Plymouth breast reconstructions following cancer treatment, despite the treatment offered there being far superior to that which is offered at Derriford hospital. May we have a debate on the postcode lottery for breast reconstruction in the south-west?

Chris Grayling: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. There are often differences in services as a result of local decision making, but in my years as a Member of Parliament I have always found that people want decisions to be taken by local doctors and by those who work in the local health service, rather than by Whitehall, and that is what we delivered through our reforms. I suggest that he bring the matter to Health questions, which will be in the first week back after the conference recess. There will also be an opportunity to debate health matters next Monday, as I explained earlier.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Dewsbury hospital has recently introduced parking charges for blue badge holders and is hoping to recoup £98,000. Simultaneously, the same trust has spent about £12 million on external management consultants Ernst and Young in the past few years—one might question whether it has its priorities right. Will the Leader of the House agree to consider holding a debate on hospital parking charges?

Chris Grayling: I know that hospital parking charges are a concern for many Members across the House. Of course, it is a difficult balance for trusts to strike, because the money raised normally goes into patient care, although I understand the point the hon. Lady makes. There will be an opportunity to debate health service matters on Monday, and there will be Health questions in the first week after the conference recess. I encourage her to raise the issue with my colleagues in the Department of Health, who I am sure will have heard what she has said.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): The A55 expressway in north Wales is an important part of the UK's road network, linking the M56 in Cheshire to the port of Holyhead. Previous Conservative Governments have a proud record of constructing this road, which is used regularly by thousands of my constituents. However, it is increasingly congested, subject to increasing numbers of accidents, and has poor linkages to the urban coastal strip of my constituency. Unlike rail infrastructure, trunk roads are now a devolved matter in Wales. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate to discuss how very necessary improvements to the A55 and its linkages might be brought about?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He highlights one of the frustrations that many representatives from north Wales feel about the fact that the Labour Administration in Cardiff neither understands north Wales nor pays very much attention to it. Only Conservatives in north Wales, fortunately in much larger numbers than in the past, really beat the drum for that important part of this country and make the case for proper improvements there. I hope that his comments will have been noted on both sides of the border. I encourage him to bring forward an Adjournment debate so that we continue to put pressure on the Labour party, which, where it is actually in office, proves pretty ineffective at it.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House make a statement on companies using number plate recognition technology and access to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency information that are levying excessive charges for short periods of overstaying in car parks? One of my constituents faces a £100 charge for leaving one about 10 minutes later than she should have done. Legal advisers to Citizens Advice Scotland suggest that this is contrary to Scots law, but that does not stop parking companies undermining the credit rating of vehicle owners. Is it not time that the industry was forced on to a sustainable legal footing instead of being allowed to behave like a modern-day Dick Turpin? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady raises a concern that, as we can hear, is clearly shared across this House. Of course it is right and proper that people should have some degree of control over the land they operate and be able to penalise those who abuse their rights to park there, but there are cowboys who grossly abuse this. I will make sure that her comments are drawn to the attention of the Department for Transport. I am absolutely with her in saying that this matter should be treated

properly and effectively. I am sure my colleagues will look at ways of making sure that we can stamp on the cowboys.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Despite suffering from Crohn's disease since he was 18, my constituent Andy Powell has not only successfully completed a degree in engineering but spent the summer raising money for the team at King's College London who are researching to find a cure for this condition. Might we find time for a debate on research into Crohn's disease, which has such a negative impact on many people's quality of life?

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend's constituent. One of the great things about this country is that we hear stories of people who not only overcome adversity but use the circumstances in which they find themselves to positive effect. Clearly, his constituent is a fine example of that. He has already put this matter on the record, but I encourage him to use the opportunities available in this House through the Adjournment debate system and the Backbench Business Committee to make his point. It is a dreadful disease for which we all want to see improved treatments and cures. I really commend his constituent for what he is doing.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): When will the Leader of the House allow us to have a debate on that vital area of our life, manufacturing and manufacturing productivity? Does he think it is enough that only 10% of people in this country make anything any longer, and does he agree with the way in which we are treating further education colleges, where most of our technicians and skilled people are trained? Is this good enough when business, industry and manufacturing desperately need highly trained people to crack the productivity challenge?

Chris Grayling: The Government take this issue very seriously. We have worked on a number of different ways to seek to boost manufacturing, whether it is protection of the science budget, investment in the regional growth fund, or investment in apprenticeships. We now have some great success stories in this country. Our automotive industry, in particular, has been a tremendous success in recent years. To make, I am afraid, a party political point, I remind Labour Members that while it is popular wisdom, often repeated by many of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, that the manufacturing base of this country declined sharply in the years of Conservative government, the actual truth is that when the Conservative party was in government in the 1980s manufacturing as a share of our economy fell slightly, but under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown it almost halved.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): The approach to the Dartford crossing on the M25 has become Britain's worst stretch of motorway. The free-flow system introduced earlier this year has clearly failed to live up to expectations, leading to horrendous traffic jams in the area. May we have a debate on the issue and how the residents of Dartford are left at the mercy of any incident that takes place at the Dartford crossing?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the knock-on effect on my hon. Friend's constituents. It is frustrating that the free-flow has not worked better sooner, because it should be a dramatic improvement on what was there before and it is disappointing that that has not yet happened. The Highways Agency understands the problem, but it needs to get its skates on and deliver a better set-up, because we cannot leave both that important part of the M25 and the residents of Dartford in a position where things are not yet at their best.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of the magnitude of the current refugee crisis, people will be making it clear this weekend that they want to provide a warm welcome for refugees, with rallies and vigils, including in my constituency of York Central. Will the Government make time for a weekly update and Question Time on the current crisis and continue to review the figures as part of that?

Chris Grayling: Of course, we will continue to update the House as we play our part in dealing with the issue, and as a nation we will provide a warm welcome to the 20,000 people we have said we will take from the camps. We will also continue—this is equally, and possibly more, important—to put nearly £1 billion a year into the camps themselves. The most vulnerable people are in those camps. They have not been able to make their way to Europe. They are the people who are most in need of help and they are the people on whom we are focusing our support.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Many areas of the country are enjoying the benefits of local TV services delivered over free-to-air digital terrestrial television and funded in part by the BBC TV licence. Due to technical issues, Leicester and Leicestershire were unable to bid for a local TV licence, so they are at a considerable disadvantage compared with our neighbours in Nottinghamshire, who have a thriving local TV channel. May we have a Government statement on what support can be given to help deliver a Leicestershire television station, perhaps by another method of communication?

Chris Grayling: I understand the disappointment in Leicestershire, and as always my hon. Friend makes an important point on behalf of the county he represents. I will make sure his concerns are drawn to the attention of my colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and I wish him all the best in his endeavours. I am absolutely certain that, with him championing the cause of a Leicestershire TV station, its launch date can be only a short while away.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Over the summer the Government announced, without consultation, 27 blocks of land, including in my own constituency, on which fracking companies can begin exploratory drilling. Given that the Government have granted communities the right to oppose onshore wind farms, can we have an urgent debate on the Government's energy policy and the rights of our constituents to oppose and have a say over what happens in their own backyard?

Chris Grayling: There is local decision making about planning applications for fracking, but, given that we have to provide future energy to warm our houses,

particularly those of elderly people, it is in the strategic interests of this country to have good, effective sources of energy. In this Government's view, fracking is an important resource and we should take advantage of it. It is not a new technique. It has existed in the oil and gas industry for many years. We are strongly of the view that it is an essential part of our future energy strategy. The hon. Lady will have a chance to raise those issues with the Secretary of State in Energy questions next Thursday, but this country must have a smart approach to ensuring that we have sources of energy for the future, and this is one of them.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that there is a popular misconception held by normal people outside this place that Members of Parliament on opposing sides cannot stand one another and barely share a civil word. By my estimation that is something that usually happens within political parties and it may be just about to get worse. Were it not for the conviviality between the parties, the normal channels that make the business of this House run smoothly could collapse or be damaged. Does the Leader of the House know of anything—perhaps something happening somewhere in London this weekend—that might put a spoke in the usual channels and prevent them from working smoothly?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend draws attention to a phenomenon that all Government Members have noticed this week not just through the usual channels, but across the whole Labour party. It is almost as though all Labour Members are like the characters—do you remember them, Mr Speaker, from our childhood days when we all read comic books?—who have little dark clouds above them and rain landing on their heads. I am not quite sure why, but perhaps something is going to happen that they are not very happy about. They certainly all seem pretty miserable, and I wish there was something we could do to cheer them up.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I commend and thank Business, Innovation and Skills Ministers for standing firm, despite the expected usual lobbying by the large pub companies and their trade association, and for making it clear that the statutory code for pubs, including the market rent only option, goes through. May we have a statement from a BIS Minister to lay out the timetable, because the code must be in place by May 2016?

Chris Grayling: I commend the hon. Gentleman on his work on this matter, on which he is an assiduous campaigner. There will be BIS questions next week, so I suggest he asks either a listed or a topical question to get Ministers to set out the timetable. I will make sure that they are aware of his interest in the matter.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It is generally accepted that for good government it is necessary to have an effective opposition. All political parties go through leadership traumas from time to time—there is no shame in that—but would it not be a good idea to give the Opposition a debate on the first day back in October? All the new shadow Cabinet members could come to the House to outline their thoughts about the policies they wish to pursue in a debate entitled, "Her Majesty's

Opposition: an alternative programme for government”, and we can find out what the terms of trade will be over the lifetime of the next parliamentary Session.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but I am afraid that his idea has one big drawback. I am not certain that on the first day back there will be any Labour Members actually willing to serve in the shadow Cabinet, so I do not think it is an option.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Earlier, the Leader of the House said that he is on the side of working people, so let us test him. Rail fares have gone up by about 25% over the past five years, while wages have gone up by only 9%. Virgin has cancelled its pensioner users card. What is he going to do about that? May we have either an emergency statement or a debate on it?

Chris Grayling: Through the plans we put in our manifesto and what we have done since, we have put limits on fare rises. The truth is that we as a party in government have had to make some difficult decisions, which arose only because of the massive deficit we inherited in 2010. I regret those difficult decisions. We have tried to find the best possible balance, but they were necessary.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): May I add my name to the requests already made during business questions by the hon. Members for Bath (Ben Howlett) and for Burton (Andrew Griffiths)? Some 23% of magistrates courtrooms are earmarked for closure, including Hartlepool magistrates court. With the single brief exception of Justice questions on Tuesday, the House has not had an opportunity to raise this matter, and the consultation period will close before the House returns in October. The Leader of the House, a former Justice Secretary, knows how many times this has been raised. Will he arrange an urgent debate so that we can discuss how local justice is being lost for millions of people, including my constituents?

Chris Grayling: This matter has been raised by Members from both sides of the House, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we still have such an opportunity next week. This could be debated on the Back-Bench business day on Thursday. We provide Back-Bench business days precisely to enable Members from both sides of the House to raise issues that are of concern to them. I encourage him to speak to the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee to put such an item on the agenda.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House ask the Prime Minister to come to the House next week to report back on his meetings this week with Prime Minister Netanyahu? When the Prime Minister does so, will he specifically address the questions he has asked Prime Minister Netanyahu and the responses he has received from him pursuant to recommendations 2 and 5 of the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution in June on the Gaza conflict? Both recommendations call for accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and for co-operation with the investigations of the International Criminal Court.

Chris Grayling: The Prime Minister will be here next week, as he is each week, for Prime Minister’s questions and Opposition Members will be able to raise that issue with him. All of us wish to see peace in the middle east and between Israel and Palestine. It is my view that the best strategy for this Government now and in the future is to be collaborative and constructive in discussions with both sides in order to play the best possible role in securing a peaceful future.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Many people across the country will have welcomed the announcement on Monday both about the additional refugees and about the decision on the air strike that the Prime Minister took over the summer. However, why can the Leader of the House not see that it was unacceptable to conflate those issues in a double-headed statement, particularly given that one was an issue of national security which, although it may be supported, should rightly be scrutinised by this House? Will he ensure that the Prime Minister and other members of the Government do not do that again?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid that I just do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Prime Minister making a statement for an hour on one subject and then making a statement for an hour on another is little different from the Prime Minister making a lengthy statement on matters of current interest and taking questions for two hours afterwards. I believe that it was right and proper for the Prime Minister to make himself available for such an extended length of time. We should be glad that we have a Prime Minister who is willing to do that.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I have been told in the short time that I have been here that repetition is not a vice, so it will come as no surprise to the Leader of the House that I am asking for a Government statement or a debate in Government time on the delays and conduct of the Chilcot inquiry. May I impress upon him the anger of military families such as that of my constituent Mrs Rose Gentle, whose son Gordon was killed in Iraq? Chilcot’s recent public response to those who are looking for a timetable could politely be described as intemperate, but is perhaps better defined as bullying and threatening behaviour. Will the Government make a statement on those recent comments?

Chris Grayling: It would not be appropriate for us to start commenting on the comments of independent advisers. However, like the hon. Gentleman, I have put it on the record that I want to see the report published as soon as possible, and neither of us has changed our view. That view is shared across the Government. I absolutely understand the frustration of the families involved, and they have my every sympathy and concern, given what they have gone through. All of us on both sides of the House are simply saying that we want the report to be published as quickly as possible. I am absolutely sure that Sir John Chilcot has received that message.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): I recently met Mark Foxley and Lorenzo O’Reilly from Rochdale town centre, who raised concerns about the lack of police in the town centre and the increase in shoplifting. That is obviously due to the loss of 1,500 police officers. I am

[Simon Danczuk]

concerned that the replacement of the police allocation formula will make matters even worse. May we have a debate on what effect the changes to the formula will have in Greater Manchester?

Chris Grayling: I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are raised with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Home Office questions are on the Monday we get back after the October recess and I am sure he will raise the issue then. I simply make two points to him. Since 2010, we have seen a stable reduction in crime levels, which is a good thing. Yes, we have had to take tough decisions about the budgets that are available to our police forces, but they have risen to the challenge effectively. Crime has fallen, notwithstanding the financial challenges that they have faced. We are seeing greater collaboration between forces, greater efficiencies and a greater use of technology. That has to be the way to ensure that we have good policing in the future, notwithstanding the financial constraints.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): During the summer recess, I received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), regarding the case of Raif Badawi. Following my call, he had asked the Saudi Arabian Government whether they would permit a visit from an international non-governmental organisation to his prison cell. I have heard nothing further from the Government since then. May we have a statement from the Government on what progress has been made on that visit request and on the wider context of the effort to free Mr Badawi from prison?

Chris Grayling: I recall the hon. Gentleman raising that issue before. It is obviously a matter of international concern. We all want improvements to human rights and the judicial systems in countries that still face accusations over human rights issues. I will refer his comments to my colleagues in the Foreign Office and ask them to reply to him with an update.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Next month, my hometown of Blaenavon in my constituency will host the UK UNESCO world heritage youth summit. Will the Leader of the House congratulate Blaenavon on that, and find time for a debate in this House on how best we can build on our use of all the wonderful world heritage sites across the UK?

Chris Grayling: I offer my congratulations to everyone in Blaenavon, both for hosting that event and for the other work they do. I commend the hon. Gentleman for raising this important issue. We are blessed in this country. We have a significant number of sites of international importance. That is a boon in bringing

people to this country from elsewhere in the world, and for the people of this country in enjoying a rich cultural heritage. It is a heritage we should always seek to protect and look after.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Later today, the House will debate the sustainable development goals ahead of the global summit to adopt the goals in New York later this month. Will the Prime Minister make a statement on his attendance at that summit when we return from recess? Will the Prime Minister also be able to tell us whether he attended the global leaders' meeting on gender equality and women's empowerment, which is taking place in New York at the same time?

Chris Grayling: I will certainly make sure the Prime Minister is aware of those questions. The Prime Minister is here every week, so the hon. Gentleman will be able to raise that issue. He talks about the sustainable development goals. What has come across loud and clear in the past few days, with the difficulties that have been highlighted in the middle east, is that we have done the right thing in making sure we are providing our committed share of our national income towards providing aid. When we look at the refugee camps around Syria, we can see why that is so important and the aid is so valuable. If we were not there—and one or two countries are not there in the volume that we are—those people would be in a much more difficult position. That is why it is the right thing to do.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I have discovered, via a parliamentary question, that the Department for Work and Pensions claims it does not collect information on the number of applicants for personal independence payments who are also students diagnosed with cancer. May we have a debate on this? We do not know the scale and that means we do not know how many young people are being forced to cope simultaneously with cancer and penury as a direct result of Government policy. Surely that cannot be right.

Chris Grayling: The purpose of the personal independence payment, and its predecessor the disability living allowance, is to provide support to pay for some of the extra costs people with disabilities face in living their daily lives. Support for those people who are suffering from cancer is provided through the employment and support allowance system. The purpose of the PIP is to support disability. Cancer is a dreadful disease. Students and young people with cancer are a matter of particular distress and concern, but I think the hon. Gentleman will find they are separate issues.

Steve McCabe: That's not what your Department says.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful for the hon. Gentleman's sedentary chunter.

Backbench Business

Immigration Detention

11.28 am

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House supports the recommendations of the report of the Joint Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration, *The Use of Immigration Detention in the United Kingdom*; has considered the case for reform of immigration detention; and calls on the Government to respond positively to those recommendations.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for responding so positively to the request from myself and the hon. Members for Bedford (Richard Fuller) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) that we have this debate. In a week in which so much parliamentary time has rightly been devoted to our role in supporting refugees outside this country, today is a timely opportunity for us to consider how we treat those who are already on our shores.

The focus of the debate is the joint report of the all-party group on migration, which I chair, and the all-party group on refugees, which was chaired at the time we commissioned the report by the then hon. Member for Brent Central, Sarah Teather. I pay tribute both to her leadership of our inquiry and her determined work on these issues over many years.

Our eight-month inquiry was undertaken by a cross-party panel of parliamentarians from both Houses, many of whom had enormous experience of the issues, including a retired Law Lord, a former chief inspector of prisons and a former Conservative Cabinet Minister from the last Government. I pay tribute to their contributions. It took place following several high-profile incidents within immigration removal centres, including deaths and allegations of sexual assault, and amid plans to increase the size of the detention estate by expanding Campsfield House immigration removal centre in Oxfordshire.

The problems have been well documented, but Parliament has never taken a systematic and comprehensive look at how we use detention, so we thought there was a need for that wider piece of work. We held three oral evidence sessions and received nearly 200 written submissions, and I pay tribute to all those who submitted evidence, particularly those who shared their often painful and harrowing experiences as detainees themselves. I am delighted that some are in the Gallery today. At our first oral evidence session, we heard from non-governmental organisations and medical experts but most powerfully from three men in detention centres at that time. We questioned them about their experiences via a phone link.

In her forward to the report, the former Member for Brent Central describes a moment in the Committee Room during that session when everybody gasped. We were talking via the phone link with a young man from a disputed territory on the Cameroon-Nigeria border. He told us he had been trafficked to Hungary as a 16-year-old, where he was beaten, raped and tortured. He had managed to escape and eventually made his way to Heathrow using a false passport. It was discovered on his arrival, and he was detained. We then asked him how long he had been detained, and his answer was

three years—three years in what is supposed to be an immigration removal centre. His detention conflicts with the stated aims of the Home Office: that those who have been trafficked should not be detained; that those who have been tortured should not be detained; and that detention should be for the shortest possible period. But he is just one of the thousands of people this country detains each year.

As the use of detention has expanded rapidly over the last two decades, so has the size of the estate. In 1993, there were just 250 detention places; by 2009, that had risen to 2,665; at the beginning of this year, it was 3,915. The number of people entering detention in the year to June 2015 was just over 32,000—up 10% on the previous year. By contrast, in 2013, Sweden, despite receiving three times the number of asylum applications we do, detained just 2,893, and Germany detained just over 4,300. The Home Office policy states clearly that detention must be used sparingly.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend and the all-party group on their report. Back in 2007, the Joint Committee on Human Rights in this House, in a rather briefer report, looked at limiting detention, as does his report, to 28 days. Given what is happening in other countries, does he share my intense disappointment that the numbers have so escalated since then?

Paul Blomfield: I do indeed. It underlines the urgency of today's debate and the need to address the issue. Nobody, especially not the Government, wants to see the immigration detention estate expanding, but without a shift in policy along the lines recommended in the report, it will be an inevitable, deeply distressing and disturbing reality.

The UK is alone in the EU in not having a maximum time limit on detention. That lack of a time limit was a constant theme in the evidence we received during our inquiry and one on which we received some striking testimony. Time and again we were told that detention was worse than prison, because in prison people know when they will get out. As one former detainee said:

“The uncertainty is hard to bear. Your life is in limbo. No one tells you anything about how long you will stay or if you are going to get deported.”

A team leader from the prisons inspectorate told us that the lack of a time limit also encourages poor working.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Like others, I commend the hon. Gentleman for his work, and I am grateful to him for his comments about my former colleague Sarah Teather, who did tremendous work in this area in her time here. On the lack of a time limit, does he think that inadequate access to legal representation is one of the reasons why people end up in open-ended detention in that way? The briefing supplied to us today by Bail for Immigration Detainees points out that 11% of those detained have never had any legal representation at all.

Paul Blomfield: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention and I very much agree with him. That was a feature of the evidence we received. Addressing that issue is important to ensure justice and speed in processing applications, which is in the interests of everybody.

[Paul Blomfield]

I mentioned poor working in the consideration of cases, and the representation we heard from the prisons inspectorate suggested that, in one quarter of the cases it had looked at, prolonged detention was the result of inefficient case working. Therefore, having a time limit is not simply about justice and humanity; it is about ensuring a focus in the system and changing the culture. Medical experts also told us that the sense of being in limbo—the sense of hopelessness and despair—leads to deteriorating mental health. One expert from the Helen Bamber Foundation told us that those detained for more than 30 days had significantly higher mental health problems.

Although they are called immigration removal centres, we found that most people who leave detention do so for reasons other than being removed from the UK. That is an important point. According to the latest immigration statistics, more than half the detainees released are released back into the country, so this is not just about the impact on those detained; it is also about cost and the good use of public money. It costs some £36,000 a year to detain somebody for 12 months, so a huge amount of taxpayers' money is being spent on detaining people who we will eventually release into the UK anyway.

Our central recommendation is for a maximum time limit set in statute, not simply to right the wrong of indefinite definition, but to change the culture endemic in the system. We settled on 28 days, not only because it reflects best practice from other countries, but because it is workable for the Home Office, given that in the first three quarters of 2014 only 37% of people were detained for longer. It also reflects the evidence of the mental health impact on those detained for more than a month. We also recommended that decisions to detain should meet the aims of the Home Office's own guidance—that is, taken more sparingly and only genuinely as a last resort to effect removal. Deprivation of liberty should not be a decision taken lightly, nor should it be taken arbitrarily. Currently, decisions are taken by relatively junior Home Office officials, with no automatic judicial oversight. With no time limit, it has become too easy for people to be detained for months on end, with no meaningful way of challenging their continued detention.

The introduction of a time limit and the reduction in the reliance on detention would represent a significant change. In order to detain fewer people for shorter periods, the Government will need to introduce a much wider range of community-based alternatives. In our report, we give a number of examples of those alternatives, from places as different as the United States and Australia, which is often cited as an example because of its tough immigration system, as well as Sweden, which we visited in the course of the inquiry. These alternatives allow people to remain in communities while their cases are resolved, including when making arrangements to leave the country. These alternatives are not only more humane, but cost less and have a higher compliance level.

There is a UK precedent. When the coalition Government committed to reducing the number of children detained, they introduced a family returns process, which the House of Commons Library described as designed

“to encourage refused families to comply with instructions to depart from the UK at an earlier stage, such as by giving them more control over the circumstances of their departure.”

It worked. There has been a dramatic fall in the number of children detained, and the Home Office's own evaluation of the scheme found that most families complied with the process—with no increase in absconding.

There are a number of other recommendations in the report; others will refer to them, but let me briefly cover them. We recommend that pregnant women and victims of rape and sexual violence should never be detained, and that the shocking harassment and abuse experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender detainees must be addressed.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend on securing this very important debate. Will he join me in putting on the record his thanks for the work done by Women for Refugee Women to uncover some of these problems in Yarl's Wood—often against blanket denials from the Home Office that these problems are happening?

Paul Blomfield: I will indeed, and I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I understand that some of the representatives are here today, which is welcome. I hope to meet them after the debate.

We echo the call of the chief inspector of prisons to allow detainees more freedom when it comes to internet access, which was needlessly denied in many cases. We hope that the Shaw review will look at our concerns about the treatment of individuals with mental health problems and of vulnerable detainees for whom detention is clearly not suitable.

Our central recommendation, as I say, is for a statutory limit on detention—not simply because it is more just and more humane, but because it would be less expensive and more effective in securing compliance. Moreover, this unanimous recommendation stands in line with the practice of the majority of countries with which we would compare ourselves, and with the views of most experts in this country who have looked at the issue. We hope that the House will agree that the Government should positively consider our report and take up our recommendations.

11.42 am

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): As one of the Members who applied for this debate, I welcome the cross-party call for action: the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller), and SNP Members, too, were involved in securing the debate. Colleagues across the House are concerned about this issue. In this first substantive debate on it, they are calling for a comprehensive investigation, not least on the basis of the report recommendations.

Today is the fourth day in succession when the broad subject of immigration has been debated in the House. Sixty years ago, Winston Churchill complained to Ian Gilmour about immigration, saying:

“I think it is the most important subject facing this country, but I cannot get any of my Ministers to take any notice.”

Today and this week—thanks to the Backbench Business Committee, hon. Members and campaign groups such

as Citizens UK, which have been out there across the country over months and years wanting immigration detention to get noticed—Ministers are not struggling to take notice of the issue.

The reality is, however, that immigration detention does not get sufficient attention. The more than 30,000 people held in 11 immigration removal centres last year were largely unnoticed—out of sight, and largely out of mind. These people were locked up without having any clear idea of when they would be released or removed. The issue occasionally gets headlines—on Channel 4 documentaries, for example. Last year, my constituent Yashika Bageerathi, aged 18 and in the middle of her A-level studies, gained public and parliamentary attention when she was separated from her family, detained and eventually deported. Yashika brought to the attention of all of us the individual humanity of the issue, which recent debates have also highlighted; she humanised the plight of thousands of detainees each year and reminded us of the issue that has run through previous debates about the refugee crisis, not least this week and in the past week or so, and will run through this one—our core value of human dignity.

We need to take serious action because many detainees do not know when they are going to be released. The following statistics were published in August: 430 people have been detained for more than six months; and 137 have been detained for more than a year. Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons found that in The Verne nearly 40 people had been detained for more than a year and one had been detained for more than five years. Souleymane, a former detainee, told the inquiry that

“in prison, you count your days down, but in detention you count your days up.”

As a criminal defence solicitor, I know that the first thing a prisoner will always ask me is, “When is the earliest date of release?” They will be able to get that answer, but most detainees in IRCs do not know the earliest or latest date of release. Let us not forget that most of those detained in IRCs have not been convicted of any crime. I say “IRC” because it is hard to say immigration removal centres, as for far too many the word “removal” is a misnomer. Half of all people who leave the centres are released back into the community rather than being removed.

There is also clear evidence to show that some detainees are treated worse than prisoners who have been convicted of very serious offences. In the past four years the High Court has on six occasions found against the Home Office for causing inhuman or degrading treatment to some of the most vulnerable of people—mentally disordered detainees in long-term detention. In the case of BA, the High Court described “callous indifference” and

“a deplorable failure...to recognise the nature and extent of BA's illness”.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned that the Home Office has been found guilty on six occasions of inhuman and degrading treatment of people detained in our immigration centres. Is he aware of how often the Home Office has been found guilty of such offences in the rest of the criminal justice system? Would he be interested to hear the Minister give an answer on that?

Mr Burrowes: That is a good question, and the Minister will have time to find that answer—I hope it will miraculously come to him. My experience is that although there have been challenges on articles 3 grounds, I have not heard of that many findings in recent years. Progress has been made, not least in dealing with mentally ill prisoners, although the situation is not ideal and there is certainly room for improvement.

As the hon. Member for Sheffield Central said, many of these vulnerable people have faced a history of torture, trauma and persecution, only then to find themselves further abused in detention. As we found when we visited the IRCs, there has been improvement in recent years. There has been a change of management and they are doing their best, within the physical structures they are operating in, to improve both conditions and staffing. I note that, and recognise that there has been a response to these judgments and that improvements have been made. What we found on our visits to the IRCs—the Minister has a lot of experience in the justice field, so he will know this, too—is that they are, in essence, prisons with some soft furnishings and some plants. They have now put in more plants and a few more soft furnishings, but structurally and fundamentally that is what we are talking about. We recognise that we do not have a blank piece of paper, but it cannot be right that so many immigrants are detained for so long in prison-like conditions for administrative reasons.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Is one difficulty facing detainees not that because detention centres are in isolated positions they find it hard to get legal representation, as solicitors find it difficult to visit places such as Dungavel regularly?

Mr Burrowes: There is a contrast to be drawn with the position of prisoners, certainly those on remand, who have good access to legal representation and always have privileges in relation to visits. Their situation is not wholly comparable with that faced by detainees, particularly in terms of proximity. There is legal access, particularly for those who are in longer-term detention, but the point is well made. It is important to compare the rights of detainees with those of others, not least convicted prisoners.

We must be there for those who do not always make the headlines, such as the constituent whom I mentioned—people who may well be convicted detainees. As we remember Magna Carta and seek to ensure that everyone is equal before the law, we need to demonstrate that we are thinking carefully about people's individual circumstances and the need for all of them to be treated with dignity, whatever their backgrounds.

What is the point of all this? The public may assume that the length of time spent in detention is linked to removal from the United Kingdom, but the opposite is the case. According to the statistics, the longer someone is detained, the less likely it is that his or her detention will end in removal. The Home Office may argue—and, indeed, the argument has been advanced—that the length of detention is linked to the legal processes, such as appeals, that are undertaken on behalf of detainees, and to difficulties related to identification. It is suggested that there may be difficulties with other countries when

[Mr Burrowes]

efforts are made to obtain the appropriate travel documents and ID. However, as the report states, a team leader from the prisons inspectorate told the inquiry that

“a quarter of the cases of prolonged detention that they looked at were a result of inefficient case-working.”

We need to drill down into that case working, and aim to improve it. The recommendations recognise the complexity of the issue. It is easy to make the headlines, and it is easy to adopt a position, but we need to look carefully at this, and one of the report's key recommendations is for the establishment of a working group with an independent chair.

The Home Office—indeed, the Minister—told the inquiry that a key purpose of detention was to maintain effective immigration control, but evidence for that is lacking, especially when we make comparisons with other countries, which is what we sought to do during our inquiry. Some of us had an opportunity to visit Sweden, for instance. We found that there were many differences between countries when it came to the way in which immigration was dealt with.

Australia is not particularly known for its liberal immigration policy, but after it introduced case management-based alternatives to detention, the programme had a 93% compliance rate, and 60% of those who were eligible for deportation returned voluntarily. It is important not just to look at the issue of limitation of time in detention, but to look, positively and proactively, at the issue of case management. In Sweden, there was a 76% rate of voluntary return, as opposed to 46% in the United Kingdom.

We need to consider affordability, about which the Government are very concerned. At a cost of £164 million, immigration detention is not sustainable or affordable. According to independent research by Matrix Evidence, £76 million a year is wasted on the long-term detention of migrants who are subsequently released, and, between 2011 and 2013, £10 million was spent on compensation for unlawful detention. That is why, like the rest of the European Union, we are calling for a time limit.

We need to firm up the Home Office guidance which states that detention should be used sparingly, and for the shortest possible time. We need to ensure that that really does bite. We are therefore calling for a 28-day limit, which should be a genuine last resort rather than an administrative default position, to ensure that those who have no right to remain here are quickly removed.

I believe that the country can do this. We have done it as a Government. The coalition Government managed to remove as many instances of child detention as possible, and we should take the next step. Yes, we may have a debate about controlling our borders, but we should do more. Whether people come here by fair means or foul, we should treat them with dignity to ensure that we genuinely reform the system of immigration detention.

Finally, let me return to Churchill. He famously said in relation to prisoners, but we can say it in relation to immigrants,

“The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of”

—here I would say “immigrants”—

“is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country.”

I believe we can meet that test.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I do not want to enforce a time limit, but given that 26 Members wish to speak, I advise them to speak for up to six minutes, including interventions. Then everyone will have the same amount of time. We just have to look after each other.

11.54 am

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I, too, welcome and enthusiastically back the call for this House to support the recommendations in the report on the use of immigration detention in the UK. I congratulate the hon. Members who have secured the debate, as well as the hon. Members and support teams from the two all-party groups involved in the preparation of the report, and, indeed, all who provided the compelling evidence on which the report is based. It is a thorough and comprehensive report and we welcome, as the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) said, the holistic approach taken to the issue, looking at the detention system as a whole.

I pay tribute lastly, but very importantly, to the many individuals and organisations who have contacted MPs in advance of this debate. I have some not so fond recollections as an immigration solicitor of taking that long and winding road into the middle of nowhere to get to Dungavel immigration removal centre; as the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) remarked, it would be very easy for the people detained there and in other removal centres to fall out of our minds. The fact that they do not do so and that there are still so many people fighting on their behalf and taking up their cause is a great source of optimism and one of the key reasons why we are here debating the issue today. That scale of interest almost certainly also reflects how badly the Government—indeed successive Governments—have got policy wrong in this area.

People see a straightforward injustice. They know that detention is a harmful and sometimes catastrophic experience for individuals; they see so many going through the awful experience of detention not for breaking the criminal law, but for the sake of the Home Office's administrative convenience; and they know that is wrong. The existing legal framework requires serious reform, not simply some tinkering around the edges. It is vital that the Government not only acknowledge that fact, but implement the inquiry's recommendations.

Why is the current system so completely unacceptable? In short, the evidence shows that it detains too many people; it detains them for too long; it detains people who should never be detained for any period of time and too often detains them in very poor and utterly inappropriate prison-like conditions; and it is a costly and inefficient system. It is worth expanding briefly on a couple of those points.

The UK's immigration estate is one of the largest in Europe; it is hugely bloated, with places for up to almost 3,400 people. In 2013, the UK detained

30,418 different people, compared with 4,309 in Germany, which incidentally received over four times as many asylum applications as the UK. We detain significantly more people than any other EU country. Detention in the UK has become so regular that it can be fairly described as a matter of routine—far away from a policy that is used “sparingly” as Home Office guidance suggests, never mind a policy of last resort. People are too often detained for lengthy periods. The hon. Member for Sheffield Central recalled the evidence to the inquiry of a gentleman who had been in detention for three whole years.

The UK is also too often guilty of locking up vulnerable people. As the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate remarked, in four years the UK has been found to have breached the article 3 convention rights of mentally ill individuals. A detention centre is not the appropriate place for these vulnerable people. That was why the long overdue decision was made that children should not be locked up in such circumstances. Many more vulnerable people are still being detained and should not be.

If the dreadful human costs of such practices do not convince the Government, perhaps the financial costs will justify change, because the policy is expensive. In 2013-14 the cost of running the immigration detention estate was £164 million and the cost of detaining one person for one year was £36,000.

What is required? I fully support the ideas proposed in the report and I will briefly mention some of what I regard as the key proposals. One of the problems of the system that was highlighted in the inquiry by the all-party parliamentary group is the lack of a time limit on detention. The lack of a time limit and of certainty is a huge cause of distress, as people have no idea for how long they will be detained. As we have heard, it also leads to lazy and sloppy operations by the Home Office.

We need automatic and regular reviews of whether people should be detained, as well as an effective presumption in favour of community-based alternatives to detention. We want an end to detention in prison-like conditions. I pay tribute to everyone who has contributed to bringing this report before the House, and we in the Scottish National party will wholeheartedly continue to support its implementation.

12 noon

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): In my first speech to the House as a Member of Parliament, I said that I wanted to be able to speak on behalf of those whose voices were small and might not be heard. In this debate, I want to speak up on behalf of the women who are detained at the Yarl’s Wood removal centre, which is on the outskirts of my constituency. Those women have to deal every day with a sense of despair, a sense of uncertainty about their future and, most crushingly, a sense of disbelief about all the encounters that they have, because from the point of view of the state they have no right to be here.

It was inspirational of Sarah Teather to set up this inquiry, and I am so grateful to her for the work that she put into it and for enabling me to be part of the review that we are debating today. In my view, it is also a great benefit to us that the Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) is responsible for immigration

issues, including detention. It is fair to say that he has inherited a mess when it comes to the use of detention. This goes all the way back to the 1970s, when the process of administrative detention was put in place. That led to a massive growth in the detention estate and introduced the principle of indefinite detention, and has led us to incarcerating children again. Those are the results of the way in which policy on the detention of people who have no right to be here has evolved over the past 30 or 40 years, and it is entirely correct that Parliament, ahead of any Home Office review, should express a demand for change by the Government.

We know that the current system is a mess not only because the Home Office is undertaking a review of the extension of the detention estate but because it has set up the Shaw review of the healthcare and wellbeing of people in the detention system. One of the administrators of the system, Serco, is carrying out its own review under Kate Lampard into the role of immigration detention and the quality of the services provided to the people in Yarl’s Wood. Her Majesty’s inspector of prisons has said that Yarl’s Wood is a place of “national concern” and the independent monitoring board of the detention estate has expressed concern not just about the practice of immigration detention but about the policy, which is the direct responsibility of this Government.

It is almost beyond question that the current process of immigration detention is costly, ineffective and too often unjust for too many of the people involved. How on earth can I justify to my taxpayers the expenditure of £100 a night to incarcerate someone in a prison, only then to put them back where they came from in the first place? How can the Minister defend a policy that results in 50% of the people who are put into detention centres being put straight back into the community rather than being removed? Why on earth will he not take the advice of the all-party parliamentary groups and look into the proposed alternative case management systems, which would offer a lower-cost solution for the taxpayer?

Stella Creasy: The hon. Gentleman and I have shared a platform before to express our concerns about Yarl’s Wood. The fact that two thirds of the women in Yarl’s Wood are released back into the community demonstrates the futility of that place. Does he agree that it is time to move on and close it down?

Richard Fuller: Absolutely: it is time to close down Yarl’s Wood. I say that not just because it would be a satisfactory end to the policy, but because it would be an emblem, a sign, that this Minister has decided that it is time to call an end to the extensive use of immigration detention. Closing Yarl’s Wood is exactly what we should do.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Further to that point, the percentage of women returning to the community is even higher among pregnant women. In 2014, the independent inspection report recorded 99 pregnant women, of whom only nine were eventually deported. The rest returned to the community to pursue their claims, which shows that, aside from anything to do with the welfare of pregnant women, detention is not the best use of resources.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): One minute left.

Richard Fuller: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. Mr Deputy Speaker, you have given me one more minute, so I shall be brief.

We should not detain people who are the victims of torture and rape. It is so hard for someone in this country to prove that they have been raped. How easy would it be for someone from another country? Just because someone cannot prove that they were raped does not mean that it did not happen. We should not incarcerate women, particularly when they are overseen by male guards, if alternatives are available. It is very worrying when women in Yarl's Wood say that they do not feel safe. Women are absolutely right to call for an end to the detention of victims of torture and rape. Ninety nine pregnant women were detained in a year—it takes a lot to get the Home Office to admit that pregnant women are detained—which is two a week except over Christmas, when, perhaps for those pregnant women, there was no room at that particular inn to incarcerate them.

Most of all, this is not just about the plight of the women in Yarl's Wood and of others caught in the immigration detention system. It is not just about looking tough on immigration, because there is no inconsistency between being tough on immigration and having an effective policy. This is about the type of people we are. When it comes to Yarl's Wood, it is time for the Minister to close it down and set her free.

12.6 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this very important and timely debate. I rise to support the motion and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on securing the debate.

“We will enforce immigration rules humanely and effectively. We will end the indefinite detention of people in the asylum and immigration system, ending detention for pregnant women and those who have been the victims of sexual abuse or trafficking. And we will ensure Britain continues its proud history of providing refuge for those fleeing persecution by upholding our international obligations, including working with the UN to support vulnerable refugees from Syria”—

and from all over the world. I was proud to stand for re-election earlier this year on a Labour manifesto pledge to end indefinite detention for those in the asylum and immigration system. A joint report by the all-party parliamentary group on refugees and the all-party parliamentary group on migration, co-authored by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central, has not only many disturbing findings, but many encouraging and workable suggestions, too.

It seems that Home Office guidance on detention often leaves much to be desired. Although minimal use of detention is recommended, detention appears to be seen as an easy option for delaying resolutions. That is particularly cruel when we consider that the centres in which people are held were mostly built to be high-security prisons. People in need, people without homes, people who have come for our help in their darkest hours are being abused by a system that considers them statistics, not humans.

The lack of humanity is startling. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) has been trying since her election to visit the

immigration removal centre, Yarl's Wood. The Home Office has refused her applications. Unsurprisingly, it is ashamed of the regime there.

Staggeringly, in the past year, 13 children in Yarl's Wood have been classified as adults. Within the UK as a whole, the number has grown to an unbelievable 127 since 2010. This Government have been presiding over a system that incorrectly classifies children as adults, and leaves them within the adult population for months before allowing them to challenge that decision. Children who have been correctly classified are routinely removed from their parents and housed elsewhere. Research by Bail for Immigration Detainees has shown that in 75% of cases where that happens the parents are finally released, and detention has been nothing but an immense strain on the family and individuals.

While prison officers have been given information and training in identifying signs of extreme mental distress, those in removal centres rarely have the training or support to do so. The British Medical Association recommends such training as vital. Healthcare is not a luxury for these people; it is a right. Specialist services must be as accessible to detainees as they are to the general public. Across the board the transfer of healthcare service commissioning to NHS England has been welcomed, but that is not the end of the problem, and screening processes have not yet been fully put in place.

A report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons from 2012 noted that nearly 20% of the people it interviewed had spent more than six months waiting without making a bail application. Poor legal advice and understanding of the system was considered to be the most likely reason for that. Bail for Immigration Detainees found that only half of detainees had a legal representative. The system we have fails those whom it is meant to serve. Liberty estimates that 45%—3,483 people—of those held on British immigration estates are asylum seekers, not economic migrants. Those human beings have fled for their lives with nothing but the clothes on their backs; they have come through the storm. Humanity must dictate our behaviour, and detention must be only a last resort, not an easy solution.

12.12 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I am conscious that a number of hon. Members wish to contribute to this debate, so I will keep my remarks brief. I congratulate the all-party groups on migration and on refugees on securing this debate, and on taking the time to compile their report.

My constituents in Crawley are concerned about high levels of immigration, but they are also compassionate about vulnerable people who come to this country seeking asylum and refuge. As Members across the House will be aware, the issue has been particularly highlighted over the summer with the Syrian refugee crisis, and people have expressed concern about people entering this country, but also compassion for the welfare and well-being of the victims of dictators, traffickers and terrorist groups. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrows) is right to say that this week we have had a great opportunity to discuss aspects of those important matters.

I will confine my remaining remarks to immigration detention and removal centres in my constituency. We have Brook House and Tinsley House immigration

removal centres, and on the outskirts of my constituency is the Cedars pre-departure accommodation centre. Before I was elected to this place I was leader of West Sussex county council with a social care responsibility, and I remember visiting those immigration detention centres in the last decade and being shocked—at the time there was a backlog of more than 450,000 cases being dealt with in this country—at some of the conditions in those centres. I was particularly troubled when I came to the family block in those centres, and I pay tribute to the previous coalition Government for announcing in May 2010 that children would not be held in immigration detention centres, and for following through on that. The Cedars centre on the periphery of my constituency has done great work in co-ordination with Barnardo's and we now have the lowest ever number of children in immigration detention, which I welcome. I believe that in May this year that number stood at 12, down from a significant high of several hundred children being detained in 2009.

I welcome the Government's review of immigration detention that will be led by Stephen Shaw, the former head of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman for England and Wales. I am confident that that report, aided by the good work of hon. Members across the House, will come forward with some conclusions on how immigration detention can be effective to ensure an effective immigration policy, compassionate to ensure that the most vulnerable people are properly supported, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller) said, cost effective. This issue is top of the agenda for many of our constituents, and we must get it right. I have confidence that the Home Secretary and the Immigration Minister will properly address this issue.

Finally, I pay tribute to the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, which is based in Crawley. It does fantastic work, and I am grateful for the briefings it gives me. We are truly fortunate to have the dedication of many people in such groups and in immigration removal centres, as they provide the best possible support to those in immigration detention.

12.18 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I join all those who have welcomed this report. As chair of the all-party group on human trafficking and modern slavery, this issue concerns us because so many of those in detention have been victims of trafficking.

I will start by quoting an email from a constituent. She is not a victim of trafficking or a refugee. She is the wife of an EU citizen who is working in the UK, so she should have the right to stay here. I firmly predict that she will eventually be allowed to stay, but the Home Office is currently maintaining that hers is a sham marriage. She was detained for more than 50 days, and she wrote to me about three weeks ago. Forgive her English:

"Today I want to bring something in your acknowledge about how detention centre's life effect mentally. According to me home office don't bother about people's life, they leave them in detention centres for die...I am nearly became a mad person while in centre because I am so much upset and depressed. I am feeling scared at night, I can't sleep even for an hour, you know when am close my eyes then am feeling that I won't be able to open my eyes again or if I will open may be I will be blind. I am going to mad. I am

totally has been die after death of my uncle and grand mom. I went 3 to 4 times in healthcare to see doctor for depression but they just saying you have to wait few days for doctor appointment. I don't know why they not taking it seriously as my condition is not good. You know I haven't had any food since Saturday not at all. Even not tea. Please I want to go to my husband and parents. I can't die like this. Why this people can't see my condition. I can't stay here any more not even a single moment. I am not a animal."

This is not a woman who lacks family support. Her husband is here legally and is supporting her. She has other family here supporting her. Unlike most of the very vulnerable people in detention, she is not a victim of previous cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, yet we can hear from that message to her MP how desperate the experience of detention made her feel.

I shall not comment on everything in this excellent report. The one part of it that has the best chance of making a difference to the Home Office is the proposal for a legal limit on detention. The lack of a legal framework means that that most inefficient of Departments feels that it has the right to continue to be inefficient and to let people suffer as a result of its inefficiency.

I am particularly concerned about victims of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, victims of trafficking and victims of torture who are detained. The Helen Bamber Foundation reports that in the two months since the suspension of the detained fast track, which was suspended because it was found to be illegal, 108 people have been referred to the foundation. In 97% of cases prima facie evidence was found of torture or ill treatment having been suffered. That should have prompted immediate release. There are currently appalling delays before rule 35 reports are made, and officials from the Home Office reject those reports because they say there is no independent evidence or people did not disclose early enough.

I am grateful to the Minister, who wrote to me in August saying that he intends to work with NHS England to consider how to improve the timeliness of medical examinations and rule 35 report production, but the Helen Bamber Foundation tells me that it has not had any consultation about how that will be done. We all know that that is the most expert group in the whole country on victims of torture.

It is desperately urgent that we get these problematic matters sorted out. Even the British Medical Association, which does not often brief Members of Parliament on immigration issues, has provided us with a sensible paper containing practical recommendations, including that rule 35 reports should be written

"only by clinicians with relevant medical experience or appropriate training in identifying, documenting, and reporting the physical and psychological sequelae of torture."

It is obvious that that should happen. I do not believe that the Minister does not think it should happen, but because there is no legal framework which ensures that that is delivered, and because in practice there is no accountability, which is what it comes down to, the Home Office's system can get away with allowing appalling delays and amateur, inexperienced Home Office officials to say, "There's no independent evidence that you were raped"—gosh, what a surprise!—or "There's no independent evidence. Those scars on your body could have been caused by something else." Such things have regularly happened to people who have been victims of trafficking and torture.

[*Fiona Mactaggart*]

The onus is on the state to identify potential victims of trafficking. That is our legal obligation, rather than requiring the potential victim to disclose. It is clear from the Helen Bamber Foundation that the experience of being in detention makes it harder for people to deal with the impact on their mental health and harder for people to disclose. Therefore the Minister must make it clear how he will ensure that in future people who have been tortured and people who are being trafficked do not suffer further through the actions of the Home Office, and that we as a state make sure that they can overcome that victimhood.

12.24 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Slough (*Fiona Mactaggart*), who has a proud record on these matters. It is also an honour to speak in front of the Minister, who is a compassionate and decent man and who, I believe, will be listening carefully to all these arguments, and an honour to follow some excellent speeches. I will speak briefly to make two points.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (*Mr Burrowes*) said, this year we are commemorating the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. A major part of Magna Carta is the right of people not to be detained indefinitely and not to be detained without due cause. We need to bear that in mind. Clearly, there are cases where people need to be returned, but I did not realise that 30,000 people a year are facing detention on that basis. That is extraordinary. There must be other ways to do this.

If we detain someone in a police cell, we require the police to bring them before a court extremely quickly. We require the police to work night and day to find the evidence that justifies holding them. In immigration detention cases we do not require the system to work night and day because such people can be detained indefinitely. The first thing I ask, as others have done, is that the case work system be improved and that the Home Office has a responsibility to work night and day on these cases where it is depriving people of their liberty. I agree that a limit—whether 28 days or something else—should be in place to ensure that that happens, with a proviso, perhaps, that in extremely serious cases officials could come before a magistrate to ask for additional days if that were necessary. The onus would then be on the Home Office to do the work and do it quickly.

My second point arises from a case of a deportation to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in which I became involved a couple of years ago. Sometimes we treat countries as if they were one. We say that they are okay for people to be returned to or not. There are many instances where there are differing circumstances within a country, depending on the religion of the person, for example, or perhaps they have no religion. Perhaps they are gay. The country may officially be on the list from the Home Office or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of countries to which it is in order for people to be returned, but for that particular person it may be a matter of life and death. If they are returned to that country, they may face immediate arrest, even though that country is on the approved list

from the Home Office. I ask the Home Office to work much more closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to find out precisely the circumstances that might pertain to people who fall into minority groups and who may be of that nationality, but will not face a welcome in their own country when they return.

12.28 pm

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow such powerful speeches. The hon. Member for Stafford (*Jeremy Lefroy*) makes a very good point about due process, which is why increased judicial oversight is one of the recommendations of the report. There is a lot of concern about the issue in my constituency, especially with Campsfield being so close. That concern is felt by people of all parties and none. It is encouraging and heartening how broadly concern is being expressed today across the House.

We owe a vote of thanks to those who served on the panel and produced this excellent report. I wholeheartedly endorse its recommendations. It is worth underlining that the panel members came from across the parties and included a former Cabinet Minister, a Law Lord and an independent inspector of prisons. I hope that from this report comes the momentum for real change. As the report says, piecemeal tinkering with the system is not enough. The Shaw review is very welcome. However, by specifically excluding the decision to detain within its terms of reference, the Government are seeking to avoid the most important question.

The truth is that immigration detention simply is not working. The report concludes, and I agree, that the detention system is “inefficient, expensive and unjust”, so real change, not least the introduction of a time limit, is essential. I hope that following this debate the Government will commit to forming a working group to implement this and other recommendations of the inquiry.

It is clear that immigration detention is used too frequently. The Home Office is detaining more people than ever, with 32,053 people entering detention in the year ending June 2015, an increase of 10% on last year. There is general agreement across the House that detention for administrative purposes should be used only in rare circumstances when it is absolutely necessary, but that is not happening. Figures from 2013 show that the UK detained 30,418 people that year while Germany detained 4,309 people, Belgium detained 6,285 and Sweden detained 2,893. As has already been pointed out, Germany received four times as many asylum applications as the UK in that time. That shows that there are workable alternatives to detention.

A high percentage of those detained in this country are released, receive temporary admission or are granted bail—49% in the most recent relevant immigration statistics. That must raise the question why they were detained in the first place. Furthermore, as has already been said, immigration detention is expensive. In 2013-14 the annual cost of running the immigration detention estate was £164.4 million. There are cheaper community-based alternatives available, and there are certainly better uses for the money.

Most importantly, indefinite detention is unjust, which is why the Labour party committed to ending it in our manifesto. People are being detained for far too long. The most recent immigration statistics show that 187 people

had been in detention for a year or longer and 29 had been in detention for two years or longer in the year ending June 2015. That is totally unacceptable. A time limit should be imposed. The 28-day limit suggested in the report, which would bring the UK into line with others in Europe, seems sensible. Of course, we need to ensure that that does not become an automatic period of detention, but the alternative of no time limit at all is simply not working and cannot continue.

Many of my constituents are involved in supporting detainees in Campsfield immigration centre, including in the bail observation project, which has done important work monitoring bail hearings. Its two reports have found many barriers to release on bail and difficulties in challenging ongoing detention.

Since the report was published there have been other concerning developments—some have been referred to already—such as publication of the report on Yarl's Wood by Nick Hardwick, Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons. He called it a place of national concern and joined his voice to the call for a time limit. Worryingly, the Government's consultation on reforming support for failed asylum seekers seems to aim to remove accommodation provision for those bailed out of detention, and I fear that the result would be more people detained for longer and at greater expense.

There have been far too many scandals about the conditions in detention centres. There have been enough calls for reform from campaigners, experts and former detainees. Every death in detention, such as those of Ianos Dragutan and Ramazan Kumluca in Campsfield, is one too many. There have been enough Government reviews. This time let us end this cruel and shameful practice by bringing an end to indefinite detention and looking at international best practice and community-based alternatives. In the past I have made many representations about the detention of children, and the previous Government made important progress in that area by radically changing how families with children are detained. It is now time to make such systematic reform to the use of immigration detention as a whole. I urge the Government to act on the report.

12.34 pm

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I rise to speak about detention centres, largely because of a case I came across a couple of years ago. A young lady—it was not clear exactly what age she was—had been trafficked to the UK from Nigeria via Tripoli. Initially everything was great, but then she was held in London and put to work as a sex worker. An attempt was then made to traffic her to a gang in Holland using false documentation. At that point she was arrested and detained.

That young lady was believed to be 13, although nobody could be certain because she spoke an extremely rare dialect from rural Nigeria, and she was also in a state of absolute fear, not just of the authorities, but, more powerfully for her, because she believed that she had been subject to juju before leaving Nigeria. As a result of her cultural upbringing, she believed that were she to speak about what her traffickers had done, she would die. Indeed, when she started to develop symptoms of a sexually transmitted infection after being detained, she believed that it was the result of juju because she had failed.

That young lady was then treated as an adult in the criminal justice system because the false documents that her traffickers had used belonged to a Dutch national who was considerably older. She spent many weeks in the criminal justice system until questions started to be asked about how old she actually was. I will not go into the details of the case, but her conviction was eventually overturned and she was given the right to remain in the United Kingdom. It was a harrowing case, by anyone's definition, and for someone who is believed to have been as young as 13. When people who are that vulnerable find themselves in a detention centre, they need more than basic medical attention; we must also make efforts to understand things as basic as how old they are.

I know that the Minister and his Department have taken tremendous strides in recent years to try to move this forward, and I welcome the appointment of the inquiry into how we can treat those who are detained more humanely. We must also accept that there are people in this country illegally who are abusing the system. It is right that they should be removed speedily, not detained for prolonged periods and treated in a way that we would not even treat a criminal.

In all of this we must think about the people, because they are often frightened and vulnerable, having come here on their own or as victims of gangs. Often they have been through absolute hell before the authorities find them. That young lady's arrest might have been terrifying for her, but it was also a new beginning in her life. She broke free from her traffickers and started to understand that juju was not going to kill her. The people supporting her were able to start to put right the abuse she had suffered.

Sadly, that was just one case of many. Members who represent constituencies in and around London will have seen much more evidence of trafficking than those who represent more rural constituencies, but these cases are out there. I urge the Minister to continue doing all he can to ensure that the vulnerable are protected in the system.

12.39 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I am very grateful to be able to speak in this extremely important debate. I must first declare an interest, having compiled a number of mental health assessments of detainees in my previous role as a clinical psychologist in the NHS.

Prior to the debate, I attended Dungavel immigration removal centre, which is housed in my constituency, and met detainees, staff, management, Home Office staff and immigration services in order to inform my understanding of local service provision. In February this year, Dungavel was subject to an unplanned inspection by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons. The findings from the published report were positive overall regarding the general operation of the centre and the conditions for detainees. However, recent inspections of other detention establishments, such as Yarl's Wood and Verne, have not been positive in that regard. The report on Dungavel indicates that the inspector's main concerns were largely outside the control of the contractor—namely, some very long periods of detention and decisions to maintain detention of extremely vulnerable detainees. This gives

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

further weight to the findings of the inquiry by the all-party groups that the problems with detention are systematic and would not be solved simply by “tinkering with pastoral care or improving the facilities”.

As I come from a health background, the APPG inquiry raises extremely concerning issues to me about the effects of detention, particularly prolonged and indefinite detention, on the mental wellbeing of individuals. It observes that being detained indefinitely without knowing for how long, with the continual possibility both of imminent release and imminent removal, means that detainees have simultaneous concerns that there will be sudden change or never-ending stasis. Information provided to the inquiry by the Helen Bamber Foundation indicated that being detained for more than 30 days correlated with having significantly higher levels of mental health issues. The APPGs propose setting a time limit of 28 days on the length of time that anyone can be held in immigration detention. The current lack of a time limit does not improve efficiency. Indeed, it appears that the lack of any external pressure to complete cases within a set time frame has led to poor caseworking. This is reinforced by the inspectorate’s report from Dungavel, which referred to finding a number of prolonged detentions related to unavoidable casework delays.

Another significant concern relates to the detention of extremely vulnerable individuals. Under the current system, there is a provision under rule 35 of the Detention Centre Rules 2001 that aims to ensure that particularly vulnerable detainees whose health it is feared is likely to be affected by detention are brought to the attention of the appropriate authority in order to review decisions and to consider whether detention is appropriate. The policy recommends that vulnerable groups such as victims of torture should be detained only in very exceptional circumstances. Despite this, the recent inspectorate report from Dungavel expressed particular concerns about decisions to continue to detain a torture survivor and a woman with a serious health condition.

As regards identifying those who are particularly vulnerable, reports have highlighted issues with a lack of training among detention centre staff in recognising the effects of abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and human trafficking. In addition, it appears that initial screening procedures and the environments in which they are conducted are not always conducive to identifying such vulnerabilities, especially as disclosure of trauma can be a very complex issue. There are many potential barriers that could impact on a victim’s ability to disclose their experiences, particularly when being held in an immigration centre.

The APPG findings indicate that the provision of mental health services in detention centres is often very poor; detainees have reportedly found it very hard to receive treatment, even after having tried to commit suicide. It appears that many of the negative experiences of healthcare provision are linked to the number of people detained and the length of time for which they are held, alongside the lack of access to psychiatric provision. The Royal College of Psychiatrists is of the view that it is impossible to treat serious mental illness satisfactorily in a detention setting, as it is not a therapeutic environment. In fact, one of the medical personnel who gave evidence during the APPG inquiry, Dr Danny Allen, described it as “counter-therapeutic”.

Another pertinent issue raised by the inquiry team is a need for gender-specific policies. At the time of the recent inspection, it was reported that the 14 women at the Dungavel centre alongside 249 male residents were housed separately in an environment that was safe and supportive, and where individual needs were being met. However, the inspectors recognised that there were still inevitable risks associated with holding women in a predominantly male centre, and that those risks were not addressed by policy. When I visited the centre, I was informed that a small proportion of detainees had criminal backgrounds and that staff were concerned that because prison records had not followed detainees to the centre they were unaware of some of the risks. The charity Scottish Detainee Visitors has noted that it has not been unusual for just one or two women to be detained at Dungavel. That can be isolating and frightening, particularly in the light of research suggesting a high prevalence of gender-based violence histories among detained women, this often having been part of the persecution that they were fleeing.

I urge the Minister to take on board the recommendations of the report, particularly where it pertains to holding very vulnerable individuals in detention centres.

12.46 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. I, too, congratulate the all-party groups on securing it. In following some excellent and passionate speeches, I will keep my contribution very short.

My constituents are concerned about levels of immigration but concerned most of all that those held in detention centres are detained for the shortest possible period and that their welfare is at the forefront of everyone’s minds. They and I would like the Minister to give assurances that people are detained only as a very last resort and are processed swiftly. It is heartening to read that the majority of those detained are able to leave within 28 days and the remainder within four months. Whether someone is detained for a few days or a few months, their welfare while in detention is of the utmost importance to me and my constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), my neighbouring MP, mentioned two centres in his constituency. One of those was the Cedars centre, which is currently taking care of 12 children. Twelve is still too many, but it is a huge drop from the 1,000 children who were detained in detention centres during the period of a year under the Labour Government. It would be good to hear the Minister say how the number of 12 held in Cedars can be reduced even further. The welfare of those detained is often discussed when I have surgeries in my constituency.

Like the Minister, no doubt, I am waiting to see the Stephen Shaw report. I would be interested to hear the Minister comment on how soon any recommendations in that report can be implemented and how he will continue to make sure that there is a greater focus on the welfare of detainees.

12.48 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I echo the congratulations to the two APPGs and to Members from both sides of the House who have

brought this very important and timely debate. In a week when moral indignation from the nation at large has caused action by the Government, I would like to think that this debate too can play its part in awareness raising and have a similar positive effect.

I do not have any of these so-called immigration removal centres in my constituency, but their names are known to me as almost a roll call of shame, and some touch on my constituents. The two nearest to me are Colnbrook and Harmondsworth, which my constituent Diane Lukeman, who is in the Public Gallery and is a lay visitor with Detention Action, visits. The situation at Yarl's Wood was brought home to me by a visit facilitated by Father Simon of Christ the Saviour in Ealing Broadway. He set up a meeting for me with Citizens UK when I was a parliamentary candidate. It opened my eyes to a world I had never experienced before.

My constituent had fled persecution from the Taliban, but even she spoke of the humiliating, degrading and harrowing conditions that left her depressed and suicidal—my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) has told similar stories—behind the tall fence and barbed wire. Defenders of these institutions will no doubt assert that they are not meant to be holiday camps and that they are meant to deter, but their dire conditions and lack of respect for human dignity have left inmates resorting to extreme actions, such as hunger strike.

The 2013 report of the inspectorate of prisons on Yarl's Wood, which followed an unannounced inspection similar to the old-style Ofsted inspections, said:

“The circumstances of those held at Yarl's Wood make it a sad place. At best it represents the failure of hopes and ambitions, at worst it is a place where some detainees look to the future with real fear and concern. None of those held at Yarl's Wood were there because they had been charged with an offence or had been detained through normal judicial circumstances. Many may have experienced victimisation before they were detained, for example by traffickers or in abusive relationships.”

The cumulative result is a moral dereliction of duty. People, including women and children, are locked up for months in draconian centres, not knowing when they will be let out.

Governments of parties on both sides of the House have sought to be tough, in the eyes of the electorate, on undocumented migrants. That is wrong and it blurs the issue of refugees and asylum seekers with the wider immigration debate, which tends to border on hysteria and forms a cycle that breeds a climate of hatred, fear, racism and demonisation of the so-called “illegals.”

The UK has long had a reputation as a defender of human rights and civil liberties where freedom prevails, but the detention system is a stain on our character. The only beneficiaries seem to be the private providers. Serco is literally profiting from the misery at Yarl's Wood.

I am pleased to report that my constituent, who asked not to be named, has got back on her feet. She got out of there and is enrolled on a psychology degree. She is rebuilding her life and working with Citizens UK on these issues, but she is still haunted by her experiences.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the Mayor of London—I am not sure which is his part-time position—is not present, but in his 2008 incarnation he stood on a platform calling for

an amnesty for all illegal immigrants. I do not know what happened to that, but it was not in our manifesto, which instead called for an end to indefinite detention. I hope we all agree with that. The report by the all-party groups recommends a limit of 28 days. I am sure we can all agree that the processes need to be sped up and that due process needs to be done.

If a time limit on detention could be set that was not prejudicial to the Government's ability to remove those who have no right to remain, would the Minister support it? The community organising group Citizens UK, which has been mentioned by a few Members on both sides of the House, has a working group devoted to examining alternatives to detention as a means of processing migrant and asylum applications. Will the Minister liaise with and meet that working group?

12.53 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): My constituents will have found this debate fascinating and enlightening, and I hope that people who do not have detention centres in their communities have learned as much as I have today. The debate comes at a key time as we consider strong concerns about Yarl's Wood detention centre, and it is right and proper that they are fully investigated.

It is important to distinguish between detention and immigration as a whole, and truly to consider people's welfare and the care given to them by the state while they are detained. I firmly support the Government's wish to achieve a substantial reduction in immigration, which got completely out of control under Labour. It left 450,000 cases unlooked at, which was unacceptable. Those people's lives will be blighted if we do not deal with that. It is right that that figure is now being brought back to a reasonable level, which means that individuals are once again being dealt with.

My constituents want a fairer immigration system. Inhumane treatment must be challenged and recent improvements built on. The Minister has noted and understands the pertinent issues that have been raised about a far from perfect system.

We must be fair and understanding not only on those who wish to come to our shores but on British citizens. The UK is a global hub that attracts talent, which contributes to our economic dynamism. As we have heard, detained people can contribute to our communities, and rightly so.

Investigations show that poor casework is causing massive suffering. It is truly worrying that 30,000 people are suffering further due to casework failures. The process seems unjust and ineffective, and it is worrying to hear that a number of women feel unsafe. The lack of gender understanding is simply unacceptable.

On detention itself and part 1 of the report, those who do not have the right to be in the UK can, of course, leave voluntarily. However, if they break the law, detention is a reasonable next step—but it must be the right kind of detention. Unlike the stories we have heard today, people must be removed appropriately and within a reasonable timeframe. Huge delays cannot be overlooked, because individuals are suffering.

Although I recognise the calls for a fixed time limit on immigration detention, I am not sure that I wholly support them. Each case has its own individual circumstances and I am not sure whether an arbitrary fixed time limit

[Mims Davies]

would enable us to recognise the finer details within 28 days. Would the focus be on getting it right or on working to a timetable? That needs to be further considered. We must recognise that detention does not sit outside the law and that all voices should be listened to.

Mr Virendra Sharma: I do not want to interrupt the hon. Lady's flow, but the period of 28 days we are asking for is a maximum, not a total. People should not suffer for so long without knowing what is happening to them.

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his input. I absolutely agree that we should be working to something, but if the casework and the systems are not in place it is very difficult to set a number. It is important that judicial review, which provides a powerful and constant check, remains intense and has clear oversight.

The welfare of those in detention centres is a very serious matter. Under the Labour Government, 1,000 children a year were in prison-like conditions, and I am proud that my party is ending the detention of children for immigration purposes. The number of children entering detention is falling rapidly, but the end cannot come soon enough. These are little people going through a very frightening process in a foreign country.

I welcome this key, enlightening debate and the extra scrutiny this House is giving to the process of detention. A state cannot allow those who break the law to continue to live as though they have not done so. The rule of law depends on us upholding it appropriately.

I absolutely support having a hard look at how to remove and detain people properly, and at the arbitrary timeframe of the 28-day limit, as colleagues have said. We must make sure that those in detention in the UK are treated with respect and dignity. It is right to enforce our laws, but we must work together to act with humanity. This is a scandal waiting to happen: there could be further loss of life if we do not shine a light on this issue.

I agree with other hon. Members that our future handling of such complex cases involving vulnerable people must be balanced by the appropriate and proportionate management of detainees who might simply be here to abuse the system. I am sure that the Minister has taken on board the importance of what hon. Members have said.

1 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this very important debate. As other hon. Members have done, I commend—as best practice for other all-party groups to follow—the work of the groups that produced the report during the last Parliament. I am grateful for its acknowledgment of my former colleague Sarah Teather's leadership in this area during her time in the House.

In looking at the scale of this problem, the surveys recently carried out by the Bail for Immigration Detainees group are interesting. During the most recent survey period, 216 people left detention after more than 12 months. It is worth reflecting on the sheer scale of that. My greatest concern is that, ultimately, only 38% of such

people were required to leave the country. Therefore, the system is not just inhumane, but inefficient. It is not doing the job that we as taxpayers require it to do.

When I see such figures, I inevitably draw on my own professional experience. Before I entered Parliament, I was a criminal court solicitor, like the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes). I started my professional career as a procurator fiscal depute. We worked to very strict timetables in Scotland. Any prosecutor remanding people on such a scale and getting convictions for only 38% of them would have found themselves in some difficulty with their superiors.

It is worth comparing how we treat those detained for immigration purposes with how we treat other people in our community whom we detain in the criminal justice system and the mental health system. In neither case do we detain people without a time limit or any sort of judicial supervision of their detention. Frankly, if we rightly apply such a standard for our own people, why should the standard be different for those who come here fleeing persecution in other countries?

That brings me to the point about the availability of legal representation that I made in my intervention on the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). I have no doubt that the lack of access to legal representation contributes to making many cases last longer than the 12-month period identified by BID. At the time of the last BID survey, only 50% of people had representation when they were interviewed, and 11% never had any representation. We all know why: these people come from countries with very different legal systems and access to justice is on a very different basis, if indeed there is much state-provided justice at all. In addition, there are the difficulties of language and the mental health problems that inevitably arise, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) said. We can understand the importance of getting proper representation to people in such situations.

Fiona Mactaggart: The constituent I quoted was unable to access legal representation because she could not afford it. It was a case of paying the council tax or paying a lawyer. In the end, she succeeded in her bail bid by representing herself, which is one of the things we need to help people to do.

Mr Carmichael: Indeed. I was very struck by the constituent's email that the hon. Lady read out. It is clear that that lady has significant language difficulties. Nobody in such a situation should be left having to represent themselves before a court or tribunal. These are exactly the sort of people for whom legal aid is designed and is absolutely necessary.

If I could make only one change, it would be in relation to the need for a time limit. In my time as a prosecutor, when we detained somebody or remanded them in custody, they had to be brought to trial within 40 days on a summary complaint or within 110 days on an indictment. Those were very demanding timescales to meet, and it could be very difficult to do so, particularly for complex crimes. However, such people were given priority because they had been deprived of their liberty. If that is how we treat people suspected of a crime, I see no reason why we should treat people seeking refuge any differently.

1.5 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): This has been a very good and quite informative debate. Members on both sides of the Chamber have outlined problems with the system and the lessons we could learn from countries such as Sweden and Australia, but it strikes me that it is worth remembering exactly what has brought us to this point. We are having this debate because the system has become so bad that it is falling apart and failing other human beings.

I want to read a few lines of a briefing, which I must confess I stole from my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald). It states that the system has recently had

“a raft of high profile scandals including allegations of sexual abuse at Yarl’s Wood, the death of a frail 84 year old Canadian man with dementia in handcuffs, and a proliferation of human rights breaches where the detention of no less than six mentally ill detainees has been found by the High Court to constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.”

The answer to the question of what has brought us here is twofold: a general attitude towards immigration and asylum—let us not kid ourselves: it has also been present in the Chamber during other debates this week—and the fact that successive Governments have been led by the nose by powers and forces that may not have many representatives in this Chamber, but have, my goodness, exerted an influence on this place of which most of us should be ashamed.

Years ago, during the last Labour Government, I used to campaign outside the offices of the Home Office on Brand Street with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), my old boss when she was a Member of the Scottish Parliament, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens). We used to go on marches campaigning for the rights of people held in Yarl’s Wood and Dungavel, and we used to stand outside those offices and watch going in and out the faceless people who presumably took them to detention centres. The point I am making is that this did not start recently; we have been on a slide for a long time. Under the coalition Government, the outside walls of the office where I used to campaign—asylum seekers had to turn up there weekly—were brandishing shameful posters telling them to go home and vans were driven around constituencies all across central London telling them to go home.

I hope that this debate marks a genuine change in spirit and approach on the issue of the detention of asylum seekers, but that change has to be so radical and so bold if we are to make any meaningful progress. How different would it be if, rather than having a Home Office Minister in charge of immigration, we had a Treasury Minister because, as we know, immigration brings economic benefits to this country? What would happen if, instead of having a Home Office Minister in charge of detention centres, we had a Minister from the Department for Communities and Local Government or the Department of Health?

I am sure that my party colleagues will back me up when I say that the UK Government must end their belligerent approach to the devolved Administrations on this issue. In the last Parliament, all but two of the elected Members of this House for the city of Glasgow

were men. Many women who had been through terrible cases of torture and rape did not want to go and address the men who were their constituency MPs, some of whom were not known for having sympathy with such issues.

I remember the time when my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East was an elected Member of the Scottish Parliament and the Home Office would have nothing to do with her, or indeed with any other elected Member. Given the crossover in service use and delivery, it makes sense to involve not just the Scottish Parliament, but the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly and the London Assembly, which I understand the UK Border Agency would correspond with in certain cases. I say that not to make a political point, but because it makes sense.

If we choose to be so bold and radical as to completely overhaul this system on a cross-party and cross-Parliament basis, our country will be much the better for it.

1.11 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on securing this vital debate.

Every year, approximately 2,000 women seeking asylum in the UK are detained, many at Yarl’s Wood detention centre near Bedford. The majority of those women have survived traumatic life events such as rape, domestic violence and threats of abuse, and many have been psychologically affected. Being locked up or detained can be particularly distressing and counter-productive, forcing some to relive their traumas.

Some 40% of those women who were interviewed recently admitted that they had self-harmed and 20% admitted to having attempted suicide. In a recent report, the chief inspector of prisons, Nick Hardwick, said:

“Yarl’s Wood is rightly a place of national concern.”

The inspectorate found that about half the women who were in detention centres pending an asylum decision felt unsafe. Worryingly, the report detailed that since the previous inspection, the treatment and condition of those held had deteriorated significantly.

One woman said:

“I felt so upset and frightened because I was arrested and locked up and tortured back home. I have scars on my feet and arms where I was beaten by police and guards and so the situation and male guards in Yarl’s Wood made me feel extremely frightened...it feels like being locked up in prison back home.”

Women have alluded to significant breaches of privacy while being held, including allegations of sexual harassment and violations of dignity. Female staffing levels are also considered to be inadequate.

The parliamentary inquiry recommended a mandatory 28-day limit on all immigration detention. Referring to cases involving women, it called for gender-specific rules for detention. It stated that there should be no detention of pregnant women or survivors of rape and sexual abuse. The current Home Office policy stipulates that pregnant women should be detained only in the most exceptional of circumstances, but in 2014, 99 pregnant women were held at Yarl’s Wood alone.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is suspicious that when I visited two women at Yarl’s Wood this summer, both of

[Jess Phillips]

whom had suffered exactly what she is outlining, they were released that day? Does she agree that the reason might be that the Government do not want too much scrutiny of what is going on at that centre?

Paula Sherriff: I absolutely agree with those comments.

Detention is a costly exercise at about £40,000 a year. The comparative cost of maintaining those seeking asylum in the community is significantly cheaper. There is significant evidence that the detention of asylum seekers is expensive, unnecessary and unjust. There is a clear appetite across the House for a change in culture and I look forward to seeing real progress on this issue.

1.14 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. I thank the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) for tabling the motion.

This should not be a debate about how we detain migrants and asylum seekers; in truth, it is a debate about how we treat our fellow human beings, many of whom are vulnerable and have suffered unmentionable experiences. When we consider the question of immigration, detention with no time limit cannot be the answer. On the latest figures provided by the Government, 187 people who were in detention last year had been detained for between one and two years, and another 29 people had been detained for two years or longer. Such arbitrary detention is an attack on the human rights of each and every one of those detainees.

Detention centres are horrific places. One man's account describes his 37 months in detention as "three years in a cage".

That is time he spent isolated from his family, friends and support network; time spent being treated more like an animal than a human being.

It is clear that the system is utterly broken. Any system that allows people to be held indefinitely cannot be described as anything else. Any system that allows people to be locked up and forgotten about and to be denied any semblance of human dignity can only be described as an obscenity. In denying dignity to detainees, we denigrate our own humanity. We need an immigration system that is focused on fairness, not forced detention. A more compassionate, pragmatic and workable approach is needed.

I am dealing with several immigration cases for constituents at the moment, although none have involved any form of detention. If those cases are anything to go by, the procedures that have been put in place by the Home Office are counter-productive and often devoid of common sense. One constituent whom I have spoken about in this place before, Merai Mupunga, cannot work to support her family because her partner's income falls slightly short of an ill-conceived minimum income threshold. This is a respectable lady who wants to contribute to society and cannot. Her dignity and self-worth are being robbed from her. Merai is fortunate in one sense: she has not had her liberty taken from her—a fate that seems to befall far too many people.

The cost to wider society simply cannot be underestimated. The removal of intrinsic rights from any individual not only robs communities of their potential,

but costs the public purse dearly. With a cost of about £36,000 per detainee per year and more than 32,000 immigrants detained last year, we owe it to the taxpayer to change how we deal with immigration detention. The amounts paid by the Home Office in compensation following claims for unlawful detention have totalled almost £15 million over the past three years. Those figures all point to a system that simply is not working.

We need to take a holistic approach to the procedures, case management and detention infrastructure across the UK. We need to be critical and ask ourselves how we can make the system not only fit for purpose, but humane. It is important that the system operates with a defined distinction between criminal and administrative detention. It is also important that the system allows for scrutiny and review. I am not convinced that the current system does either of those things very well.

The Government need not only to acknowledge the gravity of the findings of the joint inquiry by the all-party parliamentary groups on refugees and on migration, but to engage with the many organisations throughout the UK that are calling for reform. Scottish Detainee Visitors, the respected independent charity based in Glasgow, is one such voice that is calling for a considered change in approach. Each week, its volunteers visit detainees at Dungavel, which is in a neighbouring constituency to mine. Their first-hand experiences tell of horrific conditions, particularly for women, who find themselves greatly outnumbered by men. Some of those women are fleeing gender-based violence and situations that most of us are fortunate never to have experienced. One woman who was detained at Dungavel described her experience as like being

"a chicken surrounded by dogs".

A recent inspection report into Dungavel noted that there were inevitable risks associated with holding women in a predominantly male centre, yet there were no specific policies focusing on the issue. The failings of the system need to be addressed and the Home Office needs to act. The introduction of a 28-day time limit is a good start, but it is only that. Detention needs to be used sparingly and only when it is necessary. We need to restore dignity to the lives of thousands of immigrants and asylum seekers, and we need to introduce some humanity to the cold mechanics of the Home Office.

1.20 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I thank the hon. Members who petitioned me to sign up to secure this timely debate. In the short time I have been in this place, 45% of my casework has been on asylum-related issues. Indeed, I am becoming a regular correspondent with the Immigration Minister. I hope this debate on detention will be the start of looking at the many other issues surrounding the asylum process that are causing me concern. I will be using other parliamentary procedures to raise those issues.

Let me first welcome the excellent all-party group report, which sets out many of the issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) said, the report was backed up by an unannounced inspection of the Dungavel detention centre in June by Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons, which raised concerns about Home Office decisions on who is detained. Incidentally, some of

those detained have a documented history of having been tortured and of having serious health conditions. The report adds further weight to the parliamentary inquiry carried out by the all-party groups.

The problems of detention will not be solved by tinkering; the problems are systematic. We know that because this year, to June 2015, 1,322 people have been brought to Dungavel as a first place of detention. We know from freedom of information requests by the BBC that, in January 2015, 22% of detainees resident at Dungavel had been detained for more than three months and that two individuals had been there for more than a year. That is too long and I agree that we need a 28-day time limit.

The effects of long detention were explained by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier). Detention means isolation. One of the problems with detention centres such as Dungavel is that they are in an isolated position. The nearest detention centre to Dungavel is Morton Hall in Lincolnshire, which is 270 miles away. People are brought to Dungavel from all over the United Kingdom. That exacerbates some of the negative impacts, and means it is difficult for detainees to maintain contact with family members and other social support networks. For family members without access to a car, journey times can be very lengthy indeed, often leading to an overnight stay which many cannot afford. The difficulties of maintaining contact will and does impact on the mental health of those detained.

One issue that has not yet been touched on is the loss of belongings. We know from reports that, sadly, it is not uncommon for detainees to be collected or detained and not given the opportunity to collect their belongings. That is a very serious issue indeed and Scottish Detainee Visitors has done a lot of work in that regard. People should be entitled to their belongings when they are in detention.

In Dungavel, there are 14 bed spaces for women, compared with 235 for men. The report is clear that, inevitably, there are risks associated with holding women in a predominantly male centre. The Home Office really does need to look at these specific issues.

In my exchange with the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), I touched on the very important issue of access to legal representation. One of the problems in moving detainees from Scotland to England is that they have different systems, and a Scottish solicitor can find it extremely difficult to contact an English solicitor if a removal is expected over a short period. This is becoming a major issue in some of the cases I have been dealing with, so I hope the Home Office will consider it.

Mr Virendra Sharma: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the problem is not only the poor legal system but lack of knowledge of the legal system among detainees, along with English language and communication problems?

Chris Stephens: I agree completely.

Detention centres are so far out of the way, solicitors can be unable to get to them and have to correspond by letter, which is not always appropriate. We are now finding that detainees, when they are released from detention centres, are being left in a state of destitution. It is up to charities, such as Scottish Detainee Visitors,

to help them with their belongings and their transfer. That is very concerning, as is the impact it will have on other social services.

1.26 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I would like to add my congratulations to my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who has done so much to highlight the growing concerns around this issue, and to the all-party groups on their excellent report. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to raise the experiences of my constituents unfortunate enough to come into contact with the immigration detention system, and some of the flaws in our immigration policy that exacerbate the problem.

Our detention system is arbitrary and brutally effective at taking those, who may or may not have a case to remain, out of the communities in which they live. We detain far more than almost any of our European partners, depriving people of their liberty often because we have a system which treats detention as anything but a last resort. These places are prisons in all but name and, as has been mentioned, in many cases they are considerably worse than prison. The increase in those entering detention by 10%, to 32,000 in the most recent figures, is part of a longer upward trend. I do not want to repeat the valuable recommendations that have been laid before the House, except to say that the experience of my constituents is certainly consistent with the findings of the all-party groups.

The findings were true in the case of a young man resident in my constituency who fled Afghanistan in the most appalling of circumstances aged nine years old. After four years incognito, he arrived in the UK. He was given temporary leave to remain under the international humanitarian obligations by which the UK is bound. His entire family had been murdered by the Taliban, excepting his older brother who tragically died on the journey here. He is understandably now suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The young man was schooled here and built a life here. To all intents and purposes, this man is as English as you and me, Madam Deputy Speaker. He has no family and almost no connection to the country he fled at nine years old. Yet two weeks ago, after he had turned 18, he was hauled out of the community in which he lived, handcuffed and taken to the Brook House removal centre at Gatwick—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame"]—where he was put in a cell, and where food and drink was limited. He was even given his plane tickets, despite there being a block on his removal due to my intervention. After an entirely unnecessary traumatic and expensive experience, he was granted an injunction preventing his removal and release. He is now afraid to sign in with his caseworker, as he is required to do weekly, for fear of being arbitrarily detained again.

That case alone would tell of a disproportionate detention system and a fundamentally unjust immigration policy, but it is just a small insight, as we have heard, into wider failings. Problems remain with communication, conditions, illegal detention, a lack of a time limit and cost. The all-party groups' recommendations are so desperately needed if our constituents are to retain their liberty and dignity throughout the immigration process.

[Louise Haigh]

Community-based solutions, alongside time limits and proper judicial oversight, are all sensible solutions to help to ease those problems.

I turn briefly to the nearly 15,000 unaccompanied minors, such as my constituent, who are given temporary leave to remain when they arrive alone as children and find themselves in a prolonged legal battle as the clock strikes midnight on their 18th birthday, which usually ends in a detention centre and occasionally in deportation. These people, barely adults, are wrenched from the lives they have made since arriving alone in Britain and, undoubtedly terrified, are put on a charter flight back to their countries of origin. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has found that 605 individuals over the past six years who arrived unaccompanied seeking asylum have been deported to Afghanistan on turning 18. The Home Office has given me the dubious assurance in the case of my constituent that his western upbringing will be of benefit to him in his new life in Afghanistan, but that is simply not the reality for many young people who return, fearing reprisals from the Taliban simply because they are known to have lived in the west.

The issue gained further prominence this week with the announcement in the other place that Syrian refugees aged 18 would be deported, which was retracted the following day by the Prime Minister. I would be grateful if the Minister could provide details of exactly how these children will not be deported on turning 18. For example, will they be granted indefinite leave to remain upon entering the country? The process for dealing with unaccompanied minors when they turn 18 seems at best ad hoc and often leaves young men and women in limbo for years, in and out of the detention system.

I hope the Minister will agree that the harm facing these 15,000 unaccompanied minors is a considerable cause for concern and that perhaps time might be granted for further debate and to review this specific issue in our asylum system. For now I implore the Government to listen carefully to the views and experiences of hon. Members and our constituents and to signal a direction of travel away from detention as an arm of the immigration system. Detention should be used as originally intended: a last resort used only in exceptional circumstances.

1.31 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I apologise for coming late to the debate, after the first half hour, and missing the earlier contributions.

It is interesting that no one is defending the system overall, which is a significant breakthrough. I do not think we would have had this debate five or six years ago, but people have learned a lot of lessons. I have two detention centres in my constituency because I have Heathrow airport: Harmondsworth and Colnbrook. Thirty years ago as a local councillor, I used to visit Harmondsworth. Back then, it was a Nissen hut with no more than a dozen people in it. I now have two detention centres with a combined population of 1,000 detainees, and the system is absolutely brutal.

As I have Heathrow in my constituency, I am almost the last resort MP before deportation. My number is scrawled on the walls of the detention centres, and those detained contact my constituency office. My caseload

is enormous. I do not know how my staff get through it, to be frank. It is so distressing, I wonder how they get through it emotionally as well. The pleas we receive are desperate, because of the system itself, not just the issue of deportation or removal; it is about how people have been treated up to that point. Often, someone will report as normal to the Home Office on a weekly or monthly basis and will get swept in, or it is as a result of a raid. Years ago in my constituency, we had dawn raids, with white vans and so on. They have gone now, but more raids are happening at workplaces now, so the white van system is returning. People are dragged traumatised into a detention centre. The paperwork is chaotic—we all know that—partly because of staff cuts in the department dealing with these cases. In addition, the access to legal assistance and advice is largely non-existent, except for the wonderful people providing volunteer services in the detention centres.

Those people do not know whether they will be there a week, a fortnight, a year or longer. The indefinite detention is the worst thing possible and it undermines individuals' psychological wellbeing, because they do not know their future either way. That results in self-harming. I have had suicides in Harmondsworth. The case of the 83-year-old man who was handcuffed was from my detention centre in Harmondsworth. An 83-year-old man on his deathbed was put in chains and handcuffs. It was a scandal. I pay tribute to the monitoring board visiting the detention centres in my area. It monitors the system voluntarily, produces reports and exposes such scandals.

I accept all the recommendations from the all-party groups and commend the work they have done. Sarah Teather, who is no longer a Member, did fantastic work on this, both as a Minister and as a Back Bencher. I accept all the recommendations, but I want the detention centres closed. There are alternatives within the community, such as those my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) raised. There must be a more civilised way of dealing with people. I used to visit children in Harmondsworth, and I raised the matter time and again with the then Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. I am pleased we no longer have children in the full detention centres, but we still detain children.

I give this warning: if the detention centres are not closed, there will be more self-harming and more suicides. Harmondsworth has been burned down twice as a result of rioting. The hunger strikes go on, as we speak, on a regular basis. The riots will come back. This is no way to treat our fellow human beings. We have to find another way. Yes, let us accept the recommendations today, but in the long run let us close these establishments, which have so significantly failed to respect the human rights of those detained.

1.35 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I have worked with asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow and the west of Scotland for many years. Some have ended up in Dungavel immigration removal centre and some in Yarl's Wood. These individuals are the embodiment of the word vulnerable. They live in poor housing, are maintained with very little income and frequently have only a basic knowledge of the web of legislation and bureaucratic processes that determines whether they stay in the United Kingdom.

Many have children who attend local schools, while the lengthy process of deciding asylum claims is played out, but they frequently have a perseverance and bravery that would put the rest of us to shame. One source of strength is the network of support offered by local communities and charities when asylum seekers arrive in their area, and I would like to pay tribute to the work of three organisations in my city: Unity, the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees and St Rollox church in my constituency.

These people also establish networks among fellow asylum seekers housed in the same buildings and with parents at their children's school. That entire network of support is removed at a stroke by detention, particularly in the case of those taken from Scotland to be detained in England, where there is a different legal system and absolutely no chance of retaining support networks because of the distance. Detention is costly and, I would argue strongly, an unnecessary step in the asylum process. If the Government are convinced that a case is without merit, and if all the available legal routes of appeal and tribunals have been explored, they have both the address of the asylum seeker and a venue where they regularly have to attend and report to the UK Border Agency. They therefore have ways to effect a removal without resorting to detention.

It is not easy for anyone to abscond and stay on the run for any length of time. It is a million times harder for someone from another country. Let us think about it. If I want to go on the run—I sometimes want to in this place—I will have friends and family right across these islands. The average asylum seeker has only those in their local community, and they are mostly other asylum seekers who also have next to nothing. That makes it far more difficult to go any further than their local area. How would they survive? I have money, things I could sell, I have family, I am allowed to work, and I have a credit card. The average asylum seeker has none of these things. Just surviving would take a momentous effort every minute of every day. Anyone who does that does it because they know that the alternative is far worse. And what about children? It is one thing for an adult to go on the run, but how on earth do they do that with children in tow? It is almost impossible. Those who do take that route are in a minority.

Detention is a costly burden to the state and a damaging experience for the immigrant, especially if they are particularly vulnerable. I visited Dungavel, Scotland's only immigration removal centre, while a Member of the Scottish Parliament. I was there to visit a family who had asked for my help. These places are what I imagined prisons to be. I was questioned, I was fingerprinted, I was escorted by a uniformed person with a massive bunch of jailer's keys. I felt nervous. I could barely concentrate on what the family were telling me, from looking out the window at the high walls and the barbed wire surrounding us. I could see the children staring wide-eyed, no doubt wondering what on earth they had done wrong to end up in there.

Of course, we no longer detain children, but that does not mean that we would not do so in future, so it is important to talk about it, in case it should come back. I want to talk about a nine-year-old boy I knew who spent months living in Yarl's Wood with his mother. I watched this shy but happy little boy almost fade away. Physically, he lost 10 lb in the first three weeks; mentally,

we scarred him for ever. "Mummy", he whispered one day while in Yarl's Wood. "I don't want to be here any more. It would be better if we died. Please, mummy—please can we die?" I was very close to this little boy and in constant contact with his mum. This is not a made-up person to illustrate a point; those were his exact words. I will never forget them and nor should anyone in this place. And what of the women who have suffered sexual abuse in their countries of origin, as many Members have mentioned today, and then find themselves locked up with male warders? Can we imagine the terror that they experience?

If the Government are not swayed by the benefits to our fellow human beings, perhaps the knowledge about the effect of investing at the refusal stage, as countries such as Canada and Sweden do, should convince them. If they say today that they will not accept the recommendations of the report and not consider anything that those on the Opposition Benches have discussed, they should at least be honest and admit that detention is about political ideology. It is about warning new asylum seekers: "This is what could happen to you and your children, so stay away." I hope they prove me wrong on that, I really do.

1.41 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): While I have been exceptionally moved by all the stories I have heard since I joined the debate from Committee, the story told by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) in particular highlighted some of the effects of detention suffered by young men. However, I want to focus very much on the detention of women.

As I said, I visited Yarl's Wood detention centre in August, completely freely—I was allowed to go because I did not ask the Government whether I could go, but had arranged to visit residents with a refugee women's organisation. I went to see an individual who had been detained there and then deported and who, when she returned, was detained there again. When I arrived, I was told that I was not allowed to see her because she had been released—which I was utterly delighted by, to be perfectly honest. I then made a request to visit another inmate. When I was talking to her, I found out a few startling things about the place and about her case.

The woman had been there for four months—long beyond any 28-day period. She had come from Nigeria, seeking asylum due to her sexuality—she told me a horrific story, which does not bear repeating, about why she had to come here. When she arrived, brought here by somebody she trusted, she was kept in a cellar in London for two years and repeatedly raped by men who had paid to have sex with her. This woman is a victim of human trafficking. As somebody with some expertise in this field, I asked her why she had not qualified for the national referral mechanism for human trafficking, which would certainly not have detained her, but given her a 60-day reflection period, along with benefits and support. She said that two inconsistencies in her story meant that she was not believed to be a victim of trafficking and, because she had known the person who brought her here, she had not qualified.

I have met lots of victims in my life, many from this country. Let us imagine having to give evidence—to tell the same story over and over again—in a language

[Jess Phillips]

other than our mother tongue. Things are going to get confused; and maybe, in a room in Solihull or Croydon, people do not want to talk to the man behind the desk about how they were ritually raped. It was easy for me to do a basic risk assessment for this woman and find that she was a victim of a horrific crime. I am delighted to say that the next day she was released from Yarl's Wood. I am no conspiracy theorist, but it seems a bit suspicious that every person I have been to see has been released, so I plan on visiting every woman in Yarl's Wood over the next few weeks.

Mr Virendra Sharma: If that is true, as everybody accepts it is, we will ask my hon. Friend to visit all the centres in future.

Jess Phillips: I am on quite a lot of Committees, I have two small kids and I do not live anywhere near Bedford, but I will give it a go: I will shut the place by stealth if that is what it takes.

What I saw when I visited Yarl's Wood was not some horrific sort of gulag; there was a visitors centre on the front of what was clearly a prison, on a really weird and eerie estate, and the staff were all completely lovely. It was more than reasonable of them to let me see another person who I had not been down to visit. I did not see any horrors, but given the stories that the women told me, and because I am trained and have an understanding of what it is like for women who have suffered terrible crimes against their person, I can totally understand why they find detention so difficult.

If the detention system has to continue, there is an absolute need to ensure a gender-specific service, exactly as we would commission gender-specific services in our local authorities. No local authority commissioning framework would ever allow a women's refuge to be run completely by men. We have to stop detaining women who have been victims of brutal and enduring sexual violence without even offering them proper counselling or any support while they are there. None of these women seems to have had anyone talk to them about these problems.

Furthermore, we have to make sure that 28 days actually means 28 days and that the very first questions asked by those processing any women are what has brought them to this country and whether they have been trafficked. We should be using the very good systems put in place by the Government in the national referral mechanism—although they are good only if they are used. In my opinion, Yarl's Wood should be closed immediately, because the detention system as it stands is not fit for women.

1.47 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased that we are having a debate on this important issue. The current refugee crisis in Europe makes the debate on immigration detention particularly relevant, as the majority of people in detention centres are those who have sought asylum in the UK. I hope that the events in Europe and the Mediterranean this week result in wider changes in the UK's policies towards refugees and asylum seekers.

As many in the Chamber will be aware, the UK has one of the largest immigration detention systems in Europe, with between 2,500 and 3,000 people locked up at any one time. Although most are detained for less than a month, the Migration Observatory, based in the University of Oxford, has found that around 6% of detainees are held for more than six months and 1% for more than a year. Guidance states that people should be detained pending removal only when their exit from the country is imminent, but the reality is that many people are locked up for weeks or months before these arrangements are made. Detaining people for longer than needed is a waste of resources and can only be traumatic for those detained.

In 2013, two thirds of asylum-seeking women leaving Yarl's Wood were released to continue their claims in the community, leaving serious questions about why they were detained in the first place. Is locking up a woman who has fled persecution really appropriate? There are also specific issues facing women. The charity Refugee Women has found that most of the women detained after seeking asylum are survivors of rape, sexual violence and abuse. For those women, detention adds to the trauma they experienced in their home countries. This is made worse by the conditions in detention centres such as Yarl's Wood, where male members of staff have been reported to supervise women in intimate situations. As we can well imagine, these conditions can have a very negative effect on an individual's mental health.

That is why we need specific guidelines that protect women in immigration detention systems. For example, we need to make sure that survivors of rape and pregnant women are not detained. We must also remember that there are alternatives to detention, which result in high levels of compliance, as well as high rates of voluntary returns back to the country of origin. Clearly, there are cases where detention would be appropriate, but it has to be as a last resort.

The joint inquiry by the all-party parliamentary groups on refugees and on migration hit the nail on the head when it said that we need a "wholesale change in culture" around immigration detention. I believe that such a cultural change is long overdue. I hope that this debate will help to start it.

1.50 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) for his important work in this area. I sense that there will be a change as a result of this debate, which is really exciting.

I agree with the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) that immigration is traditionally a minority policy interest, but it is wonderful to see how many people have attended and participated in today's debate. That, too, is very exciting. I also support his suggestion that a working group should be established to look at some important questions, which could actually save the Home Office money. These would include looking at the statutory limitations; looking at community-based supervised alternatives; reflecting on policy on access to legal advice for immigration detainees; ensuring that there is a presumption against the use of immigration detention; assessing the impact of the removal of

section 4(1)(c) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which deals with bail addresses; and examining the section 55 duty in relation to decisions to detain parents, separating them from their children.

I shall be brief, because I know you are keen to wrap up the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. On the separation of families, a series of reports have been undertaken on how the separation of parents from their children leads to long-term problems, which often have to be dealt with later, at a cost to local authority budgets and so forth. For example, a recent report, “Fractured Childhoods: The separation of families by immigration detention”, found that of 200 children separated from 111 parents, 85 were in foster or local authority care during their parents’ detention. I know that that is not only detrimental to the children’s welfare, but amounts to a significant cost to the public purse. Furthermore, parents were detained for an average of 270 days, which seems excessive. Children described the extreme distress they experienced: losing weight, having nightmares, suffering from insomnia, crying frequently and becoming deeply unhappy. In 92 out of 111 cases, parents were eventually released—with detention having served no purpose. In the light of the issues brought up in the debate, it is clear that there is so much that we could be doing.

I am disappointed that I have not yet been able to visit Yarl’s Wood. Perhaps I should not have asked permission. I should have just gone in, like my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). A constituent came to see me at my advice surgery on Friday. I am not sure whether data protection applies, but he was detained up to August; perhaps we can compare notes and establish whether my hon. Friend had anything to do with his release! The sense of despair that comes from the deprivation of liberty was evident. We believe that we should try to make a strong case to overcome that.

Finally, for the benefit of curious MPs, if the Minister thought that there was some sort of conspiracy in Members of Parliament wishing to visit Yarl’s Wood, it is worth recalling that the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) said that he had visited social care places when he was a member of a local authority. I am a huge believer in elected members across the piece—whether it be at regional, local or national level—visiting children’s centres, care homes, schools, workplaces and so forth. It is crucial, for example, that Members who do not have a formal role on the Front Benches know what is going on. When it comes to Feltham or other places, visits by elected Members are important, as special provision can be made for our visits.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Does the hon. Lady agree with the point I raised earlier—that the Border Agency must start to work better with elected Members of the devolved Administrations and allow them to represent constituents in the same way that she and I can represent them?

Catherine West: Of course. An earlier contribution highlighted the crucial work of volunteer visitors. As elected Members, we have a special duty—a “conscience of the nation” approach—in maintaining that visiting. It is particularly important in the summer, when MPs are sometimes accused of having too long a summer holiday, for MPs to fill up their time with helpful visits to these sorts of places.

In conclusion, I reiterate the importance of the potential working group. Colleagues have said how it might work. It is important for it to examine the questions I mentioned earlier. I thank the Minister, in advance of his summing up, for this morning’s letter to me, advising that I could have a meeting with the Minister for Community and Social Care, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). I understand that Yarl’s Wood is in his constituency patch. Who knows, he might invite me to visit the centre some time to have a cup of tea together.

1.56 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to speak in this incredible debate, and to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and the hon. Members for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and for Bedford (Richard Fuller) for securing it. I thank members of the all-party groups on refugees and on migration for their joint inquiry, and I want to acknowledge the work of Sarah Teather in bringing this about.

This report has rightly been welcomed as a powerful intervention in the debate on the reform of our detention system. We have heard excellent contributions from, I think, 25 hon. Members today—contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central; the hon. Members for Enfield, Southgate and for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald); the hon. Member for Bedford; my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma); the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith); my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart); the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy); my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith); the hon. Members for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), for Fylde (Mark Menzies) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and—excuse me if I do not pronounce it correctly—Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron); the hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani); my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq); the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies); the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael); the hon. Members for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) and for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens); my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) and for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell); the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin); and my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West).

The issue unites not just the House, as is clear from the debate, but the country, demonstrating the powerful and overwhelming case for reform of a system that is not fit for purpose. Members have raised a range of issues—on time limits; the detention of the wrong people; the unnecessary deprivation of liberty; the experience of women, often victims of sexual abuse or human trafficking, in detention; the need for gender-specific processes; poor case management; access to justice and legal advice; access to health services; the desperate issue of self-harm and suicide; mental health issues caused by, as well as worsened by, detention; family separation and accompanied minors; the long-term impacts on the well-being of children; the training of staff; and the desperate need to look at alternatives to detention.

[Seema Malhotra]

We in the Labour party have repeatedly called for a review and reform of immigration detention policy. The current system is failing people who are scarred by a system where report after report shows detention being used disproportionately and for far too long. In fact, Home Office statistics for the first quarter of this year alone show 3,483 people held in immigration removal centres. Two thirds of them have been held for over 28 days. Of those, 488 had been detained for more than six months, 153 had been detained for more than a year, 25 had been detained for more than two years and one individual had been detained for more than four years. Not only is that expensive, but indefinite detention has been shown to have a highly negative impact on mental health and well-being. Will the Minister give the House more information on the reasons for such long detention times? What are the reasons for 488 people being held for more than six months? What countries are they from? What on earth could be the cause of someone being in detention for more than four years? What steps has the Minister taken to reduce that time?

Shockingly, between 2011 and 2014 the Government paid out nearly £15 million in compensation following claims for unlawful detention. The cost of failure is plain to see. What steps has the Minister taken to reduce that bill? What analysis has he undertaken of the root cause of these errors? The need for reform is clear, in order to achieve not just administrative excellence, with greater efficiency for the taxpayer, but a more proportionate use of detention in line with the principles of fairness and justice, with detention only as a last call, not a first call, as it has become.

I want to focus my remarks on three main areas: the need to end detention without limit; the reform so desperately needed for women detainees; and the need for us to rethink afresh about alternatives to detention. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central and the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate, along with many others, spoke eloquently and passionately about the need for time limits. The UK is one of only a few countries in Europe not to have a statutory time limit, and we are out of sync even with Taiwan, Georgia and the United States, to name but a few. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees detention guidelines outline the need for statutory time limits. In May, the Home Secretary indicated that the length of detention is being considered by Home Office officials as part of a broader review of immigration detention. It is four months since then, so will the Minister update us on the progress of those discussions, on whether that is part of Stephen Shaw's review and on when that review is expected to report? With broad support from both inside and outside the House for limited detention times, including from Nick Hardwick, Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, and with so many calling for an end to indefinite detention, surely it is time to move forward. That point is made even more poignant with the extensive humanitarian crisis we are facing.

In August, we also saw another devastating report on Yarl's Wood by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, and the experience of so many women in detention remains shocking: a third of detainees were transported to the centre overnight; the reception process took too long; detainees did not receive an adequate induction;

even with the knowledge that the risk of self-harm is high, safeguarding procedures are underdeveloped; women on suicide watch report being observed by male guards, even in intimate situations; and detainees report feeling unsafe and being subject to sexually inappropriate comments from staff. Those experiences would be harrowing for anyone, but we must recall that a high proportion of women asylum seekers have also reported previous experience of domestic or sexual abuse, and they will be particularly vulnerable. Nearly half of those who go to Yarl's Wood report saying that they feel suicidal on arrival. Yarl's Wood is an embarrassment and we need to look at closure.

As has been mentioned today, nearly 100 pregnant women were detained last year, yet 90%—I repeat, 90%—of them were released. When 12 cases were examined, it was found that eight of these women should not have been detained or they should have been released earlier. A response to a written question about women detainees over the past three years showed that 834 out of more than 1,600 detained were released. Why were so many just released back into the community and not sent abroad?

I thank organisations such as Detention Action and Women for Refugee Women, which are represented here today, for the extraordinary work they do in raising the needs and the voices of those they support. In December last year, the shadow Home Secretary called for the prohibition of the detention of pregnant women and of individuals who have been trafficked or tortured or who have suffered sexual abuse. That proposal was also in Labour's manifesto. It beggars belief that in the face of so much evidence the Government have still sat on their hands. It is also disappointing that the UN special rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, who published her report on the UK in June, was denied access to Yarl's Wood; the Home Office has another chance here, and I hope the Minister will take that much-needed step and make a positive announcement today.

Finally, I wish to say a few words about alternatives to detention, as the report we are debating has laid out clear arguments for reviewing those. The UK has a long way to go to identify alternatives that are more cost-efficient and, in many cases, more effective. There is growing evidence from other countries, including Sweden and Australia, as to the benefits of stronger community-based approaches which allow for individualised case management, better access to legal advice and far less of a negative impact on well-being. Research has also shown that individuals who believe that they have been through a fair refugee status or visa determination process are more likely to accept and comply with a negative outcome. Will the Minister therefore update the House on the steps he may now be considering and how he plans to develop effective alternatives that go beyond a requirement to report or electronic monitoring?

We welcome this report and its findings, and thank those who have taken part. We also welcome the challenge it has laid out on the wholesale need for reform. More people who are detained are subsequently released than return to their country of origin. We now have an opportunity to do the right thing, at a time when we know that there will be no expansion of the estate but that demand is increasing. It is not just humane but vital that we see a culture change in our system and a

change in the use of immigration detention so that it is a measure of last resort, not first resort. I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.6 pm

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), and my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and for Bedford (Richard Fuller) on securing today's debate on the report of the joint inquiry by the all-party group on refugees and the all-party group on migration into the use of immigration detention in the UK. I am aware that all three of them, as well as others who have contributed to this debate, were part of the panel that produced this report, and I thank them and their fellow panel members for their work. The report raises interesting points on an extremely important issue, which we have examined and continue to examine carefully. Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I also want to place on the record my thanks to Sarah Teather, who chaired the panel and did some extremely important work. This was certainly a topic on which she was very impassioned, and remains so to this day.

This debate has highlighted the fact that immigration detention remains an important and emotive subject. Depriving an individual of their liberty is one of the most serious acts a state can take. The decision to detain should never be taken lightly and, once the decision has been taken, it is incumbent on the state to take proper steps to safeguard the health and welfare of those in detention. I always stress that those detained should be shown respect and dignity. This has certainly been an area of particular focus for me since I became the Minister for Immigration last year. I have visited a number of immigration removal centres; indeed my first visit this Parliament was to Yarl's Wood, and last week I was over at Heathrow seeing the two immigration centres there. The issue will command a continuing focus, on the part of not only the House, but Home Office Ministers.

The Home Office uses immigration powers of detention to prevent unauthorised entry to the UK or to effect the removal from the UK of people who have no right to be here. A lot of the debate has highlighted asylum, but IRCs deal with many broader matters, including foreign national offenders and cases where people have overstayed and are abusing their right to be in this country. It is therefore a complex picture, but it is important that we discuss these points in the way we all have during today's debate.

Seema Malhotra *rose*—

James Brokenshire: I have a limited time to cover quite a lot of points. My normal approach would be to take lots of interventions, but I would like to make a number of points in response to those raised, if hon. Members would allow me.

It is very important that we are able to remove people who have no right to remain in the UK and those who have abused our hospitality by committing crimes. We would always prefer those with no right to be here to leave of their own volition, and a number of mechanisms in the Immigration Acts and the forthcoming immigration Bill are designed to promote that, but unfortunately it

does not always happen. When individuals refuse to leave voluntarily, we must be able to enforce their removal. That may well require a period of detention, which we aim to keep as short as possible.

We need to be clear about the fact that detention is not only a necessary tool to support the removal from the United Kingdom of foreign criminals, which I am sure Members in all parts of the House would endorse, but equally important in managing non-compliance by people who are here without lawful basis of stay.

As a number of Members have mentioned, the report's principal recommendation is that immigration detention should be subject to a statutory time limit of 28 days. I should explain that it is not possible to detain under immigration powers indefinitely, although some have sought to suggest otherwise. Indefinite detention is unlawful. To be lawful, detention must be based on one of the statutory powers in the Immigration Acts, and must accord with the limits set out in case law from both the domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights. There must be a reasonable prospect of removal within a reasonable time frame, and the Home Office must continue to show how a case is being progressed to removal if detention is to be maintained.

Our published policy makes clear that there is a presumption in favour of liberty and that detention should be used only as a last resort, but there will be some cases in which longer periods of detention may be appropriate. The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) asked me about that. "A reasonable prospect of removal within a reasonable time frame" is a highly case-specific consideration. A reasonable time frame may be longer, for example, for a person with a history of non-compliance with immigration conditions than for a more compliant individual. Criminality and public protection concerns will also play heavily into the consideration of the length of the reasonable time frame. There are some very difficult cases involving foreign-national offenders who may be seeking to frustrate their removal. No doubt we will return to the issue of how that can be managed, in the context of, for instance, the use of electronic tagging, and I look forward to those future debates.

I am sure Members agree that it would be totally unacceptable to reward foreign criminals and illegitimate migrants who refuse to comply with immigration law by requiring their release, even when removal was imminent, simply because a blanket time limit had been reached. Members may recall that an amendment to introduce a statutory limit of 60 days was proposed in another place during the Report stage of the Immigration Bill last year, and was rejected by a majority of over 300. The rejected time limit was significantly more than the 28-day limit proposed in this report. In the light of that earlier clear vote, the Government do not currently propose to return to legislate on the issue, but we will keep it under review.

The report recommends that more use should be made of alternatives to detention in the UK, and I entirely agree with that recommendation. Our published policy already reflects the view that detention should be used only as a last resort, and that alternatives should be considered whenever possible. I am considering carefully what further steps may be taken in that regard.

[James Brokenshire]

Concerns have been raised that we do not deport or remove people quickly enough, and that they may therefore spend longer in detention. Concerns have also been raised about the number of people who are released from detention rather than being removed from the UK. We are keen to ensure that deportation or removal takes place promptly. We streamlined immigration and appeal processes in the Immigration Act 2014 to support that, and we are considering what further steps can be taken.

People may be released from detention for a wide variety of reasons. For example, their circumstances may have changed in a way that makes detention inappropriate, they may have been granted bail, or their removal may have been prevented or delayed by unexpected obstacles such as the securing of travel documents or the lodging of late legal challenges. It does not follow automatically from a release that the original decision to detain was wrong.

However, there is more that we can do in this area. Work is in hand to examine the purpose, operation and size of the detention estate. As part of that work, we will be looking at the issues of gatekeeping for entry to detention and the review of detention, once authorised, to see how those important functions might be enhanced. We will certainly reflect on the points that have been made about caseworking. I take this very seriously, because I want to ensure that the use of detention is appropriate and is applied in the right manner.

Part 2 of the report focuses on the physical conditions of detention, including the standard of accommodation provided in immigration removal centres and healthcare representation. It is common ground that when we do detain, it is vitally important for individuals to be held in humane but secure accommodation, and for us to ensure that their welfare is safeguarded at all times. Obviously, we have an overview from Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, and I meet representatives of the independent monitoring boards that operate in immigration removal centres, whose reports I take extremely seriously.

Following the publication of the report, we asked Stephen Shaw, who was conducting an independent analysis of welfare in IRCs, to look specifically at part 2 as part of his review. We have not yet received Mr Shaw's report and had an opportunity to consider it fully, and it would not be appropriate for me to speculate on its findings, but I assure the House that we will be considering it very carefully indeed. It is a serious piece of work, and we will give its response serious consideration.

I am conscious that I am nearing the end of the 10 minutes that Front Benchers are customarily allowed. I apologise again to Members for that fact that I may not have been able to respond to every single point. I thank the members of the all-party parliamentary groups for their work in putting the report together, and I thank the Members who secured today's debate. I take this issue extraordinarily seriously, and the Home Secretary does as well. That is why we commissioned Stephen Shaw's report, and, once it has been concluded, we will update the House accordingly.

2.16 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): On behalf of the hon. Members for Bedford (Richard Fuller) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and my own behalf I thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate. I am delighted to say that there were too many speakers for me to mention individually. All the speeches were characterised by powerful stories and strong arguments. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) is right: we have stumbled into this situation under the auspices of successive Governments, and we all have a responsibility to resolve the position and sort it out.

We have heard from 25 speakers representing four parties on both sides of the House, and there has not been a dissenting voice on our central recommendation.

Fiona Mactaggart: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Paul Blomfield: I do not think that I have time, but I give way briefly.

Fiona Mactaggart: Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that, although the Minister referred to Stephen Shaw's report, we still do not know when it is going to be published, and we do not know what consultation will take place with medical experts and organisations representing people whose mental health is suffering in detention about the consequent conclusions of the Home Office?

Paul Blomfield: Yes I do, and I am also concerned about the fact that the remit of the report is too narrowly drawn.

Our central recommendation is for a statutory limit on immigration detention. The cultural change that that will produce—an end to the presumption to detain, and the development of community-based alternatives—will restore humanity and justice to the system, and it will be more efficient and effective.

I hope that the Government will take account of the debate. The Minister set out the Home Office's policy and, indeed, the law on indefinite detention. The problem is that the reality does not match it, and I hope that he will acknowledge the need for change.

Let me end by joining others in thanking Sarah Teather for her work. I also thank all the detainees who gave evidence to us, many of whom have watched the debate today. I hope that they will see the difference that their contribution has made, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports the recommendations of the report of the Joint Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration, *The Use of Immigration Detention in the United Kingdom*; has considered the case for reform of immigration detention; and calls on the Government to respond positively to those recommendations.

Sustainable Development Goals

[Relevant document: Oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 8 September 2015, on Sustainable Development Goals, HC 337.]

2.19 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Sustainable Development Goals.

This motion also stands in the name of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg).

On three occasions this week, the House has had the opportunity to debate the shocking and harrowing scenes we have witnessed through the media, as displaced and vulnerable people risk their lives, and often those of their children, to escape conflict and a poverty of existence that renders the possibility of a horrible death in the Mediterranean preferable to staying in their homes. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for having granted this debate, but it does not, at least on the face of the motion before the House, afford a fourth such opportunity, but in truth, given what we have witnessed, it is not only timely but relevant to the underlying causes of what we have seen, as well as to our response as a nation and as individuals living in a global world.

The sustainable development goals that member states of the United Nations will agree this month and that have been driven entirely positively by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his largely unsung role as the chairman of the high-level panel responsible for the underlying principles are about the sort of world in which we want to live in this century. They are about doing what is right by the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, and they are ultimately about the security of this country and of the British people.

As I made clear in my remarks in the debate I secured on corruption in Africa shortly before the summer recess, what we do as a country on international aid matters. It matters not only because we have a moral responsibility to do what is right, but because our spending on aid represents an investment in our security here at home, as well as that of our neighbours and allies. Why that matters not, though it has much to do with the fact that the world is now so much a smaller and better connected place than when I and, I venture to say, most other hon. Members were growing up.

Technology has meant not only that we can know what is happening in nearly any part of the world almost immediately, but has made international travel faster and easier and revealed to many in the developing world the enormous disparity between our own comfortable lives and their daily struggle for existence. It is little wonder, when faced with extreme poverty, that many are prepared to make the decision to try to reach the developed world, and it is no surprise at all that when conflict arises the decision to try to reach Europe or north America is made by quite so many people.

If we get development right, which is what the sustainable development goals seek for the entire world community, the scenes we have all witnessed over the last few weeks will become less frequent. But if we get it wrong, we will

not only have failed in the duties we pray for help in discharging at the beginning of each day in this House, but will have imperilled our own security and prosperity.

What are we talking about? What are the sustainable development goals that we and the world will shortly adopt and that will direct our aid spending over the coming years, and how, indeed, have we got here?

The millennium development goals, with which some at least are familiar, were agreed by the United Nations in 2001. Again, under the then Prime Minister, this country led the way, and the Labour party deserves suitable credit for that and for the moral lead the then Government demonstrated.

Eight in number, the millennium development goals sought to halve extreme poverty across the world by 2015, and in that, as the World Bank has reported, they have enjoyed a great deal of success. But that is not the whole story, for as the United Nations itself says in this year's "Millennium Development Goals Report":

"Although significant achievements have been made on many of the MDG targets worldwide, progress has been uneven across regions and countries, leaving significant gaps. Millions of people are being left behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location."

The message is clear, and was apparent even when the post-2015 development agenda began to be discussed by the world community three years ago: that while the goals have been largely effective, and have done much to shift the development focus to ensuring the eradication of poverty across the world, an enormous amount remains to be done.

It is with that in mind that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, with the Presidents of Liberia and Indonesia, published their work on the post-2015 development agenda in 2013, to which the world community has since been working. The principles there set forth—that no one in the world should be left behind; that sustainable development should be at the core for all countries, developed and developing; that economies should be transformed to ensure prosperity through growth; that peace should prevail; that all should have access to open and accountable institutions; and that the world should act together to end poverty—underpin not only what has been done since, but the final draft of the sustainable development goals themselves.

We first saw those following the work recommended at the Rio+20 conference in the zero draft published last summer, and there were at that stage, to my mind and that of others, simply too many goals and targets, laudable as each no doubt was. I know—or at least I think I know—that that was the view of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. As she said in a speech on 7 July 2014:

"The UK wants a simple, clear and inspiring set of goals and targets that centre on eradicating poverty. We believe this needs to include the missing issues from the MDGs: economic growth, governance, rule of law, tackling corruption, peace and stability, and putting women and girls first. We know the argument is far from won in the UN. There is broad agreement about the need to tackle extreme poverty...but a lack of consensus about how we tackle the root causes".

In her aim of reducing the number of goals, targets and indicators, my right hon. Friend has been largely unsuccessful, although I gather from following the negotiations that that is not for want of trying. However, I pay tribute to her work and that of the Department in

[Stephen Phillips]

carrying forward the efforts started by the Prime Minister, and she has made enormous progress in focusing the goals from the zero draft, and in ensuring that things that the UK cares about—such as empowering women and girls—have taken centre stage. Under the leadership of my right hon. Friend, the expertise in DFID has benefited not only this country but the world community, and I have little doubt that that will rebound to her credit and that of Britain over the coming decades as the sustainable development goals lift many people out of extreme poverty and ensure a prosperity and peaceful existence that helps to secure our own position here at home.

As with all documents negotiated at an international level, there remain things that we in the UK think could perhaps have been done better, including the way in which some of the goals are framed. Goal 4, for example, seeks to:

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

There is a plethora of linked targets and indicators, of course, but how, objectively, progress and compliance can properly be measured, particularly with poor or absent data sets in many developing countries, remains to be seen. Goal 14 provides another example. It requires that we:

“Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.”

What that means to the Government of, say, a west African littoral state may be very different from what it means to a landlocked country in central Asia. How the goals will be interpreted in the coming years in the light of the 169 targets and 304 indicators represents a challenge for the international community, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will say something in responding to the debate about DFID’s approach to this task.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): The goals are broad and ambitious and a wide and rigorous consultation process has been undertaken. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the goals relate to many sections of society?

Stephen Phillips: I do agree that they relate to many sections of society, and I would go further and say they stretch across almost the entire work that Governments in this country and throughout the developed world do. These goals will, of course, apply to the developed world as well as the developing world.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend on securing this important debate. May I take him back to the focus on specific goals and SDG 5 on gender equality? I share his concern about the plethora of targets and the implementation. Does he agree that we must ensure that the progress we made in the last Parliament in targeting violence against women and girls is not lost and that we must ensure more security for women and girls in some of the most unstable countries in the world, otherwise we will never achieve our aim of securing growth and prosperity in these countries?

Stephen Phillips: I agree with my hon. Friend. The truth of the matter is we cannot make progress on eradicating poverty across the world and ensuring peace and stability for the most vulnerable people unless and until we get the message across that girls and women must have precisely the same opportunities as boys and men, and we must protect them in all respects.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): On gender equality, what could be further achieved on FGM, which is currently quite high profile and about which people often contact me?

Stephen Phillips: FGM is, in a sense, part of the sustainable development goals. It is an abhorrent practice, and this Government and previous Governments have done what they can to change the law here to ensure that we stamp it out as much as we can. I know from my own questions to Ministers in the last Parliament and in this one that it is an important issue for this Government. The whole House agrees not only that FGM is an important issue but that it needs to be eradicated.

The strength of the millennium development goals was their clarity—their ability not only to focus minds and action but to communicate clearly what the world sought to achieve and by when. We set out to reduce extreme poverty by half, and by this year more than 700 million people will no longer live on less than \$1.25 a day. We set out to eliminate the disparity in primary school enrolment between boys and girls, and we have done just that. The world also set out to tackle HIV, malaria and a host of other diseases, on which incredible progress has been made, despite my own bout of dengue last year.

In 2030, however, when I rise to challenge the Government of the day on the progress that has been made—I give notice now that I fully intend to do just that in 15 years’ time—will it be as clear, given the more amorphous terms of the sustainable development goals, that we have progressed as much? I hope it will—no doubt the whole House does—but I have my doubts that it will be as easy to show that we have made real achievements in tackling the root causes of the problems that do so much to impoverish the lives of many across the developing world and keep them in poverty.

No doubt we will have made real achievements by then, but the problem with international development that, at least until the last few weeks, all Members will have encountered is that it is often difficult to explain to constituents not only what we are doing but that those actions are having a real effect and benefiting all of us here just as much as they benefit those whose lives we are seeking to make better. This country spends—as it must now do legally and, I add, morally—0.7% of our gross national income on international development, yet how many of us are challenged again and again over that figure and over the value for money it delivers, particularly in times of necessary austerity in the public finances. For many, it is not enough that we are doing the right thing; we need to show that what we are doing delivers value for money and security for this country.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) understood this problem when he was Secretary of State. The fact that we have not only delivered our international obligation in relation to the 0.7%, when so many others have not, but also begun to

communicate the effectiveness and importance of DFID's spending in this area to a sometimes sceptical public owes much to the work that he did in transforming the agenda and lifting DFID from the shadows to become a Department that is properly seen as being partly responsible for the security of this country and its standing in the world. As I am sure the Minister will accept, we would not be where we are but for my right hon. Friend, nor would the Department have been able to deliver what it has delivered in negotiating the sustainable development goals and ensuring that the final draft that has emerged from three years of hard work will achieve as much as I believe it will.

Before closing and affording others the opportunity to express their own views as we move towards the point at which the goals will be adopted in New York later this month, I want to say a word or two about data and about money. I have already mentioned that, assuming the goals are adopted in New York, progress and compliance in relation to the goals is to be measured by reference to 169 targets and 304 indicators. Ensuring familiarity with those targets and indicators among non-governmental organisations, Government Departments, donors, recipients and others will represent a challenge on a scale for which the international development community is perhaps ill prepared.

The education of policy makers and those who implement their decisions will be critical, as will the resourcing of developing countries in particular, not just to educate those who need to carry out the work but to enable robust data to be collected routinely and in a manner that permits easy utilisation. Too often in developing countries, donors and the United Nations require data in different formats that are either absent or incapable of collection at least in the form in which they are sought. Too often, data that have already been provided are sought again and again, even if in slightly different ways, because the churn of staff within NGOs and donors means that everyone has their own way of working and measuring success against the indicators to which they are working.

This is an issue on which DFID, as a world leader, has a particular role to play. Insofar as it can properly be done, standardising data collection and sets across the international development community would not only enable progress on the sustainable development goals to be more transparent and easily communicable but free up the time of civil servants and others who are too frequently found tearing their hair out trying to find substitute markers for data for which they are being asked but to which they have no access. I would like to hear from the Minister that he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will look into this agenda and make progress on it after the adoption of the goals. As I know from my own travels across the developing world, and across Africa in particular, that would do a great deal to help.

Then there is the question of money. It is unacceptable, given the commitments made by the richest countries in the world, that so many are still failing to meet the 0.7% target set at the Gleneagles summit. We have met that target, and I have little doubt that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary would agree that we have pulled our weight, yet we remain the only major developed economy that has done so. As I have repeatedly said, doing so ensures our own safety and security and those of our allies, and they need to pull their weight too.

Catherine West: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Stephen Phillips: I am afraid not; I want to make some progress.

The financing for development conference in Addis Ababa in July was supposed to offer a milestone for others to meet their obligations, but very little appears to have changed and there seems to be no new money on the table. I hope to hear from the Minister that this is a priority for the Government, and that DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are doing everything they can to ensure that our international partners do as we have done.

It is true that the current migration crisis has been driven largely by events in Syria, in relation to which, in my view, the House took the wrong decision last year. However, it remains the case that many seeking to reach Europe and these shores are coming from north and west Africa and elsewhere. They are seeking to come here because their poverty dictates that they take the hard decision to leave their homes to seek a better life in Europe. If we get the sustainable development goals and their implementation right, fewer will choose that route. If we eradicate poverty in all its forms, as the world will promise to do in New York, there will be no point to that migration.

These goals matter. They matter to the garment worker in Dhaka in Bangladesh, to the fisherman in Bureh in Sierra Leone and to the market trader in Belen market in Iquitos in Peru. But they also matter to me, as they should matter to all Members in this House and to everyone we seek to represent as we discharge our duties in this place. Though they may still have failings, I welcome the sustainable development goals and I commend the motion to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Before I call the next speaker, I must point out that 19 Members, including Front Benchers, wish to speak in the short time left before 5 o'clock. Rather than imposing a time limit, I suggest that we do what we did in the last debate, which worked well. If Members stop speaking after six or seven minutes, we will not need to impose a limit.

2.37 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing the debate and on his excellent speech, with which I concur. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting today's debate.

The International Development Committee has decided to make this subject the first area in a major inquiry during this Parliament into the sustainable development goals and their implementation. As the hon. and learned Gentleman said, the millennium development goals achieved fantastic results. The level of extreme poverty has halved globally over the last two decades, the number of out-of-school children of primary school age has fallen by almost half since 2000 and the maternal mortality ratio has declined by 45% worldwide.

[Stephen Twigg]

The sustainable development goals aim to offer an innovative approach to tackling the underlying causes of the challenges we face today. This week the International Development Committee heard from a number of witnesses about the importance of a different approach. Melissa Leach from the Institute of Development Studies spoke of “synergies” and the fact that great strides can be taken on multiple connected issues. In other words, this work cannot be left to the Department for International Development alone. We must take a cross-governmental approach.

The aim of goal 9 is to build

“resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation”.

Clearly, DFID needs to work with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and other Departments to take that forward. Goal 7 talks about ensuring

“access to affordable, reliable, sustainable...energy for all”.

DFID will need to work with the Department of Energy and Climate Change to take that forward. As the hon. and learned Gentleman said, the way in which we finance the goals will be critical, and we will need buy-in from the Treasury as well as from DFID.

I wish to focus on three areas: fragile states, education and data. There is a distinct challenge for people living in countries affected by conflict which is not addressed explicitly in the sustainable development goals. As David Miliband said yesterday, we cannot combat global poverty without a plan to support the people who face unique problems. Fragile states such as Somalia and Afghanistan account for 43% of people living below the poverty line, and every indication is that that will rise to as much as two thirds by 2030, and neither the millennium development goals nor the SDGs address that problem explicitly.

The International Rescue Committee has suggested that we should introduce concrete targets for supporting those in extreme poverty in conflict areas. For example, we could have the goal that all children in conflict settings have the opportunity of a safe education by 2030. We could adopt similar goals for fragile states in healthcare, violence against women and girls, and other areas. I ask the Government to consider taking that idea forward.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman said, a theme of the sustainable development goals is that no one should be left behind. The greater focus on inequality as well as poverty is important, as is addressing inequality both within and between nations. Seven out of 10 people live in countries where the gap between the rich and the poor is greater now than it was 30 years ago. We know from the evidence from our own country, as well as from other parts of the world, that rising inequality has an impact on healthcare and other life chances.

One of the most important ways that we can tackle both inequality and poverty is to focus on education. I praise the Department for International Development for the fantastic work that it does on education. I am talking here about the work on girls' education, and the development of the No Lost Generation initiative, which has helped to highlight the education needs of child refugees from Syria. I hope that education will remain at the top of the agenda during our response to the current crisis. We know the difference that investment in

education makes in our own country, as well as in the poorest countries in the world. We need to look at increasing the proportion of DFID spend that goes towards education projects.

Catherine West: May I say how much progress the hon. Gentleman has already made in his new role? On the issue of investment in education or in anything else related to development, how much will that be undermined by spending some of DFID's budget domestically? The Minister might want to refer to this later. Is there any sense of what might be cut from the development budget to make up for domestic issues that might emerge as a result of the refugee crisis?

Stephen Twigg: I was reassured yesterday by an answer the Secretary of State gave me on that precise point. We have not seen a shift in the Government's definition of official development assistance. It has always been the case that the first-year costs of resettling refugees can come from ODA, and provided that that has not changed, I am reassured, but that will almost certainly be one of the items that the Select Committee considers as part of our immediate inquiry into the refugee crisis.

The SDGs have extended the scope of our commitment to secondary and tertiary education, and that is welcome. Indeed there is evidence that bolstering secondary and tertiary education can benefit primary education by developing a new generation of teachers and educational institutions. With regard to higher education, there is an important opportunity for the UK to take the lead. We can work with our universities to help develop higher education in the poorest countries in the world. We have real excellence in this area and could benefit from sharing our expertise with others. I urge the Minister and his Department to work with colleagues in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the university sector to take that matter forward.

In evidence this week, Jamie Drummond, from the organisation ONE, spoke of a data crisis that needed solving. We need to improve the quality of data on those who are being left behind around the world. He told us that around a third of births in the world are not registered and that around two thirds of the causes of death in the world are not registered. Most data points for extreme poverty in developing countries are, on average, around a decade out of date. We must improve our data, so that we make decisions that are as effective as possible. This country has huge expertise in statistics and data analytics in Cambridge and London. I urge the Minister to look at ways in which we can share that expertise to build the knowledge base and institutions in the poorest countries to improve our contribution in this area.

At the turn of the millennium, the world made a commitment to tackle some of the great scourges of our time. It is right to say that we have made important progress in that regard. I agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman that we can be proud that our country has achieved the 0.7% target, and we should challenge others, including our European partners, to do the same. The summit in New York later this month is an important milestone. The goals matter, but what matters more is effective implementation. This House can play an important role in ensuring that that happens.

2.45 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing this debate. I am struck that, over the course of my short life, the population of the globe has doubled. In looking at the rather numerous sustainable development goals, I note that there is no mention of population and the control thereof, by which I mean families and countries living within their means in terms of their populations. In view of the fact that population growth drives many of the problems that we are admirably seeking to deal with, it is a notable exception.

I was struck at first by the number of goals and the additional notes attached to those goals. Quite an industry seems to have grown up around the conversations that we have about the challenges that we all face. It concerns me that there has been such a growth in that industry and in the level of bureaucracy. I think we can all agree that a number of the goals are admirable and that we should seek to achieve them, but it worries me that we have ended up with 17 goals and more than 100 additional notes. If the Chamber will indulge me I will seek to try to slim down the number of goals that we should aim to achieve. I will do so not because I think anybody will necessarily implement Phillip Lee's approach to development, but because it will highlight the fact that if we had more clarity and simplification, we may be much more successful in achieving our goals.

It is also noticeable that there is no mention of individual responsibility or of the word "opportunity". Equality is all very well in some contexts in terms of outcomes, but we also need to emphasise that we need to see opportunity—the opportunity to be able to earn enough money to pay for food and a home.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Does my hon. Friend recognise that it is incredibly important to have good governance in those countries so that we can spend the money properly?

Dr Lee: Of course, and that is why I have never been particularly enthusiastic about setting a spending goal for international development funding. I would happily come here and vote to spend 1% of GDP if I thought that it would be spent effectively in countries with good governance. The problem is that there is a litany of development expenditure projects in countries where there is poor governance and where the money has not been spent appropriately or had the desired impact.

One of the goals on which I would concentrate is on healthy lives, but why not just have the simple goal of eradicating infectious disease? It is not simple to achieve, but it is simple to say and quantify. To eradicate infectious disease we must know where it is. I got into some trouble a couple of years ago for pointing out that we needed to know who had HIV and hepatitis among the migrant population. Unless we know where the disease is, how can we seek to eradicate it? I think eradicating infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis would be an admirable goal and shared by significant numbers of people in South Africa and the near vicinity.

My second goal would be to achieve gender equality. When I look at some communities in this country and some countries around the world, the absence of women in positions of power and female role models in communities and families is, in part, why those communities

have problems. For example, I strongly believe that if we emancipate women in Pakistani, Somali and Bangladeshi communities in this country, they would be less likely to have problems with extremism and young men going on jihadi holidays to Syria and elsewhere.

My third goal would be to live within the means of the planet, which I think encompasses at least half a dozen of the goals that the report has sought to detail. If we live within the means of the planet we do not need to start talking about carbon dioxide emissions or anything else. If we live within the means of the planet we will be doing just that: the environment will be stable, biodiversity will be protected and we will all have access to sustainable energy and the like. Living within the means of the planet is complicated but something we can achieve, but let us keep the words simple so that we know what we are seeking to do.

My fourth goal would be to reduce inequality between countries, not within countries. If everybody was equal within a country, where would be the desire to better oneself? I do not believe in economic equality; it does not exist. We must have a sense of seeking to better ourselves and for our children to have a better life. That is human nature and part of the natural order of things. Inequality between countries is in part what is causing the current migration crisis. In fact, it is probably about inequality between continents. Anyone could have predicted 10, 20 or 30 years ago that there would be migrant pressure from Africa into Europe. It is economic migration because the population of Africa is growing at a much faster rate than that of Europe. If someone is born into Senegal, Ivory Coast, Nigeria or wherever, they will migrate for a better life, job, house and future for their families. That is a statement of the obvious and among the recent migration flux, which undoubtedly has something to do with war, significant numbers of people are also travelling from Africa for a better life.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments about some of the reasons why people in parts of Africa want to migrate to Europe. Was it deliberate or an oversight not to mention the idea that some or most of those people are migrating here to take advantage of the benefit system? Did he not mention that because he knows it is not the case?

Dr Lee: That intervention seeks to put words into my mouth that I did not say in an attempt to score a political point. Congratulations. I am not even going to address that point. The bigger picture is that people will move for a better life, and if there are more people on one continent and it is not as rich as another, it seems obvious that that will happen. That challenge will transcend not just my political lifetime but others to come, and it is something that we should discuss more.

My final goal would be to seek and disseminate knowledge. All these challenges require knowledge, understanding, innovation and invention. The challenges of peace and the stabilisation of the middle east and Africa require the dissemination of information to people there. If we are to have one goal above all it should be to seek new knowledge and disseminate it more widely.

Mrs Helen Grant: The goals are broad, but does my hon. Friend agree that their breadth is helpful to campaign groups in national countries so that they can bring Governments to account based on those extensive goals?

Dr Lee: That may well be the case, but my broader point is that if we have a shorter list and more clarity, we are more likely to achieve those goals.

It is admirable to think long term and strategically, and to address the big challenges, but I crave some simplicity and clarity so that we can all achieve what we want, which is a sustainable planet.

2.54 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on giving us this opportunity to debate what the agreement calls

“a plan of action for people, the planet and prosperity”—

in other words, an agenda aimed at nothing short of transforming the world we live in.

I start by declaring an interest in this debate, as a former employee of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, and until May a member of the Scottish working group on the sustainable development goals, which I may speak about briefly if time allows. I also declare an interest as a member of the human race and as a citizen of planet earth. The agreement to be signed by world leaders in New York later this month will affect every single one of us, as the draft declaration says, resolving

“to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet.”

We have spent a lot of time this week in the House discussing the very real scars and the insecurity faced by too many of our fellow human beings, and the realities of the tyranny of poverty and want, so it is fitting that we can end the week looking towards the better world that we all know is possible.

We have heard some of the history of the sustainable development goals, signed with a genuine sense of optimism and hope that they could be achieved by this year. Significant progress has been made, not least as a result of pressure applied during the Make Poverty History campaign 10 years ago. But the millennium development goals were not perfect and they have not been met in full. We have an opportunity now with the new sustainable development goals to do something different.

The question of the numbers is slightly academic. Perhaps there are 17 goals because that is how many are needed in order to build a framework that addresses holistically the numerous different challenges that still face the world. The fact that they are so wide in scope and that environmental considerations run through the goals, in addition to the specific goal on climate change, give us an opportunity to start to tackle poverty at its root. They recognise the necessity of tackling poverty among the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups, not just to meet basic material needs, but as a means of addressing the broader issue of inequality. We could have an interesting discussion of inequality between countries or within countries. It is important that the gap between the richest and poorest in whatever society is narrowed. All the evidence shows that it is better for society as a whole if we can narrow the inequality gap. That is the background to the principle of leaving no one behind that runs throughout the goals.

We are all responsible to some extent for improving the lot of our fellow human beings. The notion that people want to come here for a better life because we live in some sort of gilded society where the streets are paved with gold is slightly fanciful and wrong. One of the key factors in the sustainable development goals is that they will apply equally here as well: we are signing up to end poverty here at home, not simply doing it unto countries other than our own.

That takes us on to how DFID, and the UK Government as a whole, will approach the implementation of the SDGs. During the statement on the refugee crisis, the Prime Minister signalled a significant reshaping of

“the way we use our aid budget to serve our national interest.”—
[*Official Report*, 7 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 23-24.]

Personally, I believe our aid budget should be used to serve the interests of the poorest and the most vulnerable and marginalised around the world, so it will be interesting to know when we will get more detail of that shaping of the aid budget. It allows DFID to give recipient countries the opportunity to shape their own destinies and, importantly, to develop their own economies in the way that they see fit and not have to, for example, live with forced privatisation of national utilities or industries. I hope DFID will also look at how it works with its civil society partners here in the UK on aspects such as funding cycles. These SDGs have a 15-year time frame and most DFID grants come out on a three-year cycle. This is an opportunity to look at long-term root causes of poverty and to find the solutions that we need.

There is also the question of the resources available to DFID and how these are spent. We have heard a lot this week about the UK Government reaching the 0.7% target, and I congratulate them on living up to what has been a cross-party goal, but as I said to the Secretary of State yesterday, it has been missed for 40 years; £87 billion could have been spent on meeting the MDGs and negating some of the humanitarian crises that we face today. Members might not be aware that while the UK is meeting the 0.7% target and meeting the 2% towards NATO, I have had it confirmed in an answer that some of that money will be counted twice, towards both of those goals. It will be interesting to find out exactly how that is to operate. The Minister also confirmed to me yesterday that some of the 0.7% is being spent on a communications role in the DFID office in East Kilbride, whose responsibilities include promoting the benefits of the Union to the people of Scotland. Quite how that reaches the sustainable development goals I do not know, but perhaps we will hear.

That brings me to the role that Scotland has already started to play in meeting the sustainable development goals. The First Minister has announced that her Government want to adopt them in full and work towards implementing them around the world and at home. I mentioned that I was part of a working group that looked at how Scotland could contribute to the sustainable development goals. It included representatives from across civil society, academia and business and other stakeholders, including DFID officials. Given how constructively that worked with the DFID input, I am keen to hear whether the Minister would be interested in setting up a similar cross-departmental and multi-stakeholder group to take that kind of work forward.

Given the consensus there has been with the Scottish Government so far, perhaps the Minister will confirm whether a member of the Scottish Government or a Scottish official, or indeed anyone from the devolved Administrations, will be invited to take a place in the UK delegation to the summit in New York in September, because this is a universal framework. I accept that international development remains reserved to this Parliament for now, but the principles that we are discussing are not reserved; they are common to all humanity.

In his recent encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis said:

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.”

The Pope will attend the SDG summit, as will the Prime Minister. I hope that the Prime Minister will make a statement to the House when he returns to update us on progress and provide an opportunity for further scrutiny.

3.1 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing this important debate. I am rather disappointed to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), given that he chose—it is unusual in this sort of debate—to bring in party politics from Scotland. Actually, we are all trying to do the right thing by people around the world. It is not about Scotland being separate from the United Kingdom; it is about the whole United Kingdom. That is what Ministers in the Department for International Development are working towards.

I want to make two main points: the importance of placing the protection of biodiversity and nature within the new goals; and the human and economic benefits of doing so. These points relate both to the forthcoming summit on the sustainable development goals and to the conference in December at which UN member states will adopt a new agreement to tackle the threat of climate change.

I agree with the Government that the new goals must be people-centred and planet-sensitive. Environmental and development agendas have often been looked at separately, so this new change in approach is important. It helps tackle a criticism of millennium development goal 7—on ensuring environmental sustainability—which was ineffective because it was not mainstreamed into the rest of the framework. The Government are rightly aiming to ensure that environmental sustainability is mainstreamed right through the post-2015 framework.

Anyone who has ever been to sub-Saharan Africa will know the paradox that in an area with awe-inspiring examples of natural beauty there can be massive abuse of the environment alongside poverty. There is a way of improving the latter while preserving the former. A central theme of the new sustainable development goals is prosperity; ensuring that human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic progress occurs in harmony with nature. Goal 8 includes the aim that by 2030 Governments will have devised and implemented policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

The potential of tourism as a vital source for economic and development power that can strengthen and expand economies has not yet been fully realised. A 2014 World Bank report showed that tourism in Africa alone could create 3.8 million jobs over the next 10 years. Tourism in sub-Saharan Africa is growing. On average, international visitors spend £460 each, a substantial amount of money to the economies of developing countries and the businesses it supports.

There are obvious examples of successful tourism, such as Kenya and South Africa, but countries such as Mozambique are also making great strides, with international tourist arrivals growing by 284% between 2005 and 2010. Ensuring that tourism is sustainable is a key way to do that, by tying economic growth to environmental and wildlife protection.

Goal 15 is that we:

“Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, and halt or reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”

The goal is that by 2020 Governments integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts. Action to end the cruel poaching and trafficking of protected species and address the demand for and supply of illegal wildlife products is urgently needed. If the world loses endangered animals such as rhinos, elephants, tigers, silverback gorillas, and even lions, tourism opportunities will be much more limited. At the moment, many people travel to see these magnificent animals, spending money and creating much employment for the local people.

We need to increase the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities, ensuring that economic growth is not to the detriment of natural ecosystems and wildlife. Interweaving protection of the environment and biodiversity into the new sustainable development goals is the right thing to do economically and for the future of the planet, with almost universal agreement that doing it now will save the higher costs of trying to do it at a later date.

Making this work requires the last principle of the new goals as they stand: partnership. It will take global support to combat poaching and the trafficking of protected species, and in an ecologically interlinked world, nations will need to work together to mobilise and increase financial resources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems. It will also require partnerships between Governments, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations, and, importantly, the inclusion of the people on the ground. It is often said that the millennium development goal where the least progress was made was delivering partnerships. If that fails to happen again, it will be the world's poor, once again, who suffer most.

3.7 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I do not have anything like the background or expertise in this matter that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) clearly has, or indeed that of some other speakers. My take on his comments is that he in no way intended to be party political but was simply pointing out that while it is correct and laudable and we should celebrate the fact that the UK is now contributing 0.7% of GNI in international aid, it is vital that we ensure that that

[Peter Grant]

aid is used to help the poorest people in the poorest countries on the planet and not for other purposes that the Government may believe to be valid but are certainly not a proper use of international aid funding.

I can understand why the Government are concerned that 17 draft development goals might be too many, because managing a programme of that size and complexity, keeping an eye on 17 targets all the time, is a difficult task. Having looked at all 17, I would not have liked to have decided which ones to leave out, because it is very difficult to identify any one that we could afford to leave behind—clearly anything that is not listed among the sustainable development goals will not get a lot of attention from the international community in future. I like the way that Ban Ki-moon has suggested we look at them: to put them under six different categories such as “people” and “dignity”.

Perhaps the aspect that is most seriously missing is solidarity: the feeling that, as somebody once said, we are all in this together. The whole SDG process can almost be summed up by one statement and one injunction. The statement is, “We didn’t inherit this planet from our parents; we have borrowed it from our children—it is their planet.” The injunction is, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” I cannot believe that if any of us were in the position of a subsistence farmer in the Ganges delta who is in danger of losing everything if the sea rises by another few feet, we would be happy if it was going to take the wealthy, influential, powerful countries of the world 25 years to come up with a solution to a problem that might wipe out our family in 10 years’ time.

If we compare what has happened in Bangladesh and in India over the past 30 to 40 years, we will see that, although economic development will be part of the solution, it is not the whole solution. Economists tell us that India is a much wealthier country than Bangladesh—wealth per person in India is almost twice that in Bangladesh—but life expectancy is higher in Bangladesh than it is in India. Bangladesh has done more to improve the wellbeing of its people than almost any other country on the planet. It has certainly done more and moved more quickly than any of its immediate neighbours, despite the fact that its wealth, as measured by economists, has not increased at the same rate.

We have to keep our eyes on that. We cannot afford to let success be measured simply by economic wealth in the traditional sense. We certainly cannot afford it to be measured by what happens to the average, because the whole point of solidarity on a global scale is that we measure our success not by how well the wealthiest or the average are doing, but by how badly the poorest are doing. By that measure we are failing very seriously indeed.

Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world, excluding unusual examples such as city states. With a population of more than 160 million, it is by far the most densely populated of the larger countries in the world. If we do not deal with climate change very soon, anything up to 50 million of those Bangladeshis will be displaced within the next 10 to 20 years. The wealthiest continent on the planet does not know how to cope with 2 million or 3 million refugees from north Africa. How on earth can we expect the Indian subcontinent

to cope with the prospect of tens of millions—possibly 50 million—who have no choice but to leave their land because it is underwater?

On a humanitarian scale and a security footing, we cannot allow the SDGs to fail. I think we are past the point where we can allow them to be delayed or held up any longer. Some say it is too late to prevent climate change from seriously impacting on all of us, but it is not too late to prevent it completely.

Finally, I want this to succeed not because it is in our interests, but because it is not acceptable to me, in all conscience, to be part of a planet where thousands of my fellow human beings will die of starvation every day while at the same time, as we discussed earlier this week, we are trying to stop supermarkets throwing away massive amounts of food every day. That cannot be allowed to continue. We should be doing this not because it is in our or America’s interests, but because it is in the interests of the planet. We are all in this together. The solidarity of the human race has never been more important.

3.13 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I refer Members to my entries in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I commend the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on an extremely thoughtful speech, and thank my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) for their speeches and for proposing this debate. Indeed, I thank all Members who have spoken.

The millennium development goals have, by and large, been a success. Having lived in Tanzania throughout the 1990s, I saw what was happening in their absence. Malaria—I chair the all-party group on malaria and neglected tropical diseases—was taking a greater toll on people’s lives towards the end of the 1990s than at the beginning of that decade. The same can be said about many other diseases, but the introduction of the millennium development goals led to institutions such as the global fund and the Gates Foundation investing in tackling them. As a result, in the next few weeks we will hear about the tremendous progress made in cutting deaths from malaria by half, saving millions of lives over the past 15 years. Those lives would not have been saved but for the millennium development goals. Let us remember how much has been done through the MDGs.

The SDGs are of course far more ambitious, and I recognise that that raises some problems. The Sermon on the Mount is an incredibly ambitious statement. Every time I read it, I first realise how far I fall short, but at the same time it inspires me to go on to do better. It is the same with the SDGs. Every year, we should pick them up in debates such as this one. We will say, “Yes, we have made progress”, but they will also inspire us to do much better. I hope that the SDGs will do that in each member state that signs up to them. We must not lose ground against the millennium development goals or we will lose heart, as we will if the SDGs are simply not met and, for instance, we go backwards on infectious diseases.

I will mention four SDGs. On goal 3, on healthy lives, I want to echo the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) about the need to take

a long-term approach. I believe that we must look at incredible challenges, such as the challenge of anti-microbial resistance to drugs, which means that we need to look at the global goods in which we must invest in order to develop antibiotics. That is not a three or a five-year funding programme, but a 20-year funding programme.

When the Select Committee went to Nepal earlier this year, we saw the great results of DFID's long-term work on afforestation. We must do more on that great long-term project. On goal 3, we must also do much more on the integration of healthcare systems, rather than having the silo mentality that there has been in the past, although it is starting to break down.

Goal 8, on sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, is absolutely crucial. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) has already mentioned it with specific reference to tourism. Hilton reckons that 70 million jobs may be created globally through tourism in the next 10 years. That will bring very good, high-value employment to countries that need it. We need full, productive employment and decent work for all.

Last night, I had a meeting with a great friend who works in Uganda and the Congo. Mainly as a result of his and his colleagues' work, although with some support from DFID, he now works with 24,000 farmers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the poorest countries on earth. They have introduced a cocoa business that now brings tens of millions of dollars into the country and provides livelihoods for tens of thousands of people. That has been developed over the past few years, showing what can be done in the most incredibly difficult and challenging situations.

Goal 13 is on combating climate change and its impact. I had the privilege of walking with my daughter in the Swiss Alps a couple of weeks ago. I walked in the same mountains 35 years ago, when I worked in Switzerland. The glaciers are now less than half what they were then. That is on our doorstep in Switzerland; it is not Kilimanjaro, where I lived for 11 years and could see the glacier almost shrinking before my eyes. Climate change is a reality and, as the hon. Member for Glenrothes said, it is affecting countries such as Bangladesh right now.

Hon. Members have already referred to goal 16, on peaceful and inclusive societies. Without peace and inclusion and without greater equality within societies, we will not see development. I have just mentioned the Congo, and it is rare that there is development in the absence of peace; it takes much more effort.

I again want to mention Tanzania, where I had the pleasure to live. With the exception of the short war with Uganda, it has by and large been at peace since independence in 1961. Very few Tanzanians seek refuge elsewhere, because they want to stay in Tanzania, which is a peaceful and largely well-governed country. It is a poor country, but people want to stay there. Goal 16 is therefore absolutely crucial.

I again thank hon. Members for giving us the opportunity to discuss the SDGs today, but we must revisit them in detail every year so that we can be challenged and see where we have fallen short.

3.19 pm

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to say a few words, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee

for agreeing to the request of the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) to hold this important debate.

As chair of the all-party group on global education, I will restrict my comments to the cause of global education. Members of the House would be forgiven, given the enormity of the refugee crisis, for being unaware that Tuesday was International Literacy Day. I echo the words of the director general of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, who rightly described literacy as "a human right", "a force for dignity" and

"a foundation for cohesive societies and sustainable development".

How right she was that promoting literacy must be at the heart of the new agenda. By empowering individual women and men, literacy helps to enhance sustainable development across the board, from better healthcare to food security, eradicating poverty and promoting decent work. Few would deviate from that sentiment, and it is borne out in goal 4 of the new sustainable development goals.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) is right to describe the millennium development goals as a success. We should not characterise the past 15 years as a failure, but we must be mindful of the need to build on those goals and of the challenge. We need to set the goals for the next 15 years in a spirit of challenge.

There are 250 million children in schools who are not learning basic skills, despite the fact that half of them have spent at least four years in school. There has been success in getting many millions of children into school. The hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) and I went on a trip to Nigeria to see the policies that are getting children who were out of school into school. However, we need to look with renewed vigour at the quality of the education in those schools and at the value we place on the teaching profession across the world. I say that as a former primary school teacher here.

There is a continuing gender divide between boys and girls, although great strides have been taken and DFID has undertaken excellent work to bridge the gap. There remain 774 million illiterate adults in the world—a decline of just 1% since 2000. Some 58 million primary school children remain out of school and 59 million adolescents remain out of secondary school. UNESCO has described this as a global learning crisis, and it is right. In short, this is a period of vastly unfinished business.

If the SDGs are to be effective, they will demand more stability and predictable funding from existing funding mechanisms. The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) spoke about the different funding cycles, with the 15-year cycles of the targets and the three-year cycles under which DFID operates.

Mrs Helen Grant: Funding is essential. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that attracting private finance and embracing the BRIC countries is important?

Mr Williams: Given the enormity of the task before us, that is an inevitability. There will be a mix of funding prospects and I will move on to talk about one of them now.

I saw at first hand the approach of the Global Partnership for Education in Tanzania, as well as the funding it secured. It built a partnership between government,

[Mr Mark Williams]

civil society, international organisations, students, teachers, foundations and the private sector, and got them all working together. But—and this is a big but—despite the UK making the largest pledge of any donor, the Global Partnership for Education fell well short of its £3.5 billion target. The UK pledge is contingent on the UK making up no more than 15% of donor contributions, and there is concern about the conditionality of that pledge. Although it has already been called for this afternoon, it is critical that the Government continue to put as much pressure as they can on other countries throughout the world to make pledges or to increase their pledges, specifically in the area of education.

Time is short, but I want to reflect quickly on one other issue. One omission from the millennium development goals in respect of education was the issue of disability and access. There was no mention in 2000 of disability. I commend DFID for its disability framework, which is now being enacted, but it is staggering to reflect that disability was not mentioned then. It is mentioned in the sustainable development goals, but, if we are to meet meaningful targets on disability and access to education, we need the data as well. I visited schools in Nigeria and Tanzania, and I will shortly go to Kenya with the all-party group. I do not want to see what I have seen elsewhere, which is little evidence of provision for the disabled or differentiation in treatment. We need data to make a judgment on success and where we need to go.

Finally, SDG 4 makes impressive reading. Many of the overriding omissions in the MDGs—matters we have been campaigning for over many years—have been dealt with and are now included. I do not want, in 15 years' time, anybody to be talking about vagueness, vacuousness or a lack of enthusiasm in the targets. I therefore suggest that, when the goals are accepted, DFID put in place an overarching strategy for SDG delivery with reviewing and reporting mechanisms, as we have heard this afternoon, so we can assess whether the targets are being met and the wish list, the entitlements of the goals, are practically delivered on the ground for the benefit of humanity.

3.26 pm

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this debate. What a delight it is to serve under your speakership. We have worked together in the past, when you were Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee.

I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing the debate, as well as the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who on this occasion I may call my friend. We worked together 20 years ago and, goodness gracious me, to be participating in a debate with him now is a unique opportunity—probably a horror for him, though.

I would like to take this opportunity to refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests on my recent visit to Zambia and Zimbabwe with Results UK. We went to have a look, during the summer recess, at international development projects.

I am delighted we are having this debate. I am acutely aware that my right hon. Friend the Minister has done a very fulsome job on this. He came down to my constituency and met not only my students but one of my local churches. He was incredibly impressive, I have to say. I am therefore delighted that, with the Secretary of State, he will go to the UN sustainable development meeting, where they will be able to ensure that these goals are adopted. It is helpful that he has the support, including my support, of this place. He knows we are directly behind him. We are giving him all the support and the help he needs. It is very important to ensure that the development goals are adopted, because they are more ambitious than the millennium development goals.

I have always supported the idea that we should invest 0.7% of gross national income in international aid. Indeed, we are now world leaders in delivering that commitment. It must be done, and done in such a way that is transparent, targeted and managed in a way that is not corrupt—strength of government is incredibly important. I hope the recent issue of refugees from Syria crossing the Mediterranean and eventually coming into Europe has turned those people who think that investing in international development is the wrong idea.

Over the last 35 years, I have seen how international development can make significant changes. In 1979, I went to what is now Zimbabwe, Malawi and South Africa. In 1994, I joined my hon. Friend the Member for Ribblesdale (Mr Evans), who unfortunately is not here at the moment, to view the Malawi presidential election campaign. If anybody ever wishes to come to my office, they will see the posters showing how to vote in a Malawi general election, although I do warn Members that they will first have to learn how to speak Chichewa, which is quite a difficult language. At this stage, I think I should also declare an interest as I am the chairman of the all-party groups on Zambia and Malawi, and the vice-chairman of the all-party group on Zimbabwe.

Patrick Grady: I just want to say zikomo kwambiri for mentioning Chichewa and the successful democracy Malawi has become over the years. I am familiar with the country myself.

Oliver Colville: I was there at the beginning, and it was a delight to speak to the Malawian Cabinet at the time.

As I said, in mid-August, we went across to Zambia, after which I went down to Zimbabwe, both of which countries have significant problems with HIV, tuberculosis and malaria—I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) on eradicating malaria. HIV breaks down the immune system, making people more susceptible to TB and other things. It is a very painful condition. I am told it turns one's lungs into sponges and is a very painful way of dying. In addition, some people might have heard me talking earlier about how we can save hedgehogs as well.

I am keen that the Mediterranean boat refugees coming into the UK are screened for TB and HIV, and I am told that the Government will ensure that. As I mentioned after the Prime Minister's Syria statement, Plymouth is a dispersal centre for asylum seekers. TB is becoming a real challenge in the largest urban conurbation west of Bristol. This is a good example of how investment in overseas aid can benefit the UK by reducing costs in the NHS, which we should all welcome in no uncertain terms.

The global fund has prevented 37 million deaths from TB, while 15 million people are now on antiretroviral treatment for HIV, which is incredibly important, so I urge the Government to support its vital work, including at its pledging conference next July. I would also be grateful if they included good governance, because that is also important.

The improvement of health in low and middle-income countries, such as Zambia, contributed to over a quarter of the growth in these countries between 2000 and 2011, showing that global health is vital for the development of all nations. I was told in Africa earlier this year that El Niño was about to enter southern Africa in a big way, which will have significant implications for humanitarian issues. We have to be prepared, so I hope Ministers will put that on the agenda. This weather system will also create problems for agricultural development in Zambia, Zimbabwe and other places, which is something else we have to be careful about.

In Zimbabwe, I met DFID officials—DFID has more staff there than the embassy—and we visited an abattoir, which was interesting. If these ambitious SDGs are to be met, they must help the middle-income countries, such as Zambia, as well as the lowest-hanging fruit. I am delighted that the 2015 Conservative party manifesto pledged to

“lead a major new global programme to accelerate the development of vaccines and drugs to eliminate the world’s deadliest infectious diseases”.

I am incredibly proud of our Prime Minister, who led our party into a great election campaign and victory and who is committed to these issues. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who did great work in taking this agenda forward.

Finally, I mention two other desperately important areas: education and making sure we have decent boreholes and water so that people can thrive.

3.34 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. As we have heard, the sustainable development goals are a new universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states will use to frame their agendas and policies over the next 15 years. Importantly, they outline a number of high-level objectives for countries, encompassing a broad range of social, economic and environmental objectives, including ending poverty, ensuring access to education and achieving gender equality.

Enormous progress was of course made on the millennium development goals, showing the value of a unifying agenda underpinned by goals and targets. The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has argued that since they have been in existence the MDGs have saved millions of lives and improved conditions for millions more around the world. Yet despite their success, the indignity of poverty has not been ended for all. As has also been highlighted, too many people have been left behind, particularly the poorest and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location. In addition, other major threats, including climate change, have not been fully tackled.

The sustainable development goals are due to be adopted at the UN summit later this month. They aim to build on the progress achieved by attacking the problems that have been neglected, but, importantly, by addressing the underlying root causes. The sustainable development goals must be integrated and interlinked, which the UN argues is crucial to ensuring that the purpose of the new agenda is realised.

At this point I would like to refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests and to my visit to Zambia during the recess, as part of a parliamentary delegation with the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile), to see patients and service providers in HIV and TB clinics. During that visit it became clear that addressing health and illness is also fundamentally about addressing basic standards of living and ill health prevention. Access to clean water, sanitation, clean energy and infrastructure are crucial. We were devastated to hear when we visited one clinic that a man had carried his young son to the clinic for 48 hours only for him to die on arrival. Timeous access to healthcare is as important as the provision of healthcare. Those issues must be addressed in an integrated manner.

Along the negotiation process, there have been those who have criticised the quantity of goals and targets proposed. Critics have warned that there are far too many to focus Governments’ attention and resources in the way that they must to galvanise a better world. However, as highlighted in evidence heard in a meeting of the Select Committee on International Development that I attended on Tuesday, it is recognised that the goals are visionary. Prioritisation is not about separating particular goals to focus on, but about taking an integrated and joined-up approach. By not approaching goals in an integrated way, we would miss opportunities and key synergies, and would risk running into tangible difficulties.

As other Members have stated, underpinning the new goals is an important framework, which DFID has led on, that aims to leave no one behind. That will ensure that the goals are met for all social groups and that progress on targets is disaggregated. The UN sustainable development agenda states:

“Recognising that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society...we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.”

That will require Governments across the world to address entrenched poverty and inequality, discriminatory beliefs and attitudes, and the challenges facing marginalised groups. In that regard, it is important that those most affected are able to participate in implementation, monitoring and reporting, as a fundamental part of ensuring that no one is left behind. Those groups must have a voice in both local and international implementation.

Mrs Helen Grant: The hon. Lady makes an important point about accountability. Does she agree that the media, public opinion, academia and transparency are all important factors?

Dr Cameron: I agree that public opinion and a good research base are important in securing transparency.

One group of society that has seen particular inequality, marginalisation and extreme poverty is the disabled. One billion people globally have a disability, and 80% of them live in developing countries. Disability is both a

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

cause and a consequence of poverty. Research from the World Health Organisation indicates that people with disabilities are over-represented among the persistently poor and are less likely than others to be able to move themselves out of poverty. It is also reported that people with intellectual disability and mental health problems face a high risk of social exclusion and discrimination. All these vulnerable groups must be assisted.

In March 2015, the DFID disability champion, Beverley Warmington, highlighted issues surrounding poor data on disability, which can lead to disabled people being overlooked by decision makers. We therefore look forward to thorough data collection, as other Members have mentioned.

In summing up, as already mentioned and importantly, the sustainable development goals are not about tackling problems only in particular developing countries; they apply to developed countries too. If the UK is to take on the universality of the sustainable development goals, we must ensure—and strive to make sure—that no one is left behind within our own country. I therefore look forward to seeing the Government applying the policies of the goals in an integrated manner right across all our policy-making decisions.

I welcome the sustainable development goals, although it will be inherently difficult to apply them in some areas. They are, however, visionary, and we must work together collectively, internationally and across the nations of our own country to ensure that they are applied as comprehensively as possible.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) to speak, I must say that this is the fourth time in two days that I have looked at the Government Benches and nobody has stood up. Perhaps it has not been properly explained that when one speaker finishes, it is normal for everyone who wishes to participate in the debate to stand—instantaneously, at that moment. If a Member fails to do so, it indicates that they are not paying attention to the debate or not engaged with it, so that they do not deserve a chance to speak. I simply issue this as a warning.

3.42 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) for securing this debate. As co-chair of the recently formed all-party parliamentary group on sustainable development goals, I welcome it. It is timely, given the forthcoming UN summit at the end of this month, when the new goals are due to be ratified.

In a week when Syria and the Mediterranean refugee crisis have once again come to the forefront of our minds—and become the focus of numerous debates in this Chamber—the need for an integrated and universal approach to overseas aid and humanitarian aid is reinforced. Such situations highlight that something more must be done. We need to strengthen support and meet the special needs of people living in the areas affected by

complex humanitarian emergencies. They also highlight the way in which humanitarian aid and international development take many forms to respond to complex and often-changing situations. Some require a short-term solution, while others require much longer-term solutions and highlight the need for collaborative integrated approaches involving the international community, NGOs, civil society and, indeed, faith groups.

The millennium development goals were established 15 years ago, and there were eight of them. There has been some criticism of the limitations of those goals, but I believe that they formed a fundamental foundation and provided the building-blocks to rally the international community around tackling the indignity of poverty. I believe that they achieved an awful lot, for example, reducing child mortality and poverty, and improving access to education and to water and sanitation. We have heard about those things today.

In the past 10 years or so, I have been to Africa as a volunteer on a number of occasions, doing so with some of my Conservative colleagues. I went to learn and to see for myself. I have seen the difference that good international development can make, when Governments work together with the international community, non-governmental organisations and others to focus on making a difference, often post-conflict. The MDGs have played a big part in that, and I have seen where they can really work. Sometimes humanitarian aid is needed and welcome, but in other situations it is not a handout that people want, but a hand-up.

I therefore welcome the broadening of the goals, so that they now include the empowerment of women; the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies to encourage development; and a recognition of the devastating impact that climate change can have on some parts of the world. We have spoken about the 17 goals, 169 targets and numerous indicators. The list is long, and an argument can be made that it should be much shorter, but what is significant is the universality of the goals, their interdependency and the way in which they have the potential to bring together those different arms of government, the international community, civil society and the private sector. I hope that in doing that they will result in a more sustainable and inclusive approach, and a more long-term move towards self-dependence and self-responsibility.

As with anything, all this will come down to one thing: implementation and delivery. A collaborative approach will be needed, as will accountability. The communities that the SDGs seek to help deserve that, but Governments on all sides should expect to be held to account, as should the NGOs and civil society. Let us not forget that the British public also expect accountability. It is an interesting time in development. We face a complex situation right across the world, and global actions are often required to tackle the root causes of some of these problems. I am proud that we signed up to the 0.7% target on international development, but now it is time to deliver on it.

I wish to end by telling a quick story. We have heard many such stories from hon. Members, whereby they have talked about their experiences from trips to Africa. A couple of years ago, when I was in Rwanda, I visited a women's co-operative. One of the NGOs had worked with a group of women to encourage them to set up their own business, in beekeeping. By setting up their

own businesses, they had got together as a group, where they received a lot of support from one another. They were also managing to create an income, which was then going into educating their children. That is a great example of where a handout creates a hand-up in a longer-term, sustainable way. That is why I am pleased that goal 8 is included in the SDGs, as it introduces that focus on economic development. I look forward to hearing what happens at the UN summit and seeing this agenda move forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I call Stephen Kinnoek.

3.48 pm

Stephen Kinnoek (Aberavon) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for noticing me as I jumped to my feet with great rapidity. I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this crucial debate. I also want to declare that I spent more than a year living and working in Sierra Leone as director of the British Council there and four years at the World Economic Forum, which of course deals with many of the issues we are discussing.

The sustainable development goals represent a vitally important set of targets that the international community must achieve if we are to secure a future based on durable and inclusive growth. As the House knows, every one of those goals is critical, but today I want to concentrate on No. 13, which focuses on combating climate change and its impacts.

The first point to establish is that there is no longer any reasonable doubt about the science of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a gathering of the world's 1,000 most eminent climate scientists, and they have made it absolutely clear that human activity is causing global warming. Indeed, as Lord Deben—formerly a Conservative Member of Parliament, and now the chairman of the UK's Committee on Climate Change—has stated,

“The connection between global warming and human activity is now as clear as the connection between smoking and lung cancer”.

Human activity is the problem, and human activity must therefore provide the solutions if we are to prevent a rise of at least 3.2° in global temperatures by 2100. The consequences of that would be all too real: the seas rising because the ice caps are melting, heat waves more frequent, and—as we have seen very close to home—flooding and extreme weather on the up. If nothing is done, we can expect more droughts and floods, affecting food security and global poverty, and hitting the poorest countries with the lowest CO₂ emissions hardest. We can expect seawater to become more acidic, affecting biodiversity and, again, food security. We can expect the sea level to rise by between 0.5 and 1.5 metres, displacing more than 100 million people and dwarfing the current tragic refugee crisis. To put it simply, if we are to have any chance of meeting the 17 sustainable development goals, we must start with a serious, actionable, large-scale plan to tackle climate change.

Climate change is, of course, tragically topical, because all the signs point towards the refugee crisis becoming increasingly acute as conditions in the global south become worse as a result of drought and severe weather. That was put succinctly by Jamie Drummond of ONE only yesterday:

“In our analysis, there are three extremes—extreme poverty, extreme climate and extreme ideology—that risk taking over certain parts of the world, and if we do not have a pretty enlightened and aggressive long-term investment strategy, future flows of refugees will increase.”

Indeed, they will increase exponentially.

If we are going to feed the world, as the SDGs compel us to do, we need farmers and farmland, much of which is threatened by rising sea levels, desertification and acidification due to climate change. If you own an agri-business and those farmers work for you, it will not be a case of smaller profit margins; it will be the end of your business, and the end of your livelihood and theirs. A coastal city as vast as New York or a coastal town such as Port Talbot in my constituency of Aberavon—both reliant, to differing degrees, on tourism and coastal industries—will find that its economy, and eventually its very existence, are threatened.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, I worked for the World Economic Forum for four years. During that time, I was privy to the thoughts of CEOs and leaders of some of the world's largest companies, and most had the same message: “Your business is not sustainable if your planet is not sustainable.” The sustainable development goals give us an opportunity to inspire businesses and Governments to reinvent growth—growth of the right sort, which does not lead to the impoverishment of billions of people or the destruction of our planet—and public-private partnership is the key to that reinvention.

I deeply regret the Government's decisions on renewable energy subsidies, and I urge them to reconsider. However, I welcome the fact that the sustainable development goals, as a whole, are more business-oriented than the millennium goals were. There are more references to job creation and sustainable growth, both of which can be achieved if businesses and Governments invest in green technology and energy innovation. For their part, businesses must accept and embrace their responsibility to commit themselves to those measures, although many will be regulatory and could be spun by short-termists as burdensome. While aid will be necessary for some of the goals, and I would never advocate cuts in overseas development assistance, combating climate change will require large-scale investment, both public and private, first and foremost.

Stephen Phillips: The hon. Gentleman is making a very important speech. Does he agree that, if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals, it is critical for a proper and enforceable agreement to be made on climate change at the Paris summit later this year? Does he agree that that is part and parcel of the solution to the issue with which the SDGs seek to grapple?

Stephen Kinnoek: I absolutely agree and therefore underline the importance of us leading by example, which is why I mentioned some of the regrettable decisions made in removing subsidies for renewables. Nevertheless, the Paris discussions and the SDGs mesh together and I hope we will show leadership in Paris in the coming months.

[Stephen Kinlock]

Supporting and enabling sustainably minded business is the key to generating significant wealth at home and abroad. With that in mind, I will finish by saying that there will necessarily be trade-offs and this will be a real test of the Government's dedication to, and understanding of, the sustainable development goals. Climate change is a classic example of such trade-offs. In the short term fossil fuel companies are likely to perceive themselves as losers, even if the end result is a net improvement for society and the global economy in general. Effective leadership from all concerned Government Departments will be necessary, and innovative solutions will have to be found.

I therefore urge the Government to take seriously the following five recommendations: first, to reverse the recently announced cuts to renewable energy subsidies; secondly, to invest in renewables infrastructure and the research capabilities required to engineer them; thirdly, to attach climate change conditions to overseas aid directed to infrastructure projects; fourthly, to convene a global sustainability summit to develop a road map for public-private partnerships for sustainable growth; and, fifthly, to reform the companies legislation to ensure that the articles of incorporation of any given company must include a commitment to what the World Business Council for Sustainable Development calls triple-bottom line reporting—namely people, planet, profit. This means that the performance of a company should be measured not only in terms of its short-term profitability, but also in terms of its commitment to fulfilling its societal and environmental obligations.

If the Government could adopt these five recommendations, I believe that our country would be well on the way to showing real leadership and making a serious contribution to achieving sustainable development goal 13.

3.57 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): In 2008 or 2009 it was my privilege, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and Baroness Jenkin, to help co-found the Conservative Friends of International Development. One of its key aims was to encourage the Government to enshrine the 0.7% commitment in law and push the MDGs and achieve them as rapidly as possible. I am pleased to note that subsequently not only did my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and many others—whose omission is now no doubt, unfortunately, offensive to them—become involved with CFID, but in what is a testament to the universality of those aims of international development we have had the opportunity to work across party and also across a huge number of people, businesses and businessmen, including Bill Gates, who have been very kind in supporting us.

The point of CFID was to emphasise that compassion is truly a cross-party agenda. When I subsequently found myself fighting the seat of Boston and Skegness—and winning it, I am grateful to say—I realised that the main challenge the SDGs have and the MDGs had is public opinion. They will not be sustainable if we are not truly winning the battle in the country. That is not an attack by any means on the compassion we have seen across

the nation during the recent Syrian refugee crisis. However, there remains a small but significant minority of people who are not yet convinced that adopting principles such as the 17 we are talking about today are in our national, international and humanitarian interests.

The simple point I would make in this debate, where there has been excellent cross-party consensus, is that until, working with businesses and all other parties internationally, we make the case that it is in all our interests to get development goals such as these moved from platitude to policy, we will not be able to make the kind of changes we are talking about today. I do not pretend for a moment that I have the ability to turn those platitudes into policies, but we should all be striving persistently to make the case, when we are told that Britain cannot afford to take in refugees, that it is in Britain's interest and in all our interests to take in an appropriate number of well-resourced refugees so that we can make the global improvements we all want to see.

I want to make three further points. First, transparency is the single most important factor that the development goals can achieve, because it will allow us to say, "This is where your money is going" and "We have made a real, practical difference not only to our own lives but to those of many people around the world." Secondly, addressing the fragile states agenda will mean that we are not increasing the burden on this country. Instead, we will be increasing the opportunity for economic development in countries that will one day graduate to become our trading partners, from which we would all benefit.

Thirdly, I want to refer back to the battle for public opinion. Until we have convinced the wider world that these are truly valuable universal cross-party goals, we will be unable to answer with integrity the constant criticism that has been heard over the past few weeks. We in the Westminster bubble might believe that there is total consensus on helping those less fortunate than ourselves, but too many of our constituents are not yet convinced of the validity of this case. I hope that excellent debates such as this one—convened by my Lincolnshire neighbour, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips)—will play an important part in convincing the wider public of the true value of this agenda.

4.2 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I must start by declaring my interest in the subject of this debate. In a previous life, before I entered the House in May—that seems a long time ago—I undertook 27 international assignments, mainly in the poorer countries of the world, often working with United Nations agencies of one sort or another. Perhaps more important, given the one contribution I want to make to the debate, is the fact that I was recently elected as the chairman of the new all-party parliamentary group on explosive weapons. In the light of that, I should like to build on the important contribution made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), which dealt with places that have previously suffered from conflict.

I would generally be supportive of the development goals, but there is a sad and extremely important omission. This goes beyond what the hon. Gentleman was saying. After a conflict, we often find that a desert has been

created, and we cannot describe that desert as peace. I have been extraordinarily impressed by the debates on refugees over the past two days, but one point that some Members made deserves to be revisited today—namely, the assumption that when the military had left the scene, peace would break out and it would be an easy task to return refugees to the area. It is not going to be like that.

What we will see in Syria will in many ways be like another Cambodia. It will take years and years to clear up the detritus of war. When the military has left the scene—the theatre of war—the conflict has not ended; tens of thousands of people are killed and maimed annually because of the explosive weaponry that is left around. We will not be able to tackle some of the goals on education, health and the like until we have cleared the detritus of war from those areas. The impact of war is huge and profound. War is probably the best way known to mankind to create poverty. It destroys not only people, but infrastructure. As somebody who, at one stage, worked on a water project in Namibia, I know only too well the difficulty in starting from scratch and in trying to build up simple resources of providing clean water to people.

After conflict comes the development. Often we have to reconstruct things from the ground, and that is so much more difficult if people are walking on landmines and tripping over explosive weapons that have been left behind. I wish to see more of that work being done by the UK and added to the development goals. I know that, as we speak, there are people in Libya who are helping to clear up some of the explosive weapons that have been left behind, and I pay tribute to them, but unless we do more on that front, it will be a much slower task to engage in the capacity building that is needed.

I think it was my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) who mentioned some of the health challenges that are faced by different societies. After a period of conflict, there are huge levels of mental health problems, particularly among the citizens who have remained in those lands throughout the period of conflict. There is a huge need for counselling to help people see the world anew. We need to ensure that, in all our approaches, we pay particular regard to those states that have suffered from conflict and from the increasing complications that they bestow on them.

4.7 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I welcome the SDGs. They take a more holistic approach to development, addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality to bring transformative change that will leave no one behind. Significant achievements have been made on many of the MDG targets, but progress has been uneven. As the UN Millennium Development Goals report of 2015 states:

“Although significant achievements have been made on many of the MDG targets worldwide, progress has been uneven across regions and countries, leaving significant gaps. Millions of people are being left behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location.”

It is really important that we concentrate on the poorest of the poor wherever they live in the world. I am thinking here of the Dalits, who are below caste level. One of the many jobs that they undertake is to go out at night—they are not even allowed to go out during the

day—and clean up human excreta with their hands. I am talking about those kinds of people who are the poorest of the poor. We must not leave behind those in middle-income countries—the minorities and the ethnic groups.

Before I turn to the specific points that I want to draw to the Minister's attention, I want to comment on how encouraged I was this week during a meeting of the International Development Committee where witnesses from international non-governmental organisations and civil society and campaigning representatives voiced such strong support and enthusiasm for the SDGs and for the process by which they have been developed. The wide consultation seems to have brought about a real buy-in for the approach that the SDGs encourage. I am talking about joint working between donor and donee countries, NGOs and civil society, and the real focus on addressing the underlying causes of poverty. That focus is both people and planet-centred and promotes economic growth while ensuring that development is sustainable for the earth's resources. It is about how the world can work together and it is really exciting. I pay tribute to all those in our Government who are involved in those negotiations.

I wish to raise two specific points that I mentioned earlier—I am sure the Minister did not leave the Chamber just because of that. DFID is undergoing a review of how it structures grants and its relationship with civil society. I wish to highlight the advantage of rebalancing more funding away from large international, institutional NGOs towards those that operate at local partnering level. The power of local groups to mobilise communities, shape people's values and build a sense of identity is immense, and there is growing understanding that in certain communities, granting aid to large organisations can sometimes—not always—harm rather than help.

A study of one community in Pakistan by Masooda Bano points to the fact that large grants to non-native organisations can, on occasion, disincentivise a community from using resources that it already has, and effectively weaken the latent energy and initiative that can be a community's greatest weapon. The way that funding is structured can make a significant difference to its effectiveness. There are areas where small grants over a long period of time could be preferred over up-front large grants. Creating more flexibility for how aid is structured can bring better returns for fewer resources invested.

For example, Tearfund has told me about a community in Okulonyo in northern Uganda where a local faith-based charity launched a project of advocacy training and community mobilisation in 2011. The community has been transformed and empowered. It has mobilised and lobbied its Government for much needed aid and infrastructure projects including health services, water pumps and roads. For an investment of \$330,000 it has been calculated that a benefit of almost \$10 million has been received by that community. That is a return of \$30 dollars for every \$1 put in—even Warren Buffet would be pleased at that.

I have already spoken to DFID Ministers about how much value for money small grants to small organisations can provide, and I urge Ministers to look again at that. I hope the Minister will confirm that small organisations are being engaged in DFID's civil society review, just as larger ones are. In the past DFID has perhaps not

[Fiona Bruce]

worked as much with local, embedded partners as I would like it to do in the future, and that is important. Yes, oversight is harder and the risks might be greater, but the gains can be disproportionately beneficial. I urge DFID to be entrepreneurial about that.

Let me turn to the importance of leaving no one behind. Earlier, I read out a list of causes for which people can be left behind, whether due to gender, geography or those in ethnic minority groups such as the Dalits. This is a paradigm shift: leave no one behind regardless of their ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status. That is admirable.

However, I believe that one word and cause of inequality is missing from that group: belief. No one should be left behind because of what they believe, whether they have any faith or none. Ministers know that I have raised on a number of occasions my concern that an underlying cause of poverty is a lack of freedom of belief, freedom of thought or the freedom of speech that can follow, resulting in conflict, violence, loss of opportunities, homelessness, displacement and more. If we are determined to tackle the underlying causes of poverty, we cannot leave that behind. Fostering religious freedom should be seen as a priority not only for tackling conflict once it has happened, but to prevent it before it takes place and to promote stability.

As Brian Grim argues in his book, “The Price of Freedom Denied”, religious freedom fosters respect towards others with a different belief in the same society, therefore reducing tensions. I would go further than that, because I think it will contribute to the achievement of our SDGs. For example, goal 5 promotes the rights of girls and women. So much harassment of women is linked to religious discrimination against women—the respected report by the Pew Research Centre states that such discrimination takes place in 32% of countries. Goal 8 is about economic welfare, and employment discrimination as a result of someone being involved in a faith group is rife, as we see in countries such as Iran.

Let me give another example—sustainable development goal 16, the promotion of peace, as well as sustainable development goal 8, economic growth. In countries where freedom of belief is not respected, conflict disrupts economic activity. Foreign and local investors become reluctant to invest, jeopardising sustainable development and economic growth. As businesses corroborate, an opportunity to invest, conduct normal business practice and prevent industries from struggling is weakened. Egypt’s tourism industry, for example, has faced such challenges. By promoting and practising freedom of belief, a path to security and economic well-being can be laid.

I urge Ministers to consider this and to engage faith groups in their civil society review. Is it not time to review the Department’s faith partnership principles? Finally, would DFID consider engaging in the joint learning initiatives on faith and development instituted by some of the major international NGOs working on poverty relief, such as Tearfund, CAFOD and World Vision?

4.15 pm

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing such an important debate.

The House yesterday debated the crisis unfolding in Syria. The debate made it abundantly clear that if we are to help developing or vulnerable nation states, we need an international approach, clear goals and a long-term strategy. As we can see in the case of Syria, ensuring the stability and prosperity of our neighbours does not just meet a moral obligation; it is an imperative in our current world. This is why the millennium development goals were and the sustainable development goals are so critical, now more than ever.

We should be proud of what we have already achieved—for example, in education. The millennium development goals set an ambition to give every child in the world an education, and partly because of that 76 million fewer children are out of school, 67 million more received pre-primary education and 50 million more received primary education. But there is still a significant amount left to do: 58 million children of primary school age are still denied the education they deserve. As the New York summit approaches, we have an opportunity to see how we can build on the millennium development goals and bring about an end to world poverty and deprivation.

I would like to make three points. First, we need a long-term, ambitious strategy. Yes, the MDGs were right to set a target of education for all, but it is not sufficient that there is access to some education. It is necessary that education is sustained and of quality. Let us learn from what we have already done and then improve on it. Yes, more children received primary education but, according to UNESCO, insufficient secondary education, and academics criticised the emphasis on getting children into school rather than the learning outcomes, which is why 126 million young people are still unable to read or write.

Secondly, we must recognise that local problems need local solutions. We need to empower local communities, and the MDGs have shown that this produces the best results. Vietnam designed a curriculum that focused on disadvantaged pupils, which more than halved the number of children who had never attended school. Non-formal education schemes in Ghana also showed promise, expanding education to areas beyond the reach of the mainstream public system. Students were taught in the languages spoken at home, and provided with the skills they needed for their local communities.

Thirdly, we need clear goals that are concise and specific. The outcome document for Rio+20 stressed that the SDGs should be

“action-oriented, concise, easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature...while taking into account different national realities”.

We should measure success on the basis not of the number of goals we set, but of the outcomes we achieve. Setting a smaller number of ambitious but achievable goals that will empower local communities to resolve local issues with local solutions is the right approach.

I end where I started. Today it is critical that we work with the international community. That is not simply altruistic or humanitarian; it is necessary for our own peace and security.

4.19 pm

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): I thank my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) and the hon. Member

for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) for securing this important debate. The sustainable development goals are truly ambitious. The awesome target that the world is setting itself—getting to zero on extreme poverty and preventable child deaths—if achieved, would be a first in human history. We should be proud to be part of a generation aiming to achieve that. The mantra of “No one left behind” is a call to arms for all of us, forcing us to turn our attention to the poorest and most dispossessed in the world, including the most marginalised in our own country.

Compared with the millennium development goals, which allegedly were drafted by a few old men in a basement, the sustainable development goals have been shaped and agreed by all participants in a transparent process that has taken over three years. Indeed, they were said to be the “most participatory in UN history”—although I do not know whether that is a particularly high bar to reach. We can only hope, therefore, that that will mean better involvement by all the countries taking part and that by 2030 we will have made good progress on the goals. Britain has been strong in implementing the millennium development goals, and I hope that other countries will follow our lead. I was initially troubled by the fact that the number of goals has more than doubled, from eight to 17, but I am glad that goal 16, which deals with governance, has got a look in.

The sustainable development goals reflect a change in the development and aid landscape, with developing countries no longer seen as passive recipients of charity, which has been a common criticism of the UK’s aid budget. In that regard, I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), who is no longer in his place, on how we, as legislators, must communicate how important our international aid is, both for citizens of this planet and for Britain’s national interest. We are aiming for everyone to become active participants in their own growth and success. International aid needs to come out of the charity silo and be seen as part of a developmental means of incentivising and encouraging enterprise all over the world.

The concept of globalisation, and of a truly global world, is better understood in 2015 than it was in 1999 and 2000. This interdependence is present in the internet, for example, but also in global terrorism and guerrilla wars that do not respect national boundaries, and in diseases such as SARS—severe acute respiratory syndrome—and Ebola. These subjects are of more immediate concern to my constituents, and those of all right hon. and hon. Members, than they were in 1999 and 2000. It is up to us to show our constituents that our aid money is being spent well. I would be interested to hear from my right hon. Friend the Minister how his Department plans to communicate what it is doing, making it part of the national conversation.

To my mind, the most essential goal is the one relating to governance and transparency, because it will bring real change for the long term. I have a particular interest in the issue of property rights—for two reasons. First, before coming to this place I was a commercial property lawyer. Secondly, my family, who were forced from Iran by the Islamic revolution, have spent the past 35 years trying to reclaim land that was stolen because of an inadequate system of land registration. When there is no proper system of land registration and

property rights, both economic and democratic reform suffers. We know from our own history that it was the emergence of secure property rights that laid the foundation for the industrial revolution and the subsequent explosion of per capita incomes. It is absolutely essential that an individual’s rights to property are sheltered from predation by the state.

As other Members have quite rightly pointed out, the key element of successful implementation of the SDGs is having proper data. We can leave no one behind only if we know who they are, where they live, and what they need. Data are absolutely key. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) highlighted cases of discrimination against women, the rural poor and indigenous peoples, so I will not reiterate what she described very well. I would be interested to hear from the Minister the Department’s plans for encouraging British companies to improve data capture and analysis in countries where DFID money is spent. The idea of “no one left behind” applies as much to the UK as to the rest of the world.

I would like the Minister to give some examples of how the Department will implement the SDGs immediately following their coming into force into January 2016, particularly in relation to its goals in ensuring real, long-term, sustainable changes and prioritising property rights, transparency and the democratic process in our overseas development goals.

4.25 pm

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to be able to speak in this timely debate and congratulate hon. Members on securing it. It is a real honour to speak among people who have shared their stories of their own experiences of development. As I reflect on the past couple of years in my role of shadowing the Government in this area and the privilege of standing at the Dispatch Box, I think of the many times I have been to places in the poorest parts of the poorest countries in the world and the effect that that leaves on one. I wish we could find better ways to communicate that to our parliamentary colleagues more widely, and to the country.

This is a timely moment for the debate because 2015 is a historic year for international development. The world will soon come together at the UN in New York to agree the sustainable development goals. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for us to define a collective approach to tackling poverty and inequality across the world.

Fifteen years ago, political leadership by the previous Labour Government garnered global efforts to tackle extreme poverty and led to the millennium development goals. I am often struck by the need for clear and consistent political leadership in bringing the world together to tackle the challenges that we face. In 1996, there was no Department for International Development; it took a change of Government to usher it in. In other words, it took political leadership. Now, consensus exists across the main parties that 0.7% is something that we should not just aspire to but deliver, and I rightly give credit to the current Government for that. The legal settlement for this was passed via a private Member’s Bill with cross-party support throughout the House. It is political leadership that gets this business done. The sustainable development goals will therefore require

[Mr Gavin Shuker]

political leadership not just to get them over the line but throughout the next 15 to 20 years to ensure that they deliver.

What are the benefits? Over the past 15 years, despite the pictures we still see on our televisions that sometimes skew the debate, the millennium development goals have led to unprecedented changes. Every day, 17,000 fewer children die across the world. Extreme poverty has been reduced by half. Access to improved drinking water has become a reality for a third of the world's population. Chronic under-nutrition has declined. Remarkable gains have been made in the fight against malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. These successes prove that progress is possible. We must now show similar ambition in the agreement and implementation of the sustainable development goals. Global action works.

However, as we have heard, considerable challenges remain. More than 1 billion people still live on less than \$1.25 a day. Each year, millions fall into poverty as a result of expensive healthcare costs. Despite the fact that the effects of climate change will be the most destructive in the world's poorest countries, agreements on carbon emissions remain out of reach. The new SDGs must set out to erode those problems and address poverty and growing economic inequality, and throughout the legislative process I have argued for clear political leadership in that process.

Change should be delivered in three vital areas, and they should be prioritised for us to tackle inequality: universal healthcare coverage, climate change and human rights for all. It may aid the House to reflect on the fact that this is a universal deal that will apply not just to the developing world, but to our country too. Therefore, we should be unapologetic in our calls for universal healthcare coverage, action on climate change and human rights.

Health inequality is one of the most pernicious types of inequality. Being without health means being without work. It means that people do not have the ability to look after their family or to aspire to great things for their children. Poor health provision in developing countries is a major driver of poverty. Universal health coverage would stop 100 million people each year falling into poverty. It affirms the right of every person to have the opportunity for a good standard of health and a good life without suffering financial hardship as a result.

It is not just about individuals. Nigeria coped with its Ebola outbreak thanks to a functioning health system, yet Sierra Leone struggled because of inadequate availability of treatment. Strong general health systems help to tackle specific life-threatening outbreaks of infectious diseases. That is why we have argued for a far greater shift from simply delivering vaccines and reactive measures, to empowering countries and communities to assess and address their own individual health needs. Indeed, our 2015 manifesto committed to establish a world centre for universal healthcare right here in the UK. We have also repeatedly called on the Government to commit to a stand-alone goal on universal health coverage in the SDGs over the past two years, but they have been reluctant to do so.

With the draft almost entirely finished, does the Minister agree that goal 3—

“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”—

is insufficient for the task and that the phrase “universal health coverage” should be included in the top-line text of the goal? I have been encouraged in recent months by Ministers shifting towards that view, so would it be possible to get more movement in the final few weeks?

Climate change is development in reverse. The progress over the past 15 years in tackling poverty and improving health, food security and access to sanitation could all be eroded if global temperatures are allowed to soar. If temperatures rise by 3 °C, an additional 250 million to 500 million people, predominantly in Africa and western Asia, will be at risk of hunger, and between 1.5 billion and 2 billion more people will be at risk of dengue.

This December we hope that the United Nations framework convention on climate change will conclude with a new binding agreement on climate change, because this is our last best chance to ensure that temperatures do not rise more than 2 °C. However, for the reasons I have outlined, climate change targets should also be central to the SDG package. Although goal 13, which deals with climate change, is welcome, it contains placeholder language in place of a deal that will not be reached until December and will not start to be implemented until 2020. That is why I have been pushing for the SDGs to have a stand-alone goal on climate change. I have also called on the Government to negotiate hard to get goal 13 to commit to restricting global warming to 2 °C. What steps have the Government taken to ensure that such targets are included in the SDGs?

Human rights are sacrosanct: they must be preserved, protected and extended across the world and here in the UK. Specifically, women should have control over their own bodies and not have to live in fear of gender-based violence. Children should expect to be able to be protected from abuse, neglect and mutilation. Workers must have the right to work in safe conditions, to join a trade union, to expect the benefits of trade to affect not just some people but all communities, and to receive a wage that guarantees them a good quality of life. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities must have the freedom to live without fear of persecution because of whom they love. People of faith should be free to associate and gather to worship, and must not face discrimination in the workplace as a result of what they believe. Indigenous communities must be allowed to express their identities without fear of oppression. Disability should never be a barrier to full participation in society, be that in this country or elsewhere in the world. Our values are human rights, and those values should not stop at the water's edge, so it is right that this deal is universal and has universal human rights running throughout it. It would be good to hear more from the Minister about the methods of implementation and measurements of such rights in the deal.

With the imminent completion of the SDGs, we have a unique opportunity to tackle the drivers of poverty and inequality across the world. As Members from both sides of the House have said, we must do more to address the threats of climate change and to avert future rises in world temperatures. We have to tackle health inequalities, ensure that wealth no longer dictates who does and who does not get treated, and ensure that who lives and who dies is not based on their income. We must be robust in defending and advancing human rights at home and abroad.

The deep and complex challenges we face in the world today will not go away unless we take firm political action. As I said, there was no Department for International Development in 1996. It took a change of Government in 1997 to establish it. Were the British people any less generous towards those overseas in 1996 than they were in 1997? No, they were not, but it takes political leadership and political will to get things done. In that context, we wish the Minister well in his work in New York later this month.

4.36 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): It is always a pleasure and a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Luton South (Mr Shuker). I pay tribute to all the speakers. We have benefited from a very mature and high-quality debate, and we have very much benefited from the experience of several Members who have a long track record of involvement in international development overseas. It has been a real pleasure to sit through the debate, and I have to say that I have made some 10 pages of notes.

I pay tribute to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) for bringing his forensic intellectual rigour to this important subject. If I have a prejudice, it is that so much of the misery and poverty in the world arises out of an absence of the rule of law or, indeed, of law. My passion, in so far as I am still capable of passion, is for us to find more innovative and creative ways of bringing the legal experience, of which we have an abundance in this country, to countries clearly so much in want of it.

My hon. and learned Friend was right to say that from the very outset—the Prime Minister’s chairmanship of the high-level panel some three years ago—the United Kingdom has led the process of coming up with the global goals, as we must now all learn to call them. This document, “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, is the output. It proudly points out:

“Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda.”

It was agreed by all 193 member states in August. As it has already been agreed, there will be none of the late-night sessions towards the end of the conference we had to endure at Sendai or that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to endure at Addis Ababa. All the Heads of Government will have to do is to appear in New York, bringing their quota of glamour and sprinkling their magic to promulgate the new development goals.

Before I launch into elliptical orbit with hyperbole, I have to level with the House. This is the third, fourth or perhaps even fifth debate on this subject—however it has been presented, this subject has been the essence of the debate—to which I have responded in this Chamber, in Westminster Hall or in Standing Committee upstairs. The record will show that this document was not my ambition. We set out with a rather different objective. We wanted something much more concise, something more easily communicable, something that would inspire enthusiasm, and something that would enable people, because they could remember the goals, to hold Governments to account.

I said, even earlier this year, that we were prepared to expend diplomatic and political capital to reopen the issue and get back to that original ambition, which we believed we shared with the Secretary-General. The reality, I have to tell the House, is that there was no enthusiasm for such an enterprise. We cherish our leadership role and the influence that we have. It seemed to me much more sensible to accept the consensus, rather than war against it. There was, after all, a perfectly legitimate fear on the part of our allies: namely, that by reopening the process, we might sacrifice some of the important gains that we had made, particularly on the “golden thread”, as the Prime Minister referred to it, of the importance of economic development, governance, the rule of law, driving out corruption and human rights.

On reflection, having read the document, which I commend to hon. Members, I take my hat off to our negotiating team. I think that we have the best outcome that was to be had. Just look at the document. There is the robust language of the preamble. Those of us who are concerned about communicability should look at the clever way in which the agenda is grouped under “People”, “Planet”, “Prosperity”, “Peace” and “Partnership”—it is almost poetry. I am sure that there is something for the spin doctors to work with there when communicating the agenda. There is the rallying cry that absolutely nobody will be left behind. That is the standard by which all the targets are to be judged: no target will be met while any segment of society is left behind.

There is the really strong language of goal 16 on governance, which, as I have intimated, is one of the most important achievements as far as I am concerned. That whole question was largely ignored by the millennium development goals. There is the importance that is attached to gender, to which we gave such enormous effort, with the targets on female genital mutilation and on early and forced marriage.

Mr Shuker: I want to put on the record the thanks of the Opposition to our excellent negotiating team in New York, who I had the privilege of meeting. While the Minister is walking us through the goals, I wonder if he might say a few words about the two goals that I mentioned, specifically the placeholder language in the climate change goal and the need for a commitment to universal healthcare within the language of goal 3. He mentioned that he had some regrets about the process. I wonder if he shares those two in particular.

Mr Swayne: I have every intention of addressing those issues, if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me.

There is the full integration of climate change into the heart of the process. At the last minute—I hope this will be of some comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy)—we even secured the language that we wanted on anti-microbial resistance. There is the inclusion of modern-day slavery, on which there is cross-party consensus.

I just draw the attention of Members to one single quote from the document, if I may treat them to it:

“We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from

[Mr Swayne]

violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.”

Those are our values and we have managed to get them into the declaration in an unequivocal way. That is an enormous achievement, against all those countries who, frankly, believe that development is just about economics and, if you please, leave human rights at the door. If I may say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) I share his ideological outlook. We are from the same stable. It all just goes to prove how two like-minded people can read the same document and come to radically different conclusions, but I am happy to have that discussion with him.

We have the global goals and they must now be the starting point for everything the Department does. The foundation is the 0.7%, but there now must be a clear line of sight between the goals as set out in the document and the departmental plan we develop. The goals are, of course, universal. They apply to us. Members have referred to the fact that there must now be a cross-Whitehall approach led by the Cabinet Office to ensure we meet the global goals. As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, there must be no cherry-picking—we are committed to the entire package.

As far as DFID’s work is concerned, however, we have to consider where our comparative advantage lies: what we do best, where we can make the greatest impact, where we can secure the greatest value for money and what are our strategic priorities already. They remain our strategic priorities: the reform of the international system, to make sure that all the agencies and multinationals with whom we work also bend themselves to these new global goals; and our right and proper attachment to the gender question and the rights of women and girls. That must remain one of the forefront activities by the Department. We have to, quite properly, retain the emphasis we have placed on sustainable and inclusive economic development as the only permanent way of exiting poverty. Of course, we still—hon. Members have been right to draw attention to it—have to provide the very basics of water, nutrition and health to so many of the world’s poor people.

On specific choices, however, and on the question of where our main effort lies, they will be determined by those priorities and the process, which has already begun in the Department, of the bilateral aid review. We will examine every single country in which we operate and ask the following questions: why are we operating in this country? Are there other countries that we ought to be operating in instead? What are we doing in those countries? Are there things we need to be doing more of, or things we need to be doing less of? Are there things we are not doing that we ought to be doing? That whole process is under way.

In line with that is the multilateral aid review. We have to examine all the partners through which we operate. Are they delivering value for money? Are their objectives aligned with ours? Are they efficient? Are they still a useful operating model? All that has to take place. At the same time, there will be some conditioning

as a consequence of the security and defence review, which will guide policy in those areas of the world where our concern is greatest. Our spending portfolio will have to evolve. We will have to do development differently and integrate climate change into everything we do. We have to be climate smart in all our projects and all our doings. These are things we will develop over the next few years.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham quite properly drew attention to data, and was joined in that by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) and the hon. Members for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). We are alive to that concern, as is the document, which speaks of the need for a data revolution. That process has already begun. Our former colleague, Lynne Featherstone, when Parliamentary Under-Secretary, hosted a conference on data. We recognise the huge deficit and the need to make an enormous effort to address the matter. The question of the indicators is still open. We do not expect them to be finalised and published until next March. It might be of some comfort if I say that the national statistician, John Pullinger, is chairing the committee, and I am confident that the indicators will be focused and will enable us to make the appropriate measurements.

I had a very different take on the outcome of Addis Ababa from my hon. and learned Friend. I thought it was a triumph, particularly because it went beyond aid. I share his disappointment at the inability of other G20 and G8 nations to step up to the plate and deliver on the 0.7% target, but my understanding is that at Addis Ababa the EU made a time-bound pledge in respect of the least-developed countries. Its strength, however, lay in its going beyond aid—to questions of harnessing the private sector, of harnessing countries’ resources and of tax reform and widening the tax base. These important issues all came out of it.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, as well as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) in an intervention on him, asked about the transfer of the aid budget to dealing with the refugees. I can reassure the House that there is no change in the definition of ODA, and no cut is being made to make money available for refugees, but clearly there are always opportunity costs: money spent in one way is not available to be spent in another. That is a perfectly proper evaluation for the Government to have made.

I have already addressed the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell. The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) asked about the national interest. I do not see a disparity between our national interest and how we deploy our official development aid. I regard the way that we spend it as an investment in pursuit of our national interest. We want to live in a safer, more stable and more prosperous world. That is in our national interest, and I believe we should pursue it.

I will certainly pass on what I took to be the application by the hon. Member for Glasgow North to be included in the delegation to UNGA. I do not know how the delegation is being made up; all I can say is that I know that I am not going.

Patrick Grady: It is not a personal request; it is about the relationship that exists, the respect agenda across the devolved Administrations and whether there is a space for a Minister or official from Scotland.

Mr Swayne: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in her place and will have heard this exchange. The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to that important relationship and I very much look forward to meeting Humza Yousaf, which is scheduled in my diary for Monday.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) referred to the importance of biodiversity and tourism. That is an important point. We must not forget that tourism is an important earner for many poor countries.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) asked a very important question, on which I have reflected a great deal: “If you wanted a shorter list, what would you have left out?” That is one of the reasons why, on reflection, I have come to the belief that we have the best document that we could have come out with. He said that he regretted the absence of solidarity. I commend the document to him: the word leaps out of the page several times. I assure him that solidarity is there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) reminded me of the very enjoyable time I spent among his students and his congregation, even if it was small. *[Laughter.]* There were many more students than there were in the congregation. He reminded us of something that is increasingly true and that many hon. Members will have experienced on their travels to see our operations in the rest of the world. In many of our posts the DFID element is significantly bigger than the Foreign Office element. That is a measure of the way that we have placed primacy on the international development role, but in all those operations we represent one Government—Her Majesty’s Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), who has long experience in Rwanda—I have joined her there on a number of occasions—spoke of the need for long-term sustainability, particularly in respect of objective No. 8. The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) brought to bear his important experience from Sierra Leone and his other operations. He rightly drew attention to the importance of our pitch at the Paris climate change summit in December. I have spent some time over the summer visiting countries and getting them to up their game in their offer for Paris. In particular, I have encouraged Bangladesh to make sure—*[Interruption.]* I see that I am trespassing on the time. I am sorry if I have been unable to answer all the questions; I will write to hon. Members, but I must give the remaining time to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham.

4.58 pm

Stephen Phillips: If anybody thought that my right hon. Friend, who answers for the Government in this

debate, lacked passion as he enters his sixth decade—or perhaps his seventh; I am not sure—they have obviously failed to see him at the Dispatch Box today.

This has been an incredibly important debate, in which the views of the House have been made clear to Ministers—those views have been almost unanimous—about the importance of the sustainable development goals. My hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) talked about the extent to which our constituents sometimes raise with us international development and the amount we spend on it. This Department—under my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, whom I am pleased to see on the Front Bench listening to some of the contributions in the debate—is leading the way in making clear to our constituents quite how important international development is, both for doing the right thing and for our security in our country.

It is impossible in the time available to do justice to the contributions that have been made in this debate, but it has been a full debate, in which views have been expressed across the House, making it clear that there is political leadership here and that we will do the right thing and the thing that is necessary for our national security. For all the reasons that I gave when I opened the debate, I commend the motion before the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Sustainable Development Goals.

LAY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS

Ordered,

That, in accordance with Standing Order No. 149A and the Resolution of the House of 17 March 2015, Mr Peter Jinman, Mr Walter Rader and Ms Sharon Darcy be re-appointed lay members of the Committee on Standards for the period ending on 30 March 2017.—*(Dr Thérèse Coffey.)*

Business without Debate

LIAISON COMMITTEE (MEMBERSHIP)

Ordered,

That, with effect for the current Parliament, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of select committees), the chair for the time being of each of the following select committees shall be a member of the Liaison Committee:

Administration; Backbench Business; Business, Innovation and Skills; Communities and Local Government; Culture, Media and Sport; Defence; Education; Energy and Climate Change; Environmental Audit; Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; European Scrutiny; Finance; Foreign Affairs; Health; Home Affairs; Joint Committee on Human Rights (the chair being a Member of this House); International Development; Justice; Northern Ireland Affairs; Petitions; Procedure; Public Accounts; Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs; Regulatory Reform; Science and Technology; Scottish Affairs; Selection; Standards; Statutory Instruments; Transport; Treasury; Welsh Affairs; Women and Equalities; and Work and Pensions.—*(Dr Thérèse Coffey.)*

Libyan Personnel: Bassingbourn Barracks

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

5 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing the House the opportunity to consider the extraordinary and unhappy events that occurred in the city of Cambridge as a consequence of the decision to train Libyan personnel at Bassingbourn barracks last year. Bassingbourn barracks is located some 10.5 miles to the south-west of Cambridge—the city I now represent—but the background to the events in question takes us back some years to events in Libya and announcements by the Prime Minister in 2013.

The decision to train up to 2,000 Libyan armed forces personnel at Bassingbourn was announced in a statement by the then Secretary of State for Defence on 11 June 2014. It indicated that in the first tranche, some 325 Libyan recruits were starting training and that the programme would continue for 24 weeks. He assured the House:

“These recruits have been carefully vetted by the Libyan Government and Home Office officials”.

—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2014; Vol. 582, c. 51WS.]

Cambridge is normally a safe city—as everywhere else, there are some incidents—but in late October 2014, the local newspaper started reporting a series of assaults that were highly unusual. The *Cambridge News* reported a Cambridgeshire police spokesman saying:

“We are investigating allegations of a serious sexual assault on Christ’s Pieces which is believed to have occurred between 2am and 5am this morning.”

The report continued:

“The force is hunting a group of three men, described as being of Middle Eastern appearance with dark black hair, in relation to the attack on the man in his 20s yesterday. Two men, both in their early 20s, are also being sought for the sexual attack on a woman on Mill Road. Cambridge residents are being warned to be vigilant and take safety precautions as well as sticking to groups at night.”

We now know that assaults took place on the weekend of 17 October, and more serious assaults occurred on 25 and 26 October.

What was going on? The police do not normally advise Cambridge residents on “sticking to groups at night.”

What was going on was that these recruits, described by the Secretary of State as “carefully vetted”, were out of control on the streets of Cambridge. The local councillor for Bassingbourn tells me that he was assured, in respect of the recruits, that

“you will never see them and no-one will notice that they are there”, and that the training was so intensive that they would not be let out of the barracks. That was clearly not the case—so out of control were they that, as we learned later when the cases were tried in May this year, two Libyan cadets were jailed for 12 years each for raping a man in Cambridge in a prolonged attack in Christ’s Pieces.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. We urgently needed to examine what happened in Cambridge and the trauma experienced by many families in the city. Does he agree that the Ministry of Defence should have been much

more alert to the risk, given that sexual assaults, personnel breaking out of camps, the setting up of roadblocks and harassment of local communities had all happened where training had been offered to Libyans in Turkey, Libya and Jordan, and that the security vetting of these people was impossible?

Daniel Zeichner: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was not aware that that experience should have been brought to bear; that will add to some of the points that I am about to detail. The point I am making is about just how serious the offences were. We found out more after the rape trial verdicts were returned, because it was revealed that three other Libyans cadets had already pleaded guilty to unrelated sex attacks which had taken place in Cambridge on the same night. They had been sentenced at Norwich Crown court on 13 May, but reporting restrictions had been in place until the rape case was concluded. What was happening was very serious, and today I want to find out how that was allowed to happen, why it has taken so long to get answers, and why the people of Cambridge, and, in particular, the victims of the assaults, have not had an apology from those who gave quite clear assurances in the first place that risks would be minimal.

Let me first pay tribute to those who have been seeking answers, particularly Councillor Lewis Herbert, the leader of Cambridge City Council. The horrible, avoidable attacks took place in his city, but the council had been given not a single piece of information at any stage by the Ministry of Defence or the Army about Libyan troop visits to Cambridge. He has doggedly refused to accept the frankly evasive and frequently obstructive responses from the MOD. I also pay tribute to his fellow councillors, from a range of authorities across Cambridgeshire, and council officers who have pressed for answers for months and months. They are, however, still being denied the full facts, so much so that Councillor Herbert’s most recent letter to the Secretary of State, in late May this year, concludes:

“An acknowledgement of regret and an apology to the victims is, in our view, still outstanding from the Ministry of Defence”.

I hope that that, at least, will be forthcoming from the Minister today. I would also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), the shadow Minister, for her tireless pursuit of the truth on these matters through questions and interventions. I am sure she, too, would like the full story to be revealed.

I shall move to the substance of what I hope the Minister will be able to tell us, but I will start by reminding the House of some of the key statements already made. On 4 November, soon after the weekends I have described, the Secretary of State made a brief statement saying only that the training programme was being curtailed and that the recruits will

“be returning to Libya in the coming days.”—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2014; Vol. 587, c. 44WS.]

There was no explanation and certainly no reassurance to the people of Cambridge. The following day the Prime Minister announced that he had requested a report into what had happened. It took until 9 January of this year for a further statement telling us that a copy of the report’s conclusions and recommendations only had been placed in the House of Commons Library. We still have not seen the full report; nor have we had the opportunity to see whether it really faces up to the issues or not.

Those producing the report had met local councillors and council officers, who presented a series of detailed questions and interrogated the terms of reference of the review that they had been given. Cambridge City Council also told the review team that it believed only an independent inquiry would restore public confidence. Later, in December, in response to Freedom of Information requests from the BBC, the original risk assessment was released, and it was confirmed that complaints about Libyan trainees leaving the camp and seeking out alcohol in pubs in local villages were reported as early as 8 August. Indeed, local Councillor Nigel Cathcart tells me:

“There were a number of incidents where Libyan trainees were observed, unsupervised, in the village of Bassingbourn. They were not causing any particular harm but residents were concerned to see them as it was understood that they should have been confined to the Barracks. As far as I am aware these incidents were reported at the time so the MOD should have been aware of what was happening. It was only later (probably 2 or 3 weeks) that the far more serious incidents took place in Cambridge. Had the MOD acted promptly on the original information and suspended the unsupervised incursions immediately then the Cambridge incidents could have been prevented. This was, therefore, a preventable event if the MOD had acted promptly with the information available to them.”

The councillor’s views are backed up by the risk assessment. The July 2013 assessment states that, subject to any subsequent review, the trainees were not to leave the camp off-duty unless—this is critical—they were in organised supervised groups. It states that

“the risk of bad behaviour of trainees outside Bassingbourn Camp is mitigated by the provisions of their visas, the supervisory measures in place for limited excursions and the security arrangements between the MOD, Police and Home Office.”

A second risk assessment reports that the initial plan to train 360 trainees for 14 weeks had been extended to 24 weeks, with tranches of 360 to 500. It is stated that by lengthening the course,

“to better meet Libyan intent and be more coherent with US plans”,

it would be necessary to allow supervised excursions, as rewards. These would require

“the appropriate measures in place to mitigate immigration and security risks”.

Detailed measures to reduce risks would include

“small, controlled batches of trainees”,

pre-advising of local police, and

“a robust communications plan in place for local communities and the media”.

There is also a detailed risk assessment for organised recreational visits. It says that

“under no circumstances will trainees be allowed to leave the group on an outward visit, and alcohol will be banned.”

Of course, as the local councillor has explained, none of that bears any resemblance to what actually happened.

Mrs Moon: Is my hon. Friend aware that the visits—which were apparently intended to encourage good behaviour among the Libyans, who were becoming increasingly out of control—included visits to the House of Commons, No. 10 Downing Street and Buckingham Palace?

Daniel Zeichner: We are grateful for the knowledge, as a consequence of some of the questions that have been tabled, that that series of visits took place. My point is

that, even if those visits—extraordinary as some of them might seem—were supervised, the key question is what happened in the case of the unsupervised visits.

What actually happened was described by councillors, including the one whom I quoted earlier, when they met representatives of the MOD and the Army in February. In the minutes of that meeting, we had, for the first time, an apology from the Army, but none from the Ministry of Defence; and we finally had a recognition from the Army that the consultation with key local stakeholders had been inadequate. However, as the Army representatives admitted, we also learned that there had been a significant change in what is known as the “walk-out” policy in August 2014. Councillors were told that the decision to allow trainees to leave the camp unsupervised had been made by Ministers. I ask the Minister to confirm that that was the case, and to tell me why the safety of Cambridge residents was put at risk at that point.

I have to say that I find the account of what was happening in late October after the first spate of incidents quite alarming. Councillors were told that following the incidents of October 17, measures taken to

“add additional deterrent to leaving the camp included the addition of a platoon of Gurkha, two companies from the UK standby Battalion and Military Working Dogs.”

The following weekend, however, Cambridge suffered the most serious assaults of all. I also find it concerning that, in a written parliamentary answer on January 15 to the hon. Member for Bridgend, the then defence Minister said that the trainees

“were...escorted to shops in the local area, and Cambridge City Centre.”

In the light of what we now know, that hardly does justice to what was actually happening.

Of course, there was also a significant financial cost. We have learned from parliamentary answers that the costs of the training programme and reactivating the facilities were some £17 million, of which only £2.48 million has so far been recouped from the Libyan Government.

Let me end with a series of very clear questions to the Minister. Will the full report be made available? Who exactly authorised the end to the supervised walk-out policy in August 2014? Why was so little revealed about what actually happened, for so long, and why has it had to be dragged out by freedom of information requests and parliamentary questions? Will the Minister hold a genuinely independent inquiry, as requested by the local councils? What will be the financial cost of this entire exercise to the taxpayer? Finally, will there now be a full and unequivocal apology to the people of Cambridge and Cambridgeshire who were put at such risk, particularly the residents who, it may be argued, were as much victims of Ministry of Defence negligence as the Libyan trainees?

5.13 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt): I thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for initiating the debate. I appreciate the concerns of his constituents about the tragic events he has described.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, at the 2013 G8 summit the UK pledged, along with international partners, to train up to 7,000 Libyan troops. Of those, the UK offered to train up to 2,000 Libyan armed forces

[Penny Mordaunt]

personnel. They were to return to Libya as a general purpose force to support the democratically elected Libyan Government; to disarm and integrate militias; and to improve the security and stability of the country. That was part of the wider ongoing political, economic, justice, and security support package with which the UK was providing the country at the time. The first phase of the training began in June 2014 at Bassingbourn barracks in Cambridgeshire, when 3 SCOTS delivered training to 328 Libyans.

If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I would like to record my thanks to 3 SCOTS. It did tremendous work in the training it provided, and these appalling events should not mar its efforts. There is a direct connection between the work it has been doing and making our country safe and secure. Security in Libya and a political settlement there will help the security of our nation tremendously, and 3 SCOTS did a huge amount of work to support the mission.

The majority of Libyan trainees remained in the programme until the end, and were trained successfully despite the ongoing political uncertainty in Libya from August 2014 onwards. At the point when the training was eventually concluded, the battalion had exceeded its training objectives. The battalion could have been reinserted into a meaningful role in Libya if one had existed. Let me also add our gratitude to the hon. Gentleman's local community, the Cambridgeshire constabulary and other Government Departments for their enormous support throughout that period.

The hon. Gentleman raised several points and I shall take them in turn, and the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) rightly identified the issue of training in-country as opposed to training here; that is clearly our preference and I will touch on that as well.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the publication of the report. Key findings were published in January and I will touch on the reasons the full report was not published then, but the full report now has been published, although it does have some redactions, which I will talk him through. He also raised concerns about one of the key findings of the report, which was the poor communications, to say the very least, with some elements of the local community, and I will talk about that and the lessons we have learned. He rightly talked about an apology and redress as well, which I will touch on, too. He mentioned vetting security and the process, too, and I will start with that.

Every potential recruit who successfully passed the Libyan vetting and selection process was subject to additional UK vetting in Libya to ensure that they met the minimum UK security, immigration, medical, physical, literacy and numeracy criteria. Home Office visa processes included checks against UK criminal databases and a visa declaration by all trainees confirming they had no criminal convictions or charges in the UK or elsewhere. In addition, to ensure a balanced mix of trainees, the selection process was designed so that no single group or region was over-represented in the training cohort. We were not aware that any of the candidates who passed UK screening had criminal convictions or faced charges at that time in the UK or elsewhere. If we had known of any, those candidates clearly would not have been in that cohort.

However, as the House is aware, there were some serious disciplinary issues. Libyan officers proved unable or unwilling to apply the sanctions that were available to them to deal effectively with the disciplinary and behavioural issues that arose. In order for the disciplinary issues not to affect the training any further, the Defence Secretary authorised the introduction of a package of incentives for good behaviour, including a system of training bonuses, and a change to the walking out policy, as it was known, effectively allowing Libyan recruits unescorted time in Cambridge. That led to a period of relative calm within the camp.

It was not until 17 October that further incidents caused concern, when there were allegations of sexual assaults on members of the public in Cambridge. This led the chief constable of Cambridgeshire to request that the commanding officer of the training unit suspend local visits outside the camp, including visits to Cambridge. He did that, and also put in place heightened security at the barracks.

Bassingbourn is not a prison; it is designed to keep unwanted persons out of the camp, rather than to stop people leaving. It is also important to note that trainees could not legally be treated as prisoners. In the event, the extra security did not prevent substantial unauthorised groups of trainees from leaving the camp on 25 and 26 October, during which time two Libyans left the camp unauthorised and went on to commit a serious sexual assault in Cambridge. This led to another major increase in police and Army resources to secure the base, and the police and the Army concluded that the training had to be ended.

The dysfunctional position in Libya and the continuing absence of a defined role for the Libyan purpose force that we were training meant there was nothing to be gained in military terms from the training planned for the final four weeks of the course. Continuation of the course and further live firing training might have placed the trainers at unacceptable risk, and concerns were also being expressed about the strain that the training was placing on the unit itself. Taken together, those circumstances led to the Secretary of State for Defence ending the course. All Libyan trainees not in UK custody or claiming asylum were returned to Libya by mid-November.

I shall turn now to the report. Following the premature completion of the training, an independent report into the circumstances was produced. Its key findings were released in January of this year, and we accepted its recommendations in full. The Secretary of State made a statement to that effect in the House, but, as hon. Members will know, the full report was not released owing to ongoing criminal proceedings against the five Libyans accused of sexual offences. Those proceedings were concluded in May.

Having consulted the police and the Libyan embassy, and across Government, we have placed a copy of the report in the Library of the House of Commons. Those reading it will notice that, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, the technical arrangement between the UK and the Government of Libya has been redacted. This is unfortunately unavoidable. This is a bilateral document and, due to the fragility of the political situation in Libya, we are still awaiting agreement from the Libyan Government to publish that information. All names below senior civil servant level have also been redacted in line with the Freedom of Information Act.

The Defence Secretary has already gone on record confirming that no future general purpose force training will take place at Bassingbourn. The report underlines one area in particular where we could have done considerably better, which the hon. Gentleman raised: communication with the local community and in particular the way in which we communicated changes in the walking-out policy. Home Office Ministers were aware of the situation and the police were fully consulted on this change and provided advice during the decision-making process but, unfortunately, the local MP, local councils and the communities that were most affected were not told that there would be periods when trainees would not be escorted.

The heightened security at Bassingbourn and the suspension of all visits to Cambridge did not, in the event, prevent the most serious offences from being committed, but a more active approach to communicating with the local community was clearly needed. Since then, the Army has met local councils to discuss how the processes for communicating policy that affects local communities might be improved. Communication procedures have now been reviewed and measures are in place to ensure better communication, should a similar event ever arise.

The report also raises the issue of disciplining foreign troops. It is clear that the breakdown in the political situation in Libya played a large role in the problems we encountered, but the report concluded that the UK trainers had few tools at their disposal to discipline the Libyan trainees. The report asked whether we could apply UK service discipline to troops training in the UK. This would involve bringing foreign troops into the British military chain of command and require significant amendments to the Armed Forces Act 2006. My Department has assessed the challenges and downsides of making those changes and decided that they would currently outweigh any benefits, particularly as we are keen to provide training in-country. I have therefore not instructed my Department to instigate such changes now, but I will keep the matter under review. The report also recommends, however, that, in future, on courses of this kind, we consider delivering that training to the officers involved separately and in advance of the remaining trainees and carrying out basic training for the rest of the recruits in their own country. That will provide an additional layer of vetting, filtering out those for whom a career in the military may not be suitable, and securing a higher level of commitment from trainees.

Finally, I wish to turn to the issue of apology and redress. The Ministry of Defence has already expressed its deep regret about these appalling incidents. I add my personal voice to that to say how sorry I am that this has happened. These were heinous crimes committed against entirely innocent and random passers-by. Everyone who has been close to this case has been appalled by it and deeply regrets it.

I wish to place it on the record that these crimes were not committed by our armed forces. I am very conscious of that. The perpetrators clearly did not follow the high standards that we expect from our own military or from other military personnel, so as well as the tremendous hurt and harm they have done to members of the public in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, they have also done a grave disservice to anyone who wears a uniform.

Mrs Moon: I hear what the Minister says, and she has been very open and honest in her response, but we are still left with the MOD's own risk assessment before the personnel came to the UK. It says:

"There were reports of widespread sexual and gender-based violence during the conflict and there is some evidence that serious human rights abuses involving sexual violence took place. A UN mission in 2012 found incidents of rape perpetrated against both women and men. This is likely to represent significant under-reporting, due to the sensitivity of sexual violence and reticence to discuss these issues outside the family."

We knew that there was a problem, and yet still those personnel were brought to this country. The UK personnel who were asked to provide the discipline were not given the tools to do so.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her point, because it gets to one of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. Clearly, there were risks associated with the cultural norms in Libyan society. Obviously, they were clearly identified in the risk assessment. Having read the report in preparation for this debate, I can say that there were things put in place to mitigate them, so a cultural education took place as part of the preparation for that course. Those providing the training took that extremely seriously.

I have already touched on the consultations that took place when policy was being changed to cope with what was a pretty unique set of circumstances, as these trainees were watching what was happening in their own country. A clear process was gone through. Clearly, there were issues around communication, and we regret what has happened. I just wish to state that there was no lax attitude in trying to mitigate the risks that any training course carries. Furthermore, decisions that were taken on changes of policy were clearly designed to improve the situation and not worsen it. We need to look at the conclusions of the report, which I have already done. Clearly, this has been an appalling episode that we never want to happen again. I know of the interest that the hon. Lady takes with regard to incidents of violence and sexual violence. She can be reassured by the cultural training that took place before the course started.

Finally, let me talk about redress. The hon. Gentleman very kindly spoke to one of my colleagues about some of the issues that he has raised, and he has also touched on the cost to the MOD, which clearly we would like to recoup for the British taxpayer and our own budget. In that conversation, although not on the Floor of the House, he alluded to losses that his local authority has incurred. Clearly that should not be allowed to stand, and if he has concerns about that I encourage him—if he has not done so already—to write to me or to my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government, and we stand ready to provide him with advice. We are seeking financial redress, and perhaps others who are out of pocket should also do that. If he has such concerns, I will do all I can to assist him and his local authority, and I thank him again for allowing me to get that point on the record.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 10 September 2015

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

Rural Broadband

[Relevant documents: Sixth Report from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2013-14, on Rural communities, HC 602, and the Government response, HC 764; Seventh Report from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2014-15, on Rural broadband and digital-only services, HC 83, and the Government response, HC 1149.]

1.30 pm

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I call Neil Parish to move the motion.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Betts. It is a great pleasure to work under your chairmanship. Do I have to move the motion now?

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Yes, move the motion—that is the new format.

Neil Parish: I do not have it to hand, which is not a good start.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): It is arriving.

Neil Parish: Thank you for passing the motion to me, Minister. Don't worry, once I get going, it will be fine.

I beg to move,

That this House has considered delivery of rural broadband.

Next time, Mr Betts, I will make sure that I know the new procedure. It is a great pleasure to work under your chairmanship. It is a delight to have the Minister here this afternoon, and I shall put some questions to him at the end, which I am sure he will be more than able to answer. I thank hon. Members for turning up this afternoon. We are all concerned not only about rural broadband but about the delivery of broadband throughout the country, which is very significant.

The internet is increasingly important to everyday lives, whether for online shopping, for staying in touch with friends or for all our rural businesses, such as farming and tourism, which are keen to have broadband. Despite a public subsidy of about £1.7 billion, too many consumers, businesses and individuals cannot access broadband. Theoretically, until we had to change the system, farmers were expected to deliver payments online, and next year they will have to, but if they do not have superfast broadband or a good internet connection that will be impossible.

BT owns a lot, if not all, of the infrastructure and is the largest retail provider using it. Ofcom is considering whether to propose separating the infrastructure division, Openreach, from the rest of BT, which would create more competition and mean that BT no longer had a conflict of interest in delivering the high-quality broadband that everyone deserves. I do not know whether this afternoon the Minister will want to be drawn on the

question of what should happen to BT. An independent Openreach would improve the quality of service and increase infrastructure investment.

There are two elements to the delivery of superfast broadband in most constituencies: the publicly funded programme—in my constituency, Connecting Devon and Somerset—and the commercially funded roll-out of superfast broadband in larger towns and cities. We must remember, however, that Government and council money is all taxpayers' money, and we want to see value for it. In earlier debates in the House, we have been very concerned not only about the pace of broadband roll-out but about whether it is being rolled out with value for money for our taxpayers.

For the Devon and Somerset roll-out, the first delivery contract was let to BT and is believed to be on time; it has been suggested that it is also within budget. The target refers to 90% coverage of the area by 2016, but that is where the problem lies in many respects. If roll-out across a constituency or a country is in percentages, people automatically roll out to the areas that are easiest to get to and, all the time, we will have to put public money in to get to those hardest-to-reach areas. I have yet to be convinced that we are getting the necessary value for money from many of the contracts.

If we let one contract get to 90% of the population and another to 95%, and if it is the same company rolling out the broadband, what stops the company from not delivering what it should have done under the first contract but delivering it under the second contract and saying, "Of course it is all too hard to reach. We need more money to reach the hardest-to-reach areas"? One of our problems in Devon and Somerset is that there has not been enough competition in letting the contracts. A contract was let to BT, then a further one was to be let to it again. There has not been enough competition, so there are not enough people out there with wireless connections or different types of technology to keep BT moving. BT has been slow at bringing in the new technologies.

Many Members present have constituencies with a hilly topography and many farms, villages and hamlets are stretched out and a long way from the cabinets and the fibre cable. In the end, there will have to be a system not only of fibre cables but of wireless and other technologies to deliver broadband.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): I cannot stay for the whole debate, because I have to go to the main Chamber, but given the very name of my constituency, the High Peak, I want to echo what my hon. Friend is saying. Broadband has very much become the fourth utility, and businesses and farmers need it. The terrain of the area that I represent makes broadband difficult to get, so we need to put some effort into that last 10%, because those people are as important as the first 10%.

Neil Parish: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. There have to be other initiatives, or other existing systems. Can we use church towers or mobile phone masts, if there are any? Do we need more of those, or do we need to link the broadband or internet connection to other systems? Otherwise, we seem to be getting only to those areas that we can get to and not to

[Neil Parish]

the hardest-to-reach areas. I am not yet convinced, even with the latest contracts, that we are getting where we need to be.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely correct about reaching the hardest areas. A key driver for the final 10% is getting more competition into the market for broadband provision. Was he as concerned as I was to read in *The Times* this week that BT Openreach had been referred to Ofcom? The article claimed that it was to some extent fiddling figures to avoid having to proceed as quickly as possible with the installation of fibre-optic cables. That must be of concern to him and to rural residents in my constituency, in places such as Water, Lumb, Lower Darwen and Whitworth, who have been waiting a long time to be remembered as the final 10%.

Neil Parish: Yes. If we look at the contracts with BT in particular, there is money that is supposed to be delivered into the contract, but that always comes at the end. I do not know what the situation is in my hon. Friend's area, but there is certainly little under the Devon and Somerset contract.

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): My hon. Friend is altruistic, so he will not mind me commenting on other constituencies. He mentioned what the situation was in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), so I am sure he will welcome the fact that broadband will reach 98% there under our scheme, and High Peak 93%. That is good news—thousands of our constituents being connected, thanks to this superbly successful broadband programme.

Neil Parish: I thank the Minister for his intervention. It is all very well to talk about the great delivery of broadband in those areas, which is fascinating, but it does absolutely no good to many of my villages, which have only 25% of people connected. The more he keeps on about how much other areas have got broadband, the more it annoys those who have not got it. That is the problem with rolling out statistics.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Although I welcome what the Minister has said about percentages for individual constituencies, the great concern for my constituents in Dorset will be that last 5% to 10%, as they are the hardest to reach and are clamouring the loudest to make sure the broadband is actually delivered.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. Also, the last 5% is probably not 5% around the whole country but 50% of particular areas of very many of the constituencies of Members here today. Believe it or not, I have some sympathy for the Minister—

Mr Vaizey: No!

Neil Parish: Occasionally, on a good day. To be serious, the people who have broadband are very happy and we do not hear much from them; the issue is the

people who do not. I repeat that the more we talk about all those who have it, the more it drives on those who do not.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am sure my hon. Friend will recognise that those of us who represent coastal communities face a real barrier to the delivery of infrastructure, better known as the sea, which rules out some of the options he has talked about. I welcome the Minister's announcement in a previous debate that Torbay would have 100% coverage, but sometimes in an urban area it is the site that most needs to be covered—a business park or a development park—that is left out, even though nearby housing has been covered.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend raises a good point. That is part of the trouble and is hard to understand. When someone knows that people right next to them have a good connection but they themselves have not it seems a huge anomaly. BT has so much fibre-optic cable that where it is rolling out the contract it tries to deliver broadband with that cable, but sometimes it simply will not work. I do not think that BT is necessarily deploying the other technologies that we need as fast as it should be.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman say that the areas that are of most concern to him are the 5% who are not going to get broadband if the 95% target is hit. What about my constituency? Fermanagh and South Tyrone has coverage for only 55% of the population; are the other 45% not as much disadvantaged as the 5% in the areas with 95% coverage, or even more disadvantaged?

Neil Parish: The hon. Gentleman stresses the point that people in a large area of his constituency are not getting the connection that they should be. That is the problem. We have done well in the areas we can get to reasonably easily, but given the amount of public money going in to deliver to the areas that are harder to get to, I feel coverage is not getting there fast enough and there is not enough concentration on that problem.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Many businesses are looking to relocate to rural areas, which presents us with a big problem. Those businesses do not want to be confined to industrial estates; many looking to relocate to my constituency of North Cornwall are food based and want to have access to broadband on farms. What can be done about that?

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. I also thank him for elevating me to the status of right honourable; however, I am only an hon. Member. To be serious, we talk a lot about infrastructure and about roads. It is right that the Government are doing a lot about our roads, and I fully support that.

Mr Vaizey: And broadband!

Neil Parish: Yes, and broadband, but the issue is the speed with which we are getting the broadband out. There are individual areas with quite a lot of really good businesses that want to stay, but some are considering whether they will have to relocate if they do not get

broadband quickly. That is the conundrum. I therefore echo what my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) has said.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP) I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on obtaining this debate and on his elevation to the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. He is very well placed to debate this subject and has been a champion for rural broadband. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) indicated that his constituency has low coverage. We are talking about the last 5%. As has been said, the Government are encouraging innovation, and encouraging farmers to diversify, yet there is still not the broadband coverage that is needed. Surely as well as investing, we need to think outside the box. Whether we are using church towers or whatever, we need to be innovative in our thinking.

Neil Parish: One question I will be putting to the Minister is whether we will need to use some form of voucher system to enable the hardest-to-reach areas to do their own thing. In Devon and Somerset we often get BT starting on part of an area, which stymies work for the rest of it, and then nobody else wants to come in to finish the job. We have to get to grips with those sorts of issues. It is good to have the Minister here because we shall get such clarity when I ask him my questions.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. We are continuously talking about this subject and are edging the Minister forward; he realises how serious this is. In my constituency, the Blackdown hills, which border the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), are a harder-to-reach area. Might it be possible to consider giving that area special designation, such as Dartmoor has, when the contract process for phase 2 of Connecting Devon and Somerset begins? It could then be considered for one of the new different methods, so that those hill people could be catered for. Will the Minister comment on that?

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend and new constituency neighbour. It is great to have her in Parliament—she really speaks up for her area. We have treated Exmoor and Dartmoor as a special entity, and most of the area will have a wireless connection. I think that we should look at the same sort of treatment for the Blackdown hills. I know that the Minister is not keen on the benefits of not having signed the contract with BT earlier this summer, but one benefit of looking at a new contract for Devon and Somerset is that there is some competition out there. Other companies are prepared to come into the area and so may be prepared to come in to the Blackdown hills. The Devon and Somerset contract is probably one of the biggest in the country—

Mr Vaizey: It is the biggest.

Neil Parish: I thank the Minister for that clarification. I think it is too big in some respects—[*Laughter.*] No, I do. It is too big, so it is unwieldy. Some of the other companies providing broadband are not of the same scale and size as BT, so because the contract is so large it is almost tailor-made for BT and no one else. If the Minister wants greater competition, I suggest that a smaller contract could be the way forward.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the conversation about superfast broadband we should not lose sight of those people who do not have broadband—by that, I mean a connection at a speed of 2 megabits per second? Cheltenham is not wildly rural, yet there are people there who are on dial-up speeds. It is no good saying that 93% are on superfast broadband, as that could obscure the fact that lots of people really have no broadband at all, as is the case in my constituency. Funding has to be sent towards those people in e-poverty as a priority, to take them out of the digital dark age.

Neil Parish: If my wife was here, she would be reinforcing exactly what my hon. Friend is saying. Every time she gets on to our computer and it does not dial up properly or get any connection, she says, “What are you doing about it?”, so hon. Members can see how I have been encouraged to hold this debate. He is right; what is driving everybody so crazy is that some people have superfast broadband, some people have some form of connection and some people have either a very slow connection or no connection at all. As we get towards 2 megabits, the argument then will be whether it is 24 megabits, 50 megabits, or 100 megabits. I am not the most technical man in the world, but I imagine that those are getting faster—but seriously, this is a problem and we somehow have to get everybody on to a reasonable speed and connection for broadband before we drive everything forward. Otherwise, people will be treated doubly badly as a result. That is what we are all worried about in our individual constituencies, and I am sure that the Minister is taking note of that.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. As new Member of Parliament, I find that the question of broadband is one of the biggest in my inbox. My only problem is that in the village in which I live, I have a very slow speed, so I cannot get back to my constituents as quickly as I would like to.

I thank the Minister for coming to Brecon and Radnorshire during the election campaign. He had a look at broadband in the town of Brecon and I am delighted that Brecon now has a good speed. The problem is in Brecon and Radnorshire. The county is vast—the largest constituency in England and Wales—and it is very difficult to get to many parts. We need to think outside the box. In a part of my constituency called Elan valley, 27 homes are not even on mains electricity, so how we are going to get them to mains broadband, I really do not know. However, I would be grateful if the Minister looked into such matters. We have a long, long way to go in rural broadband, but please look into this issue. Like the rest of the Members here—and, I am sure, Members who are not here today—I find that business and social elements in my constituency are being stifled. Broadband has to be pushed further up the scale and the delivery of rural broadband has to be a top priority.

Neil Parish: I welcome my hon. Friend to Parliament, and I am sure that he will do a great job for Brecon and Radnorshire. My brother used to live in Lampeter, so I drove quite regularly through the Brecon Beacons. Brecon and Radnorshire must have some of the most hilly and mountainous country in the nation of Wales and in the

[Neil Parish]

United Kingdom. I therefore suspect we will have to use lots of different methods of getting broadband and internet connections to those areas—I expect the Minister at least to provide my hon. Friend's constituents with generators where they do not have electricity. In very drawn out constituencies that are difficult to get to, we will need different technologies. I am sorry to labour the point so much, but I do not think that it has had enough focus, and it is what my hon. Friend will need more than anybody. I and many other hon. Members will need it as well, but my hon. Friend's constituency will need it in particular.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Is not one of the problems the fact that BT will not be open about which premises and cabinets will not be connected, particularly in relation to its commercial programme? It has been extremely difficult to get information from Connecting Cheshire, because it says that it is prevented from releasing that information under a freedom of information request, because of BT. Many of the communities that are not connected, if they knew they would not be connected, would be willing to band together to try and find a solution if they could, and if there were some sort of voucher scheme.

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and welcome her to Parliament. She is right. I do not know whether Cheshire is the same, but Devon and Somerset signed a confidentiality clause with BT in the first contract, so that has made it doubly hard. The situation has got better and in Devon and Somerset, websites have been set up and people know roughly where they are going to be. The people at BT argue that is a commercial matter, and if they say they are going to be in a certain place at a certain time, and they do not arrive, they leave themselves open to a legal challenge. However, it is still very frustrating for people. I am a little concerned that BT is inclined to move faster when it thinks somebody else might move into the area. It is just a feeling of mine, but I think it is probably shared quite a lot in this Chamber. Perhaps we can ask the Minister about that: does he actually like the confidentiality clauses in these contracts, and would it be better if we did not have them? It would be interesting to see what he has to say about that.

In 2010, Ofcom put regulation in place to allow competing broadband providers access to Openreach national infrastructure and access to passive networks, so that their own fibre to the cabinet or fibre to the home superfast networks could be deployed. That has been helpful for non-BT providers such as Sky and TalkTalk. The majority of superfast investment comes from BT and Virgin Media, and both are investing in upgrading their existing networks. We need, all the time, to keep as much open access as we can.

I turn to Britain's digital future. The UK has one of the most competitive broadband markets in the world, with lower prices than most other European countries. Once people actually get access to the internet and broadband, they get a very good deal, but it is about making sure that we can get people connected in the first place. The UK has an ambitious digital plan, which will help the economy and result in world-class

connectivity, so we are going in the right direction—I thought I ought to put something in this speech to make sure that the Minister felt that I have listened to what he has said. This will help to decrease business costs as well as reduce the cost of public services and help our long-term economic growth. Indeed, it might even help our long-term economic plan, might it not?

However, if that is to happen, the current market structure is letting Britain down. There are over 500 different telecom companies, the majority of which depend on Openreach. It is worth remembering that when other sectors were privatised, such as the electricity sector or the rail network, they were prevented from simultaneously owning the infrastructure and being a retail provider. Ensuring that Openreach was independent of BT would help to extend internet coverage, which, in turn, would help to support small local businesses. In addition, that would help to cut back on the red tape and ensure that the process of installing broadband across the country is much more transparent.

I have emails in my inbox from businesses that feel like they are being let down by the Government not getting broadband to them fast enough. I know that the Minister is working hard on that, but it is what people are concerned about. Over 200 businesses have been in touch to say that they do not have the internet connectivity that they need to be able to run their business. Indeed, 75% of Federation of Small Businesses members say that the internet is vital to their businesses. One particular business said that as a result of the internet, its sales increased by 40%, and 46% of members would like faster internet provision. It is extremely important that businesses have good internet speed and access so that they can promote themselves online. It is essential for tourism, shopping and market research.

In rural areas, Broadband Delivery UK intends to roll out superfast broadband to 95% of the UK by 2017, with universal access to broadband speeds of up to 2 megabits. The final 5% is primarily made up of rural areas, which is mostly what we have been talking about today. Although that is only 5% nationally, it probably means that in many of our constituencies, up to 50% of our areas will not be covered. Rural areas also have slower superfast broadband coverage. There are also related technical issues, as rural areas tend to be further away from the cabinets. That means that companies and the Government should be looking at more efficient and cost-effective solutions, which we have largely covered this afternoon. We appreciate that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has announced a £10 million fund to pilot technologies such as satellites to address the problem, but we would like to see more speed due to the negative effect on businesses and constituents. I want to labour this point for a third time. We have not concentrated enough effort and resources, and certainly BT has not, on the different technologies. We will not by 2020, 2021 or 2022 get to the hardest-to-reach areas if we are not using the better and newer technologies to get to them now, because all these things take time. That is what worries us. We are very pleased for all those who have the broadband connection, but we are very worried about our constituents and businesses that do not have it.

Finally, I come to my questions for the Minister. Can he extend competition to keep the pressure on BT to deliver on its contracts more quickly and effectively?

Can he persuade BT to use extra technologies, especially in the harder to reach areas, to ensure that BT is delivering on its contracts as promised? Will he encourage other companies to bid for contracts to deliver superfast broadband, especially in difficult to reach areas, so that there is local competition in the marketplace? Can businesses and individuals be given vouchers that would go some way towards paying for broadband, which in many cases individuals have to fund privately, out of their own pockets, instead of through the huge taxpayer subsidy that BT is already receiving? Will the Minister keep up the pressure on BT to ensure that it keeps its promises, as already too many people in rural areas do not have broadband and that is only adding to the problems of rural isolation?

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Six hon. Members have applied to speak. I shall restrict the Front Benchers to nine minutes, rather than the usual 10, to allow everyone else five minutes to speak. It is a five-minute time limit, including any interventions, because obviously we are restricted.

2.1 pm

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): It is quite an interesting debate here today—and we have almost had the debate already. I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) has secured this debate. The last time I spoke in this Chamber, he intervened. The debate was on fracking, and I recall that he was blaming Europe, or he was taking the blame for most decisions that had been taken in Europe. I am surprised that he has not also taken the blame for the decision on rural broadband.

As I said, I welcome the debate and I want to touch on a few aspects of the issue. One critical aspect is how targets will be met. It is okay to reach 95% in some areas. As with rural farm payments, it is often possible to reach the first 90% or 85% quite easily; it is getting to the last ones that is very difficult. However, in my constituency and others in Northern Ireland, we are not near that: 55% is the figure for Fermanagh and South Tyrone and the situation is similar in other areas. For West Tyrone, the figure is also 55%. Only four constituencies in Northern Ireland—the urban ones in Belfast—are meeting the 95% target. I am sure that other people in rural areas are in a similar position.

We need a much more in-depth look at who can get broadband when there is a fibre-optic cabinet in the area. I have found two examples recently. About a year ago, we found that the Department of Education was bringing fibre optic to a local village school, but no one else in the village or in the area—no business and no resident—could access that fibre-optic connection. We have now found that BT is bringing fibre optic to the village and putting it into a cabinet, but many people in the area still cannot obtain it from BT. I cannot understand the technology of that.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): This issue is regularly raised in Wales. We get notification that fibre optic is enabled in our area, but if we ring to sign up, it is not. How much can we rely on BT's statistics? I ask my hon. Friend the Minister this question through my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott).

How robust are the statistics that tell us that these targets are being met if we are being told one thing but the physical reality on the ground is another?

Tom Elliott: Absolutely. I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention; what he says is right. I do not have an answer as to how reliable the figures are, but obviously the Minister may be able to give us more information on that. Clearly, if fibre optic is in the village, whether it is going to the school or to a cabinet through BT, the real question is why businesses and residents cannot access it. I just do not know. That has not been addressed.

Another issue in the EFRA Committee report that I noticed was not addressed is how farmers in particular, and people in rural areas in general, cannot now access business opportunities. Some of this is just about the simple registration of births of animals. Doing that online is actually very efficient. Someone may make a mistake on a form, and farmers quite often do—I am a farmer myself, so I hold my hand up—but it is very difficult to make one on the electronic form that is submitted, because it will be rejected. In fact, it is almost impossible to make a mistake on the application form that people put in. Many farmers are disadvantaged because they cannot do that online. In Northern Ireland, we can apply for the single farm payment process online, but many farmers in Northern Ireland cannot do that, simply because they do not have broadband availability. Even the dial-ups in Northern Ireland are quite slow—much slower, I am sure, than the broadband or dial-up connection used by the wife of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton.

We want answers to those questions. I noted that the Minister had referred to two areas, saying that there was 98% and 93% availability of high-speed broadband. The hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) referred to Dorset, saying that the last 5% is key. It is the last 45% in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. It is the last 45% in West Tyrone, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) will make the case about his constituency, where I am sure the figure is equally low, so I think—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Order. That is five minutes.

2.7 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Betts, for giving me the opportunity to speak in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing it. One of our roles as parliamentarians must be to create a level playing field, so that businesses can compete wherever they are situated. I give credit to the Government and to the Minister, because we have seen huge improvements. I am referring to the £1.7 billion of investment, the target of 95% of people getting superfast broadband by 2017 and the fact that we are one of the leading nations in the European Union for broadband access.

However, the issue is not just what we are spending, but where. The key question is whether we have a level playing field. Some 5% do not get good access; they have poor or absent broadband and mobile phone coverage. There is the issue of rural areas gaining access to schemes such as the £3,000 broadband connection voucher scheme, which was aimed only at cities.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

As we have heard, broadband is now an essential service. The Institute of Directors names it as its No. 1 priority for businesses. Rural Action Yorkshire says that it is now a “necessity” and that poor mobile coverage and slow broadband make it nearly impossible to run a business. Many businesses in my constituency are struggling to compete. Businesses used to compete just locally, but now businesses compete nationally and internationally. I recently visited a Michelin-starred restaurant in my constituency that is competing against other Michelin-starred restaurants in other parts of the country. If people are sat waiting to be able to book a client in online and the screen will not change, they are losing business. Other companies selling goods online are competing against businesses internationally.

We want to attract great businesses such as architects and graphic designers, but they cannot operate in rural areas with slow broadband, which means that they will relocate out of our areas. They will move to urban areas or places where they will get faster broadband. It is not a level playing field, and that is contributing to a depopulation of young people and businesses, which hampers job creation and investment.

A report by the National Farmers Union recently stated that 40% of farmers are without access to broadband and 90% have no reliable service. Despite that, we expect them to fill in forms, use the common agricultural policy information service, complete VAT returns and manage vehicle tax and animal passports online. North Yorkshire County Council recently announced that its third-stage investment in broadband would still mean that some isolated areas would not get access to high-speed broadband, so those businesses have no prospect of a solution in the foreseeable future.

The position is similar for mobile phone coverage. Yes, there have been improvements, and we are delighted to hear of the £5 billion investment in new masts in our major networks around the UK. On the ground, however, we see little apparent improvement in access to mobile phone coverage.

How do we help rural businesses on to that level playing field? There are solutions, of course. Point-to-point wireless is an effective solution. Fixed-line to wireless and back to fixed-line is another. I am grateful to the Minister for agreeing to meet in October one of my providers, Moorsweb, which provides those excellent solutions in my area. Its business model is contingent on finding long-term customers in its area, but as soon as it achieves market penetration, BT or Openreach can come into the area and take those customers back. As a result, Moorsweb has no long-term customer base, which is a disincentive to it to invest. It is a good, not-for-profit organisation that is keen to deliver a service to local people, but when it invests, there is no long-term return. We need to make sure that such providers have security of commercial opportunity.

Effectively, we have a market failure. The bundling of BT with Openreach almost disincentivises the company from rolling out superfast broadband to industrial estates, where it already has leased lines—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to cut the hon. Gentleman off, but we have to move on to the next contribution.

2.12 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Over the summer, I had the privilege of speaking to a great many of my constituents about broadband access in north Lancashire. It has been clear since my election in May that many of my constituents, from both the farming community and the wider rural community, find poor broadband to be one of the biggest barriers to maintaining family connections—because they cannot Skype, for example—accessing things such as BBC iPlayer, and carrying out their the day-to-day business. As farmers increasingly diversify, poor broadband access cuts them off from many business opportunities. I will not cover ground that other speakers have covered on those issues, but I encounter very similar problems in north Lancashire.

Instead, I will tell a positive story about a community-led group in my constituency called Broadband for the Rural North, which has come together and, in true Lancashire spirit, decided to dig the trenches and lay the cables required to deliver broadband to rural communities. On 12 August this year, I joined Allen and Bruce, volunteers for B4RN, in laying cable and connecting the properties and premises just outside Dolphinholme in my constituency. That was fibre to the premises, delivering hyperfast—not just superfast—broadband, which is capable of 1,000 megabits per second. That is about 100 times faster than the superfast option delivered by BT.

That is an innovative and exciting project. What frustrates me, however, is that with the support of Lancashire County Council, after B4RN has connected up a village and achieved 80% or 90% take-up of its fibre to the premises, Openreach comes in and fits cabinets in the centre of the village, which offer a poorer service so people are not switching. My concern is that a few miles down the road, other villages have access to neither of those services, and it strikes me that it is not the most efficient use of Openreach’s resources for it to supply services to villages that have already found alternative ways of accessing high broadband speeds.

I end by noting my congratulations to Barry Forde and Christine Conder of B4RN, who were recently awarded MBEs in the Queen’s birthday honours.

2.15 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for securing the debate. Although Eddisbury is in Cheshire and would not appear to have the engineering problems described by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies), it has poor broadband coverage—in fact, coverage in my constituency is only 70%. Like the hon. Gentleman, I find that that is the issue about which I get the largest amount of correspondence from constituents. They are particularly concerned about the lack of information from Connecting Cheshire about when they will be connected.

There are considerable delays to the project—we understand that some of the delivery will be delayed until 2017—so although it should be a phase 1 roll-out, it will actually happen in the phase 2 timeframe. Another enormous frustration is that we will get three cabinets, say, in a village such as Little Budworth, but the fourth cabinet there will not be connected. That has a massive

impact on the value of people's homes. It also has an impact, for example, on their children's ability to do their homework.

There are two strands to the problem. The first is quickly identifying those who will definitely be in the 5% or 1% who will not get broadband under phase 2 so that alternative solutions can be offered. A very good rural broadband support scheme was started in 2011; perhaps that should be looked at again, particularly for premises further than three kilometres from the cabinets. Even if fibre comes to a cabinet in a village, someone who lives three kilometres away cannot get superfast broadband speeds, so we need to deal with such premises. I believe that BT is already aware of the problem, but it will not tell the occupants of those properties that they will not get broadband under the scheme.

I know that the Minister is genuine in his commitment to rolling out broadband across the UK and making this country one of the most competitive in the world. As many hon. Members have described, the rural community has a high proportion of small businesses. Farmers are trying to diversify and set up other businesses, and to add value to their product so that they can export it. A lot of small businesses in my constituency make yoghurt and cheese, and they want to export and get their product out there in the market. The way to do that is on the web; not being able to access the internet prevents them from doing it. Not only that, but the cattle tracing system relies on movements of cattle being reported largely online, partly because if a farmer's reporting card goes missing in the post, they will get heavily penalised.

Minister, we request clarity about which cabinets will not be covered. We ask the Government to consider a voucher scheme that will allow communities to band together and get in the innovative solutions that the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) described in her constituency from Broadband for the Rural North. There are solutions out there, but BT seems to be hiding behind its commercial roll-out programme to discourage such competition and prevent communities from being reached.

I find that, on the whole, the rural community are resilient, inventive and resourceful, and they are willing to work around problems. What they do not like is to be told that they will get this in 2015, and then to be told that it will happen in 2017, and finally to be told that they will not get it at all. I have no doubt that that frustration is driving the correspondence in my email inbox and those of many other hon. Members.

My second point is about the minimum service provision of 2.2 megabits per second. People are paying for their broadband service, but they are not getting those 2.2 megabits per second. I would like a clear statement, or something to which I can point providers, so that I can say, "The Minister has made it clear that you are required to provide 2.2 megabits per second as the minimum service obligation." If we cannot get BT—Openreach, more specifically—to up its game, we should introduce a universal service obligation for it to provide that service across the UK.

2.20 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I thank the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for this opportunity to debate the roll-out of rural broadband. This matter arose in oral questions

this morning, when there were a number of discussions about it. I apologise if other Members have previously had an opportunity to debate this subject, but as a new Member this is my chance to put on the record the experience of my constituents in the county of Gwynedd in relation to connectivity.

I appreciate that we have been talking about 2.2 megabits but, compared with the UK average speed of 23.4 megabits, Gwynedd experiences average download speeds of 14.6 megabits per second. Superfast broadband coverage in that county is 53%, compared with 75% across the UK as a whole. Looking at other aspects of connectivity, 17% of Gwynedd has 3G coverage, whereas, at 84% coverage, 3G is effectively the norm for the rest of the country. We have approximately no 4G coverage in the county.

I welcome the fact that the UK Government, along with the Welsh Government and the European Union, have been funding the Superfast Cymru scheme that is being carried out by BT. It is anticipated that that scheme, along with other Welsh Government projects in this area, will achieve 96% coverage by 2016. None the less, it is disappointing that the Welsh Government and BT have so far refused to disclose which parts of Wales are likely to comprise the remaining 4%—those areas, of course, are most likely to be rural.

It should be appreciated that people living in rural areas find that the slow progress of superfast broadband roll-out is aggravated by all-round poor connectivity, given how the unreliable mobile data signal varies from provider to provider. We have talked about Brecon and Radnorshire, but please bear in mind that Dwyfor Meirionnydd includes Eryri—Snowdonia—and Yr Wyddfa, the mountain. We have the most mountainous area in England and Wales, and that topography has a direct impact on rolling out this technology.

Simon Hart: The Welsh Government also have Access Broadband Wales, so if people cannot get on to the BT scheme, there is £1,000 per household to connect via wireless or satellite, provided the household can demonstrate that it meets one or two basic criteria. That is a practical solution. For once, the UK Government can learn from the Welsh Government.

Liz Saville Roberts: Upgrading digital infrastructure in rural areas is crucial to ensuring that the rural economy is not further disadvantaged. We have a duty to ensure competitiveness. The current situation evidently puts rural businesses at a disadvantage and may make potential employers think twice about investing in such areas.

Rural businesses cannot afford to rely on passing trade in the same way as businesses located in great conurbations such as London and Cardiff. There is therefore a greater pattern of reliance on online customers. In my discussions with businesses in my area, I have heard that that is particularly true for tourism and accommodation. Such businesses' shop window, and their crucial initial interaction with customers, is dependent upon slick interactivity, and some of these businesses, by their very nature, are located in areas that are most difficult to reach.

What will the UK Government do to ensure that the remaining 4% of homes and businesses that fall outside the Superfast Cymru scheme are provided with a dependable

[Liz Saville Roberts]

high-speed broadband connection? As I mentioned, it would be useful to know where those areas are, although I anticipate that they will be in rural areas. On the wider question of connectivity, does the Minister agree that network providers should be obliged to provide roaming across Wales, and the UK as a whole, to ensure that rural communities have a reliable data connection at all times?

2.24 pm

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate and introducing it in his inimitable style. He is surely emerging as a champion for agriculture and rural communities across the country. It would be churlish not to start by applauding the success of the phase 1 roll-out. It got off to a slow start in my county of Somerset, but in the past few months a satisfying number of villages have been connected each month. However, there are three key issues connected to phase 1.

First, there is a lack of awareness that cabinets have gone live, which means that the uptake in many places has been disappointingly low. Does the Minister have some ideas, or even some resources, to assist in the promotion of cabinets that have gone live so that there can be better uptake?

Secondly, it is not only farms and isolated hamlets that are at the end of long lines. In many linear villages in Somerset where the cabinet is in the middle, homes that are very much in the village suffer from being on the end of a long line. Indeed, the same is true of homes within the larger towns in my constituency, particularly Wells, where properties are connected directly to the exchange. It is hugely frustrating for people who live in a concentration of premises that have been connected and that have superfast broadband when, because they are connected directly to the exchange or because they are on the end of a long line, they do not have the connection that their neighbours have. We should prioritise such people when identifying who we address in phase 2 or phase 3.

Finally, there is a group of people for whom I feel very deeply: the people who live within the areas that were grabbed by BT for commercial roll-out but who BT has not yet got round to delivering. Those people live in villages just on the edge of a town. When BT's eyes were bigger than its stomach, it said, "We'll take that." Villages all around them have since been helped by the state aid programme, but they are still waiting. Will the Minister consider imposing a time limit on BT for the commercial upgrade of cabinets? If BT fails to do so within that time, it should be made to forfeit so that the village can benefit from the state aid programme that is unwinding around it.

Looking at what comes next, I have a parochial plea. The Minister is well aware of the collapse of the phase 2 negotiations between Connecting Devon and Somerset and BT. There is no doubt that that has caused concern locally. Despite my earlier welcome for the acceleration of the process over the past couple of months, we should not ignore the danger that, with the phase 2 contracts not having been signed, there is a real likelihood that the progress in Devon and Somerset will plateau,

which would be hugely frustrating for homeowners and businesses alike. Will the Minister consider imposing a deadline on Devon County Council and Somerset County Council for the negotiation of the phase 2 contracts?

In the process of working out what is in phase 2, we should identify what is left. My final plea to the Minister is, when we know what is left because it has not been included in phase 2, let us be bold and get on with connecting them concurrently. There is no reason to wait to connect the final 5% sequentially after the completion of phase 2. We know what is left, so let us do it at the same time.

The Minister is right to shout about the success of this programme. It is a huge state aid project and a real investment by this Government in our country's future, but the frustration grows in rural areas every time we are lapped by those in the cities. The reality is that, every time the cities get something more—dial-up, broadband, superfast, ultrafast, 3G, 4G and 5G—we are left even further behind. Every time we are lapped, the frustration grows, the productivity gap widens, the competitiveness advantage becomes more stark and the sense of isolation becomes more acute. We must not rest on our laurels. We must accelerate into the final 5% to make absolutely sure that no community in Somerset, or anywhere else in the country, is left behind.

2.29 pm

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate and on his election as Chair of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I was interested in his comments, I agree with many of them and I share the social and business concerns that he has highlighted.

As the Member for the UK's northernmost mainland constituency, I have seen some progress in the delivery of broadband in rural areas. There is still much to do, and I think that we all share the view that the internet, and broadband in particular, has the potential to change our lives, especially in rural areas, where shrinking distances can have life-changing impacts.

A huge amount of business in the modern world relies on the internet, for research, advertising, selling and communicating. By letting people work remotely or run small businesses from their home, broadband is clearly good for local economies. For all those reasons, we in the Scottish National party believe that there should be a universal service obligation for broadband, and we are working towards that objective. The Scottish Government, through their Digital Scotland superfast broadband programme, are working to deliver 95% superfast broadband coverage in Scotland by the end of 2017. The initiative has already delivered £400 million in investment to extend fibre broadband access to areas where commercial organisations simply would not otherwise go.

The programme consists of two regional projects, one covering the highlands and islands and the other covering the rest of Scotland. Both those contracts were awarded to BT in 2013. The Digital Scotland roll-out has covered more than 394,000 premises since it started and is more than halfway to its target of making the technology available to 750,000 homes and workplaces by the end of the contract period.

Just two weeks ago, the new Scotland rural development programme broadband grant scheme opened for applications from community-led broadband organisations such as GigaPlus Argyll, a ground-breaking scheme in which numerous hard-to-reach communities have come together to procure superfast broadband services from commercial providers. We support such initiatives, and to date the SNP Government have made more than £16.5 million available for similar community broadband projects, in addition to the £400 million Digital Scotland superfast broadband programme and the larger £13.4 billion Scottish rural development programme for 2014 and 2020.

The Scottish National party has a strong track record of supporting Scotland's rural and remote communities. We will continue to identify further opportunities to boost Scotland's rural economies. I would like to see the UK Government support those efforts and implement complementary actions to ensure that rural communities benefit fully from the roll-out of broadband and 4G technologies in addition to mobile connectivity in its broadest sense. I am aware that the UK Government have committed to ensuring that 95% of households can access superfast broadband at a rate of 24 megabits per second by 2017. I applaud that commitment, just as I applaud the Scottish Government's enhanced strategic approach.

However, the time has come for the UK Government to be creative and innovative in their thinking, and to prepare now for the future, particularly the future of our remote and rural areas. The UK Government must begin to consider issuing licences and providing the necessary financial incentives and support to encourage providers with the technological capacity to deliver broadband to rural communities that might never receive broadband services through conventional routes, in order to allow those communities to exercise their civic rights fully and participate fully in our society.

The UK Government must consider the supply opportunities for the 5% of households that are unlikely to have broadband before 2017. It is now time to consider high-quality service, measured in terms of speed, volume and latency, and to commit to ensuring that 100% of households have the opportunity to access broadband at a minimum of, for example, 20 megabits per second with a latency of not more than 30 milliseconds. I urge the UK Government to deliver on the Scottish Government's call for a universal service obligation for broadband and to recognise that this crucial technology must now be considered a basic utility, one essential for those in remote and rural areas if they are to exercise their civic rights.

It seems clear that broadband will not reach all communities in the immediate future, and that there is consensus in this Chamber on the fact that the UK Government must now intervene to secure the necessary investment in our rural communities. I support the questions raised by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and what he will do to take forward the objective of establishing a universal service obligation for broadband.

2.35 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I will try to make my contribution short, because the Minister appears to have a little list—in fact, it appears to be a large list.

It probably has the names of all our constituencies on it and how things are improving, so I will allow him a little more time to engage in dialogue with Members about that.

We have had a good debate, introduced by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish). A lot of thoughtful speeches have been made. I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman speak about the importance of value for money and how we deal with broadband in the hardest-to-reach areas. There has been a great deal of discussion about businesses and their receipt of broadband, or in many cases about how they cannot receive it properly. Furthermore, if we consider business development and rural regeneration, we see that there is an untapped source of private regeneration involving home workers living in rural areas, perhaps travelling sometimes to a company in the city. For that group, too, it is vital for there to be good access to broadband in rural areas.

I will not be able to mention all the speeches made by hon. Members, but I would like to draw attention to a couple of them, including the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). She made the important point that farms today must often diversify their business, and good broadband is vital for that. She also spoke about Broadband for the Rural North, which seems to be doing a valiant job.

My Welsh colleague and neighbour the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) spoke about Superfast Cymru, which I think we all agree is a good programme that will deliver real improvements. The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) referred to Access Broadband Cymru. Although Conservative Members do not always praise what is happening in Wales, there is widespread agreement that that is an excellent initiative that deserves serious consideration.

This always happens at the summer recess: we come back and discuss the Government's failure to deliver rural broadband. The Minister makes another speech; he often comes with a little list. We wonder whether the Prime Minister could not get mobile coverage on Polzeath beach during the summer, or whether it was difficult for him to chillax in his holiday cottage, but whatever it was, the view is always that something must be done, and the Minister is always dispatched here to tell us that he is the person to do it.

However, the facts are fairly simple. We all know, especially those of us from rural communities, that far too many parts of the country do not have any broadband coverage whatever. Some areas cannot get the most basic broadband at 2 Mbps, which is not even fast enough to watch iPlayer, and the roll-out of that basic broadband is three or four years late. Some people are still unconnected now, in 2015. The Minister says that the Government will provide basic broadband in 2015, while the Department for Culture, Media and Sport website says that it will be 2016. It would be interesting to hear which year we are talking about.

The Government are considering a minimum requirement or universal service obligation; I know that that has been raised in various speeches in this debate, including by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach). However, I believe that the universal service obligation that the Minister has discussed is only 5 Mbps,

[Susan Elan Jones]

not the 10 Mbps that Ofcom says we need as minimum. Why has he not listened to Ofcom? Perhaps he has, and can clarify or even correct me.

The level up from basic broadband is superfast. The Government's target is 24 megabits per second, but even that target is a long way short of what Ofcom and the EU call superfast, namely 30 megabits per second. Why do the Government promote that dodgy definition? They promised the

“best superfast network in Europe”,

but their broadband scorecard does not even measure its speed. At the same time, research shows that our rivals are speeding ahead. One study even showed that Ukraine's capital has faster broadband than ours. Why is Kiev faster than London? The Government missed their superfast roll-out deadline of May 2015 and shifted it back by two and a half years to December 2017.

The Minister is writing furiously; I hope that he will correct me and bring the deadline forward a bit. Even the 2017 deadline is only a hope, as senior BT executives and almost half of councils have warned that it could be 2018 before the roll-out to 95% of the country is finished. Is the Minister really going to get up and say that BT Openreach has been doing a brilliant job or will he get things sorted?

The Government designed the tender process for superfast roll-out so that it was virtually impossible for any company other than BT to win. The hon. Member for Eddisbury and the hon. Member for Wells (James Heapey) also raised points in connection with that. What was the result? Funnily enough, BT Openreach won 44 out of 44 contracts, and its monopoly on the existing copper network was reinforced. BT Openreach delivers the Government's delayed roll-out.

Although it is nominally at arm's length from BT, Ofcom says that it still has an “incentive to discriminate” in favour of the rest of BT Group. Ofcom is now considering whether the situation provides an unfair advantage to BT and whether BT Openreach should be split off in the interests of transparency and fair competition. The Opposition believe that the situation is now so bad that Ofcom's review should work on the presumption that BT Openreach should be split from the rest of BT unless the review produces conclusive evidence to the contrary. Surely the Government, apparently wishing to champion free enterprise—at least some of the time—should consider that view.

Beyond the existing roll-out, at least there is a plan for getting superfast broadband to 95% of the population, even if it is two and a half years late. The Government do not seem to have any plan whatever for how to get superfast broadband to the final 5% of the population, let alone how to pay for it. It is not 5% of the population, however, because as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton made clear, we are talking about 50% in certain areas. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) spoke of similar proportions in Northern Ireland. The Government have pilots looking at different ways to get to that 5%. When will those pilots definitely report? Will the Minister confirm the story in the *Financial Times* that he is considering an industry levy of £500 million?

The Government have missed target after target on basic and superfast broadband, and yet despite their record of failure, they are setting themselves another goal to miss. [Interruption.] The Minister smiles; he is going to correct me. The Government have set their sights on an ambition that ultrafast broadband should be available to nearly all UK premises. They plan to review progress against that ambition annually, starting in April 2016. Will the Minister commit today that the review will be conducted independently and then published for proper scrutiny? Will the Government be able to deliver on all their goals? At the Edinburgh TV festival, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport got the definition of “superfast” and “ultrafast” wrong. He said that it was “up to” not “at least” 24 and 100 megabits per second. That does not fill us with confidence.

What does the Government's performance mean for rural communities up and down the land? Many of us fear that broadband is too slow and too late for many people and that the Government are creating a digital divide. We all rely on the internet. Broadband has become as much a public utility as electricity and water. People in rural communities expect decent, high-speed, reliable broadband. We all shop online, pay our vehicle duty and council tax digitally and check deliveries on the go on our mobiles and tablets.

We want high-speed, reliable broadband for social media, for catch-up TV and iPlayer. The NHS orders drugs, shares patient records and sends x-rays and test results online. Farmers are supposed to register and receive their common agricultural payments online. Builders and plumbers rely on internet searches for new clients and many of the burgeoning new industries, such as video games, are entirely dependent on the fastest possible broadband. Rural communities need broadband to diversify economically. Reliable superfast internet and mobile connections are essential for farmers who want to diversify their business, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood said, and for the geographically isolated. It is not an added extra any more; it is essential for every aspect of our lives and the economy. That is why we hope that the Government will get a grip and deliver decent rural broadband, so that the Minister might have a glimmer of good news for us for once.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): May I ask the Minister to finish at two minutes to the hour to allow Mr Parish two minutes to wind up?

2.46 pm

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I hope that you will signal the time to me, because I get so passionate and carried away about the subject. In fact, in the previous debate, I was meant to finish two minutes early, but I forgot because I had so much to say—not just a glimmer of good news, but a bucketful.

In the same way as we had a debate at the end of the previous parliamentary session, we meet early in the new parliamentary session to celebrate the world's most successful state-sponsored broadband programme. Our cousins in Australia look at the UK and at their own broadband programme, which has not yet started and has already doubled in cost. Our cousins in America look at their rural broadband connection programme,

which is much more expensive than ours and delivers to far fewer homes. Our European cousins in the big four member states look at us and see the UK powering ahead. They are celebrating our unequivocal success story. As I look at the thousands of homes being connected in the constituencies represented here today by my hon. Friends and hon. Members, I can say only that I am delighted to be the steward of this highly successful programme.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for calling the debate, because it allows me to once again rehearse some of the landmarks. Most of the debates begin with hon. Friends and hon. Members saying how important broadband is for rural communities. I get that point, which is why we started the programme in 2010. We understood that rural communities needed broadband and we also understood that it would not be delivered commercially. In Brecon and Radnorshire, not a single home in that constituency would get broadband under a commercial roll-out scheme. It is entirely subsidised by our rural broadband scheme because companies do not go where they cannot get a return on their investment. We are all agreed on that.

I notice a change of tone in the debate. Because we are now focusing on the last 5%, there is a quiet acknowledgement that the main job is done; we will get to 95% and now we need a solution for the last 5%. I understand that the role of the Opposition is to pick holes, particularly when they have no policy of their own. The hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) has to tread carefully; her party is in power in Wales. She lives in a world in which superfast broadband roll-out in Wales is going absolutely fantastically well and it is a disaster just in England, so we can discount pretty much everything she has said.

Let me remind hon. Members what the Government have said from the outset. In 2010 we said that we had a certain amount of money and would get to 90% of the homes in the UK by the end of 2015. I am still confident that we will do that. We have never changed that target. People think that we moved the goal posts; we have not. The programme was going so well that the Chancellor gave us more money, so we said that we would get to 90% by 2015 and use the extra money to get to 95% by 2017. So we have always said 90% and 95%. And I am no fool: I know that that means that we were not going to get to the last 5%. However, I also said as we approached our targets that we would look at how we get to the last 5%, and all my hon. Friends know—they have seen the curve—the enormous expense of getting to the most hard to reach premises.

Nevertheless, we have been working on that. Two Secretaries of State ago—under my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—we set out very clearly a £10 million fund to pilot new technologies to get to the last 5%, because we did not want to go to the Treasury, give them a back-of-the-envelope costing and say, “Give us two billion and I think we could probably get to the last 5%.” We wanted to see whether we could drive down the cost and we wanted a good idea of what the cost would be. The good news is that we have a range of different providers already delivering to homes that count in the last 5%—in terms of competition, that is good news—and we are now actively working on a solution for the last 5%.

In the eight minutes I have left, let me address some of the points that have been raised. I completely accept the point that has been made about clarity. It is important to remember that this project is a partnership with local authorities. Every local authority that is managing one of these schemes should publish on a map where superfast broadband is going. I say to any hon. Member who has an example of a local authority that is not doing that to let me know please, and I will personally ring the chief executive of that council to ask why that is the case.

It is the case that sometimes the target is relatively flexible, because when someone is on the ground actually delivering broadband it is important for us to remember that they are part of an engineering project. Delivering broadband is not about flicking a switch; trenches have to be dug, cabinets have to be put in and power has to be put in. Sometimes, providers allow an element of wiggle room, but people should be able to get clarity.

As far as competition is concerned, the process was competitive; the 44 contracts were let as part of a competitive process. However, let us not forget that European state aid rules require open access for anyone who builds a network using state aid money. That is why Virgin did not compete with BT for these contracts. But there will be competition for the last 5%, because we are showing that smaller providers can come in for these smaller contracts. Nevertheless, we wanted to get to as many homes as quickly as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton asked about new technology. BT is already introducing new technology, G.fast, which uses existing infrastructure to get speeds of up to 300 megabits a second, as well as fibre to the remote node. As I said earlier, one of the reasons that we have these pilots is to test new technology for the last 5%.

My hon. Friends have asked about vouchers, which brings me to the solutions for the last 5%. We are looking at a whole range of solutions. Funnily enough, some of the last 5% is in cities and we are looking for a bespoke solution for that; there might be a voucher solution, or a fund that companies can bill into. And yes, it is no secret that a universal service obligation is under consideration. We hope to announce our proposals towards the end of the year, to coincide with the spending review. However, it is our intention to get to 100%, in effect, by the end of this Parliament.

My hon. Friend also asked us to keep BT's feet to the fire. We keep BT's feet to the fire; we meet with BT regularly. As he will know, any Member of this House who comes to me with concerns about roll-out in their constituency will have a meeting with me, and BT will be asked to respond to those concerns.

I was asked whether we could rely on BT's statistics. In the middle of August, I was very pleased to be able to say that we had passed the landmark of 3 million homes, and by the end of 2017 we should have about reached about 5 million homes. The 3 million figure is an audited statistic of premises that are capable of receiving speeds of at least 24 megabits a second. Roughly speaking, probably by the end of this month we will have reached 3.5 million homes, but we will not announce that as an official figure because it will not have been audited. We only announce figures that have been properly audited.

[Mr Edward Vaizey]

My hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey) talked about making people aware of superfast broadband. It is important to make people aware of it, because the more people who take it up the more money we get back. In fact, under the terms of the contract BT has paid back £129 million early; by the way, it did so earlier than it had to under the terms of the contract. That means that with the same money we might reach 96% of the country rather than 95%. We had a superfast broadband campaign towards the end of last year. Of course, we were mocked for spending money on that campaign, but it drove up take-up and pulled back money to allow us to go further.

I also take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton about a time limit for BT where it has said that it will roll out broadband commercially in an area and is effectively putting a block on a competitor that might wish to go into that area. I will take that point away with me and ensure that we can make progress.

I am an unequivocal fan of this programme, because—obviously—I am responsible for it but also because I am the only one who seems able to talk about its benefits. I always like to hear speeches that refer to how well we have done and that simply request improvements, because that is the approach I take. We are doing well; we have hit all our targets; we are technically under budget; and this project is probably the most impactful and most successful Government infrastructure project of the last five years.

I will not take lessons from the Opposition. We had to write off £50 million of investment in south Yorkshire from a contract negotiated by the last Labour Government to deliver superfast broadband. They had a pathetic target of 2 megabits a second by the end of 2012. Members can imagine what kind of debate we would be having today if I was standing before you now and saying, “Well, we reached our 2 megabits target in 2012. What on earth are you complaining about?”

As for the absurd suggestion that London has worse broadband than Ukraine, that is for the birds. It is the finding of a bogus survey put forward by a rival of BT, and my hon. Friends must remember that everyone in this debate always has an angle; this marketplace is a highly competitive one and we will always hear from other people saying that they can do a better job. My hon. Friends should also remember that we lead the big five; that this country has the highest rate of e-commerce, so some people must be able to get online to buy goods; that two thirds of the people in the country have smartphones; that we have the fastest roll-out of 4G anywhere in the world and we will reach 98% of premises with 4G by the end of 2017; and that the Government have also negotiated a landmark deal with the mobile

companies to get to 90% geographical coverage, because we do not forget rural areas or the roads that our rural constituents have to drive on. So I look forward to a weekly debate on broadband, so as to continue to celebrate this fantastically successful programme.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I call Neil Parish to wind up, on behalf of himself and, no doubt, Mrs Parish. [Laughter.]

2.57 pm

Neil Parish: Thank you very much, Mr Betts, for calling me to speak again and if my wife is listening I am sure that she will hear immediately.

I thank the Minister for his straightforward replies and the work that he is doing. He can judge by the number of Members who are here today and by the number of interventions that were made that there is still much concern about this issue. Naturally, because he is a good Government Minister, he will put forward a very good line that everything is working well, and we accept that much of it is working well. However, many of us in Westminster Hall today represent areas in which there is much more to do. What pleased me about the Minister’s answers is that they showed he is listening to us and working hard on those areas.

The Minister made the point that there are now competitors to BT out there that can deliver to people in the last 5%, and that BT itself is now rolling out these different technologies that can get us to the last 5%. What has been frustrating for so many of us is that we have felt that BT was just not moving fast enough.

I am reassured by the Minister that he is working to get to the last 5%, that there is greater competition and that broadband will be delivered. However, I also assure him that I and many Members in Westminster Hall today will be back here again regularly, just to make sure that he and the Government are delivering on their target. That is because in the end—we have made this point many times before—our constituents are not worried whether it is BT or another company that delivers their broadband; they do not care who delivers it. But they want broadband and if they are living next door to a house that has it when they do not, that is hugely frustrating.

Of course, the one political point that we all know, whichever party we represent, is that those who have broadband are not necessarily the ones rushing to come in and tell us they have it; it is those who have not got broadband who come to us. We must make sure that we work hard for those people, and I think the Minister has received that message loud and clear.

I look forward to greater competition and to the Minister keeping the pressure on BT. He should look at universal coverage. Much can be done to ensure that BT delivers broadband better than it does at the moment, but I thank the Minister very much for his response.

Common Fisheries Policy (Reform)

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am slightly disappointed to see the Chamber thinning at the rate that it is, but I am resigned to it. This topic has not suffered from a lack of debate over the years, certainly not during my time in the House. As we can tell from the number of Members leaving the Chamber, this issue matters a lot to a small number of communities and to a smaller number of people in a wider range of communities. My constituency of Shetland, in particular, is one of those communities where it does matter a lot.

In 2014, we in Shetland alone landed in the region of 78,000 tonnes of fish or shellfish with a value of £76 million from local and visiting boats: 24% of all fish landed in Scotland in that year. In fact, the amount of fish landed in Shetland is greater than the amounts landed in ports in England, Wales and Northern Ireland combined. Some 30% of our local economic product comes from fishing or fish farming—the seafood industries taken as a whole. I tell hon. Members that so that they can understand. Talk about common fisheries policy reform can often be quite jargon-heavy and a little bit dry and academic, but for us, as a community, it is anything but that. The fishing industry defines us as a community and underpins just about everything else that happens within our community.

Indeed, across all sectors of the industry, more traditional models of boat ownership and operating exist in Shetland than in other parts of the country, from where they have perhaps disappeared. We retain fishing as a family industry, where generation after generation will want to go to sea and make their living as fishermen. That came home to me in 2002, as a fairly new Member of Parliament elected in 2001: we had the December Council result, which was probably one of the most difficult for the industry to manage that people can ever remember. The week before Christmas, when the House had gone into recess, I went home to Shetland and had to address a mass meeting of the local fishermen's association in the mission in Lerwick. It was as bleak and grim a meeting as I have ever seen; a week before the end of the year, not knowing what was going to happen come 1 January, the rug had been pulled out from underneath these men's feet and they had no idea how they were going to manage the deal that had been landed on them. No other industry would manage itself, or allow itself to be managed, in that way. It was in that 2002 deal that the seeds of reform were sown, and we have seen significant progress since then.

In 2000, before I was elected to Parliament, I attended a conference in north-east Scotland, where Mike Park of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association was one of the speakers. He said that the further a skipper is from his home port, the less he cares about conservation of stocks. That has stuck with me ever since. I have always taken that as being the justification for regionalisation and bringing control of the industry back as close as possible to the communities most directly affected by it.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that what was said at that time has been borne out, given the plundering of tiny fish that the Spanish pursued after its accession?

Mr Carmichael: That was very much the context of the day. My only rejoinder to Mr Park's statement would have been that the same was also true of Ministers and officials: the further removed they were from the management of stocks, the easier it was for them to impose unworkable deals that caused an enormous range of difficulties in practical terms. I exempt the incumbent Minister from that; he has always demonstrated a tremendous willingness to engage with industry and has a good working understanding of it.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the great problems of the common fisheries policy is that even the regional organisations are too large? If local fishermen realise that if they conserve fish they can get them at another time, they are more likely to go along with the measures. The trouble with the common fisheries policy is that there are too many fishing, from too far and wide, who are really not concerned about conserving fish now—they know very well that, if they do, somebody else will get them before they do. That is one of the worst problems of the CFP.

Mr Carmichael: There is not much that I disagree with there. The essence of the problem that the hon. Gentleman highlights is that fisheries management is something done to the industry and to the communities affected, rather than being something that they feel they have any ownership of, or are able to influence. Although there have been an enormous number of problems with the regional advisory councils, they have been a source of enormous progress and benefit and are certainly infinitely preferable to what we had before they were established, when everything was done in Brussels with simply no opportunity to challenge it.

How we have been able to build partnerships between fishermen, conservationists and scientists, through the regional advisory structures, is exceptional. That has been taken on by various people. I commend the Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), for the work he did in the lead-up to landing a reformed common fisheries policy, because that developed the first iteration of the regional advisory councils to the point where they might even become regional management councils. That is the first point that I would like the Minister to take on. The advisory councils themselves are best placed to author the next iteration of their development. With the history of joint working and the body of expertise within the councils, that could now be done to improve and speed up the present rate of change.

Mrs Murray: The right hon. Gentleman wants regional management councils. How would he do this under the current treaties and regulations? We are never going to get rid of the equal access to a common resource while other countries want access to our waters.

Mr Carmichael: One reason why I love being in debates with the hon. Lady is that she always anticipates my next point. That is exactly why I think this is a timely debate. However, before I touch on that, I should like to make a brief reference to one other aspect that hinders the work of the regional advisory councils and everybody else involved in fisheries conservation. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

and all the scientists involved in it are required to use data that, by the time they are implemented, are about two years out of date. One of the biggest difficulties with our total allowable catch and quota system is that it will work only if it accurately reflects the amount of fish in the sea at any moment in time. For that reason, if the data are two years out of date, there will eventually be a difference between what fishermen are told is in the sea and what they actually find in their nets. That then results in a downward spiral, where the fishermen have no respect for what the scientists tell them, and the tax and the quotas do not reflect what the fishermen find.

The problem will become particularly acute as we implement the next stage of the discards ban; it has always been difficult, but it is now positively urgent that we deal with it. There must be some way in which an early, quick and dirty analysis can be done so that the data can be used in as close to real time as possible.

The reason why I sought the debate, and why I am so pleased we have a good turn out, is the very point raised by the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray). I hope Members will forgive the pun, but we have been pushing water uphill a lot of the time in reforming fisheries management and the CFP. That is because of the constitutional architecture within which the CFP, in its various iterations, has had to sit: the various treaties, the *acquis communautaire*, the principle of common access, which the hon. Lady mentioned, and the Lisbon treaty, which enshrined the principle that the conservation of marine biological resources, as only the EU could call fishing, was to be a sole competence—something about which I felt so strongly that I resigned from my party's Front Bench when the issue came to a vote.

We have had to live with all those matters, because it has been next to impossible to find our way around them. If we proceed piece by piece, we will reform neither the policy nor the constitutional architecture that sits around it. Now, however, we apparently have an opportunity to bring about reform. The Prime Minister has said that we are to have a referendum on a reformed European Union, and the issue before us is one of the areas of community policy and responsibility that is absolutely ripe for reform. The CFP has not worked for fishermen, fishing communities, conservationists or scientists, so this is surely the time to take a blank sheet of paper and say, "We can do this differently."

When we talk about regionalisation and regional management, we should say, "Those can be written into any new or changed treaty." When we talk about the principle of common access, we should be honest about the fact that it had its roots in the very earliest days of the community. It was perhaps understandable for a community of six nation states, but for a community of 28 member states—not just around the North sea, but stretching right across Europe, and including many that are actually landlocked—it makes no sense whatever.

I cannot see many people in Europe, beyond the confines of the Commission perhaps, wanting to argue against such reform. The CFP has badly served all the member states and all the various interests affected by it. It has affected particularly badly the communities that I and others in the Chamber represent. We now have an opportunity, and I suspect that the Government

would find it rather easier to make progress and to deliver positive change in this area than they might in some of the others that the Prime Minister has listed as priorities.

My request to the Minister is a simple one. On behalf of the House and the various fishing communities represented here today, will he make the need for reform and for tackling historic anomalies that have caused so many problems in Europe a priority for negotiation with other member states? In that way, he could deliver a change that would make an enormous difference to the industry and to the communities we represent, which would serve us all better as a result.

3.15 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Mr. Walker, I know that you have an interest in the angling fraternity, as well as the fishing industry, and it is a delight to be serving under you.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate. He has been involved in fisheries for a long time, although not quite as long as I have. When he sums up, I hope that he will reassure me that the Liberal Democrat party is now looking to secure a little more national control over our fisheries, because its position has never been really clear. Perhaps he could reassure us that it has changed its stance somewhat.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, and Cornish colleague, the Minister and to his predecessor, the hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who have worked tirelessly on securing quota entitlement, which has allowed fishermen to continue to eke out a living in the short term.

We hear an awful lot about the UK's financial contribution to the European Union, but one of the UK's greatest contributions over the last 43 years has been the contribution of around 80% of European fishing waters. I have lost count of the number of occasions on which the House has debated reforming the CFP. It might benefit some Members if I set out the historic timeline, but I do not intend to go into detail, because we would be here until next week.

In 1970, as the right hon. Gentleman said, the original six member states introduced a policy of equal access to a common resource. I have always been suspicious of the reason for that, given that an agreement called the London convention had been reached in 1969, restricting access to UK territorial waters. I believe that there was a reason why the original six member states decided to come together to draw up regulation 2141/70, which includes article 2 on equal access to a common resource.

The 1972 treaty of accession, which the UK signed up to, included a derogation for the six and 12-mile limits, which, at that time, was our territorial sea. The UK was allowed sole access within the three and six-mile limits, but it had to open up the waters between the six and 12-mile limits to certain vessels that had traditionally fished in them. That was 40-odd years ago, and those vessels are not fishing any longer, but we still have to have other member states' fishing vessels coming into the waters between our six and 12-mile limits. There is an anomaly there.

In 1976, member states declared a 200-mile median line limit. For those who do not understand what a median line is, I should explain that it is the line

drawn—for example, down the channel—where there is not 200 miles each side to land masses. Despite the best efforts of Ireland and the UK, which argued at first for the 12-mile limit to be extended to 100 miles—they subsequently reduced that to 50 miles—the EU insisted that we settle on a 12-mile limit.

The CFP management system of total allowable catches and quotas was settled in 1983, more than 10 years after our accession to the EEC. Historical fishing activity was used to share the total allowable catches among member states, with those for each stock dictated by scientists and historical landing data. The UK gained very low quotas in many areas, while other member states benefited. In area VII, on the south-west coast, the UK got 8% of the cod and 12% of the haddock, while our colleagues across the Channel secured something in the region of 60% of the stock. The 12-mile limit restrictions were continued for 20 years and there was a mid-term review in 1992, but nothing changed. In 2002, there was a further review. Regional advisory councils were set up, but they had no power to change regulations, and they still do not. Sometimes that has been sold to us as the answer, but it is not for the UK fishing industry. The regional councils were large and burdensome and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) mentioned, they were of course trans-European.

In 2012 there was another review. Throughout the time I have been talking about, we have seen the UK fishing fleet being reduced to a shadow of its former self, together with the UK share of the fish stocks found in the UK sector of the EU pond, which are 80% of it. Enough is enough. It is time for our fishing industry, which makes a disproportionately large contribution to the economy of many coastal communities that rely on fishing, to get the recognition it deserves. No one more than I and my family knows the real price paid by the brave men who put to sea to bring such a healthy source of protein to our table.

In 2003, the then Leader of the Opposition and right hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe, Michael Howard, said:

“The CFP has been a disaster for the British fishing industry and we want to withdraw from it and establish national control—and that is what we will do.”

On 9 December 2003 the shadow Secretary of State said:

“By any measure, the CFP has been a disaster for the British fishing industry, which is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition reaffirmed on Sunday that ‘we are committed to a policy of withdrawing from the Common Fisheries Policy and restoring national control for our fishing industry’.”— [*Official Report*, 9 December 2003; Vol. 415, c. 1000.]

Unfortunately, the party in question remained in opposition and so could not deliver that promise; but I believe that the only answer for our fishermen is to regain national control. Forty years of senseless destruction are enough. Britain’s fish stocks are our responsibility. It is our duty to protect them and the communities dependent on them.

I notice that there are some hon. Members from the Scottish National party present. If one of them makes a speech, perhaps they will clarify their policy, which I am confused about. In 2003 the SNP MEP Ian Hudghton said that equal access to a common resource was fundamental to the common fisheries policy, and that

no one could change it. Yet I remember that in the early days of my involvement in fisheries policy the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who was then the Member for Banff and Buchan, promoted a private Member’s Bill to restore national control.

I am asking my hon. Friend the Minister, and the other right hon. and hon. Members who are present, to join me in asking the Prime Minister to include restoration of national control over our 200-mile/median line limit in the negotiations when he goes to Europe.

Neil Parish: I agree that, as we are now looking to renegotiate many of our arrangements with the European Union, the common fisheries policy is one that is ripe for reform, and for our taking back much of our national control. That would be good not only for our fisherman but for conservation and fishing management. Those fishermen would know that fish that were retained would be there for them to catch another day. At the moment, they think, “Let’s take them before the Spanish, French, Belgians or anybody else come to get them.” There is a lot to be said for taking back much greater national control and for pushing our limits back out to at least 12 miles, if not further. We should control our own waters. I would urge the Minister to urge the Prime Minister to go for that renegotiation.

Mrs Murray: My hon. Friend has served the fishing industry in this place and, I believe, as a member—I believe as chairman—of the fisheries committee in the European Parliament. He served them well.

Of course we are not saying that we should tell all foreign fishermen not to come into our waters. We should allow fishermen from other member states limited access, but on our terms. In 2003 it was reported that the then Leader of the Opposition claimed that Prime Minister Tony Blair had missed an opportunity by not using the draft European constitution as a means of tackling the fishing issue. That was a failure for our fishermen. Unfortunately between 1997 and 2010, when my late husband was fishing, he was under far more pressure than he had ever been before, because he felt ignored.

We must now call on our Prime Minister to rectify the situation, so that our Fisheries Minister, who has done a fantastic job so far, can have real power in controlling British waters.

3.27 pm

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this afternoon’s debate, and bringing the important issue of reform of the CFP to the House.

About 80% of the UK’s fish landings of key stocks, by weight, are landed in Scotland, much of them at Peterhead and Fraserburgh in my constituency, and at Lerwick in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland; so we have a shared interest in defending the Scottish fleet and the onshore industries that depend on it. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I represent some of the most fishing-dependent communities in Europe. Peterhead and Fraserburgh are home to an exceptionally diverse fleet. We have a substantial part of

[*Dr Eilidh Whiteford*]

the white fish fleet, a large part of the pelagic fleet, a sizeable nephrops fleet, and a host of larger and smaller inshore fisheries around our coast. We also have numerous and significant onshore industries, which employ thousands of my constituents.

I would be guilty of great understatement if I were to say merely that the common fisheries policy has not served our fishermen well. The unambiguous consensus is that the CFP has been a disaster. The truth is that it has been disastrous for our fishing industry for the past four decades. Over the years, we have seen a pernicious combination of wanton neglect and political ineptitude and bureaucracy undermine our fleet and cause enormous, untold damage to our fishing communities. The CFP has also been the major driver of the degradation of our marine environment, to the extent of forcing fishermen to throw good quality fish overboard into the sea, creating the massive problem of discards that we are only now starting to tackle.

I have waxed lyrical many times in the House about the shortcomings of the common fisheries policy. I was a little surprised that the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) thought that there was any ambiguity in the SNP's critique of the CFP. I think we have been robust in outlining what we see as its shortcomings.

Members will be pleased to know that I do not intend to rehearse all those points in this short debate. When looking at reform of the CFP, we have to ask ourselves how we got here. Like the hon. Member for South East Cornwall, I am keen that we remember exactly what happened in the 1970s. It has not been a happy history, but if we have any hope of reforming the CFP, we need to understand what happened. The truth of the matter is that the Scottish fleet was sold out right from the very start of the UK accession process. Back in the early 1970s, when the Heath Government were negotiating the UK's entry to what was then the European Economic Community, they decided that fishing was, in the words of official Government documents, "expendable". They signed an accession treaty in 1972 committing the UK to a European common fisheries policy that established exclusive competence over fisheries and enacted legislation that enshrined the principle of equal access to our waters—that common resource that was alluded to earlier—and that has bedevilled us all ever since.

The steep decline in the fortunes of fishing communities right across the UK can be traced back to that moment in history. The deal that was struck was frankly not in the interests of our fishermen or our fishing communities. It has created untold problems over most of my lifetime. We can acknowledge that the CFP has changed a lot since the 1970s. It has been through various incarnations. There have been successive derogations of one sort or another, but the most problematic parts of the regulatory architecture remain intact to this day, including the problematic regulation 2141/70—the equal access regulation—and they still put barriers in the way of progress. We should not be shy of saying that the CFP has proved itself again and again to be an unworkable policy.

It is really only with the most recent round of reforms that we have even begun to move towards a workable common fisheries policy, and that is largely due to the

introduction of the regionalised model, which has for the first time brought fishermen and other stakeholders into the process. Having the industry at the table is a big step forward, and it is helping to create an approach that is more sustainable economically, socially and ecologically, but I will be interested to hear the Minister's views on how the regional advisory councils can develop and be strengthened going forward.

The great irony of this conversation is that, aside from the CFP itself, being part of a single European market has brought good opportunities for our fishing and processing industries, whether that has been through the development of healthy and lucrative export markets or through the ability to address labour shortages thanks to the free movement of people, goods and services throughout the EU. The wider social benefits accruing from EU membership have also benefited people in fishing communities.

The Government have, however, now stated their intention to renegotiate the terms of the UK's EU membership ahead of the proposed referendum, so there is an unprecedented opportunity to right the historic wrongs of the CFP. At the heart of today's debate is a very simple question for the Government on the priority that they will put on renegotiating the EU's exclusive competence over fisheries and the regulation that enshrines equal access to a common resource. It is the single most useful thing that could be achieved. While it would not repair the structural damage that has been done to our communities over the past 43 years—most of my lifetime—and we cannot pretend that that has not happened or turn back the clock, it would nevertheless go a long way to removing some of the barriers to the future sustainable development of the industry.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister what the fishing industry can expect out of the renegotiation process, and I hope that he will address that in some detail. I also hope that the Government will grasp the opportunity to demonstrate that the fishing industry is a valued industry. The industry is inherently sustainable. It provides healthy food and sustains thousands of livelihoods. It supports our exports, yet remains one of the most dangerous occupations in our economy. I hope that the Government will give the industry the priority it deserves and push the reform right up its agenda.

3.34 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing this debate. The issue that I wish to focus on is the allocation of fishing resources—the quotas. There is a pressing need to address the current inequitable distribution, whereby smaller inshore boats continue to get a raw deal. I particularly wish to look at that from the perspective of Lowestoft, which is in my constituency. The port of Lowestoft was once the fishing capital of the southern North sea, but it is now a very pale shadow of what it once was. If fishing is to have any future at all in ports such as Lowestoft, we need to address the quotas, which have very much become the elephant in the room.

The reformed common fisheries policy that came into effect in January 2014 provides some sort of framework for addressing the issue, but progress has been slow in

implementing its provisions. The situation is becoming urgent and needs to be sorted out quickly. As we have heard, we need to consider using the forthcoming renegotiations of our membership of the EU to obtain further reforms so as to enable a once great industry to have a sustainable future around the whole coastline of the United Kingdom.

In years gone by in Lowestoft, one could cross the water, from one side of the Hamilton dock to the other, by walking from boat to boat. Today, the dock is virtually empty of fishing boats. In the past four decades, Lowestoft has been hit hard by over-fishing, wrong decisions by politicians and the vulnerability of the very make-up of the industry, where the large trawlers helped to sustain the smaller boats. The existing quota system has played a major role in removing the larger trawlers, and we now have a situation where the seven affiliated vessels in the Lowestoft producer organisation have a fixed quota allocation of 79,097 units that is landed elsewhere. That is an enormous amount of fish. It was previously landed in Lowestoft, underpinning so many fishing and ancillary businesses. Dutch vessels fishing British quota have an annual turnover of £48 million, yet only 1% of the fish they catch is landed in the UK.

In recent years, the small boats—the under-10s—have had a raw deal and they have been hanging on by their fingernails. The root cause of their plight is the fixed quota allocation system introduced in 1999. As the under-10s did not keep records of their catch in the 1994 to 1996 reference period, the quota they received was a best estimate. That was subsequently shown to be a major underestimate, for which they have been paying ever since. There have been attempts to address the situation, but as Jerry Percy of the New Under Ten Fishermen's Association has pointed out, the under-10s are starting from such a low level of quota in the first place that an additional percentage simply based on past allocations is of little, if any, use.

Since 1999, the situation has got worse. The way the system was devised has meant that the producer organisations have been able to hold or acquire fixed quota allocation units knowing that they can retain them if they do not use them. They can sell or lease them to the under-10s on their own terms, at their own whim and fancy. It conjures up the image of the under-10s taking on the role of *Oliver Twist*, holding out the bowl for more fish, only to be denied by an overbearing Mr Bumble. Moreover, where reallocations have taken place, they have been profoundly unsatisfactory, as they have neither been permanent nor predictable, and they have invariably taken place towards the end of the fishing season.

The 2007 decommissioning scheme exacerbated the problem, creating more “slipper skippers”, with vessel owners entitled to retain the fixed quota allocation units, even when their vessels had been decommissioned. A system has thus developed whereby the under-10s do not have enough quota to make a living and are in effect dying a slow lingering death, while quota held by the producer organisations is not being used. Attempts by the Government to encourage gifts of unused quota have often come to nothing.

While the Marine Management Organisation allocates catch limits on a month-to-month basis to each vessel in the under-10 metre pool, in practice what often happens is that the vessels end up with high levels of one species

when it is not available and low levels for others when they are abundant. Reallocations of quotas from the producer organisations to the under-10s do take place, but, as I have said, they are neither predictable nor permanent. Such a month-to-month, hand-to-mouth existence is not conducive to building a business. There is an urgent need for a reallocation of quotas in favour of the inshore fleet so that the under-10s can deliver benefits to the communities in which they are based.

It is against that backdrop that the Government must focus their attention on the needs of the inshore fleet, including the one that still fishes out of Lowestoft. While nationally under-10 metre boats comprise 77% of the UK fleet and employ 65% of the total workforce, they receive only 4% of the total quota available. Currently, under-10 metre boats fishing along the Suffolk coast receive what has been described to me by one local fisherman as a “miserable share of catch”. The inshore fleet can bring significant economic, environmental and social benefits to the ports out of which it fishes. Unless it is provided with the means of doing so, with a sensible amount of fish to catch, it will continue to dwindle. That would be a real tragedy for many coastal communities.

The reformed CFP, which came into effect in January last year, provides the regulatory framework under which to carry out the much-needed redistribution of quotas. Article 17 not only allows for such a reallocation, but actually requires it. There is a legally binding commitment to encourage the sustainable fishing that is carried out by the inshore fleet, which has the least impact on the marine environment but maximises the economic and social returns to coastal communities such as Lowestoft. Not much has happened regarding putting the article 17 provisions into practice. We await the outcome of Greenpeace's successful application to the High Court for a judicial review of the Government's failure to implement the requirements effectively.

I appreciate that a judicial review might delay matters, but it is important that the UK does everything possible to address the current plight of small-scale coastal fishermen. There was an undertaking to provide the under-10s in England with approximately 25% of the English—not just the under-10s—quota uplift that will result from the implementation of the discard ban in 2016. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give us an update on whether that undertaking will be kept to?

I urge the Minister to do all he can to adhere to article 17. If he does, real benefits can be brought to fishing communities such as Lowestoft. That said, we must also have in mind the needs of the fishing industry in the forthcoming renegotiation of our terms of membership of the EU. We should be looking to prioritise access for low-impact fishermen in UK waters within the 12-mile zone. In carrying out any renegotiation of our terms of membership of the EU, the Government should consider: an effective repatriation of the 6 to 12-mile zone for UK fishermen only; a review of the historic rights of other EU member states' vessels in our waters; and a review of relative stability, the grossly unfair historical share-out of access to fish stocks that the UK lost out on when we joined the Common Market.

The Government must deliver on the pledge to reallocate the UK's inland water quotas to smaller, locally based fishing communities. There is a need to give communities

[*Peter Aldous*]

such as Lowestoft a long-term vision of a future in which fishing-based businesses can have a realistic hope of a reasonable living, invest in their businesses with a degree of confidence and, most importantly, create and sustain jobs. The inshore fleet must have proper representation on advisory councils. Skippers of inshore boats must receive an increase in their monthly catch limits so that they are no longer beholden to producer organisations for handouts. Quotas should be held only by active fishermen who bring real benefits to their local communities, not by either foreign vessels or non-active fishermen who hold quotas only as an investment. Any renegotiation of our future membership of the EU should include as a priority demand the reclaiming of the UK's territorial waters in the 6 to 12 nautical-mile area so as to allow fish stocks to be properly protected, with primary access being given to local fishermen who depend on those waters for their very survival.

It is important that we grasp the nettle now so as to give many fishing communities such as Lowestoft the opportunity of a viable future. I sense that if we do not do so in this Parliament, the fishing industry in many ports around the United Kingdom will disappear.

3.45 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing this debate and enabling me to make my first contribution in the House to a debate on the fishing industry, which has been important to my constituency, particularly the town of Fleetwood, for many years.

Currently, seven fishing vessels over 10 metres in length and 55 under have Fleetwood registered as their administrative port, with all the over-10s and approximately a third of the under-10s also making Fleetwood their home port. That is a far cry from 1929, when the Fleetwood fishing industry provided direct employment for nearly a quarter of the town, and far more indirect employment. At its peak, 70,000 tonnes of fish were landed in Fleetwood by British and foreign vessels, but that has steadily declined: in 2013, the Marine Management Organisation recorded just under 9,000 tonnes of fish landed via the Fleetwood Fish Producers Organisation. Those 9,000 tonnes have, however, the considerable value of approximately £24 million.

The fishing industry in Fleetwood does not rely only on fish landed in Fleetwood; a significant and growing processing industry draws on fish brought into Fleetwood over land. The development of a new fish park is a sign of the ongoing importance of fishing and a welcome investment in jobs and skills in the town. I was pleased to welcome the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), to my constituency this summer for a public forum on the future of fishing in Fleetwood. The issues raised at the meeting were many and varied, but central to them was the need to maintain and increase fish stocks and to ensure that our small-scale domestic fishermen get their fair share of the quota under the common fisheries policy.

Our local under-10s fishermen pointed out that there are environmental constraints on their maximum catch—the wonderful weather of the north-west—but that the current

quota arrangements were seeing some fish stock quotas exceeded before the fish even reached our local waters. Also, because of delays in how the catch is recorded, the current arrangements do not properly address overfishing.

Small-scale fishing enterprises comprise the overwhelming majority of the fishing fleet—77% last year—and employ the vast majority of people in the industry, yet they get only a tiny proportion, around 4%, of the overall quota. That means that the viability of many small-scale fishing businesses is jeopardised. But these are the people who provide the most jobs in the industry and fish in the most sustainable ways.

Greenpeace and the New Under Tens Fishermen's Association have come together to highlight five key actions that they believe are needed to ensure both the viability of the small-scale fishing fleet and the sustainability of the fishing industry. The recommendations include the redistribution of quotas to the under-10 metre fleet, the restoration of fish stocks, the protection of the marine environment, the prioritisation of access for low-impact fishing in the UK's 0 to 12 nautical-mile zone, and the regionalisation of fisheries management.

As it stands, the fish quota is largely controlled by a powerful minority. Recent reforms to the common fisheries policy have created measures that reward those who use more selective and low-impact fishing methods, but the responsibility now lies with implementation. Member states and our own Government must act to ensure that small-scale fishermen get their fair share of the fish quota, because it will be better for jobs and better for the environment.

3.49 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I join colleagues in congratulating the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate.

My constituency, Great Grimsby, was once the fishing capital of England. Our fish dock was built more than 150 years ago and, at its peak, received around 600 trawlers. I recognise the comments made by the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) about walking across the trawlers; the story in our local community is that people could walk perhaps a mile out, from trawler to trawler. It is sad that the demise of the fishing industry means we can no longer see that. Our town still celebrates the proud history of the industry, hosting this week the World Seafood Congress—the first time that has been held in the United Kingdom. It is perceived as a great success, so I congratulate all who were involved in its arrangement.

Today, the industry, from catching to distribution, is still worth £1.8 million to the local economy, but it would be wrong to over-romanticise what was, and still is, a difficult, dangerous and sometimes insecure industry. We cannot simply blame the European Union for the loss of jobs in the industry over the past four decades, as some have tried to do. Of course, not everyone thinks that the common fisheries policy has worked for them, but it is overly simplistic to lay all the industry's problems at the EU's door. The policy's inception came when the industry was already in decline due to shrinking fishing stocks, environmental concerns, which were not necessarily

known about previously, and other factors. The sharpest fall in the employment of fishermen came before Britain joined the EEC, between the years of 1948 and 1960.

Mrs Murray: The hon. Lady is basing her remarks on her area. Does she agree that many of the long-distance fishing vessels in her area fell on hard times due to the loss of access to fishing opportunities in the waters around Iceland?

Melanie Onn: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I will come on to the 200-mile limit later on. I defer to her superior knowledge of the smaller fishing fleets and boats that are pertinent to her constituency.

Since the cod war, Iceland has lost more fishing jobs than Britain. The number of people employed in Iceland's fishing industry has halved since the 1980s. That is why it is misleading to use the common fisheries policy as reason to exit the European Union—although I note that today's comments have focused on renegotiating the policy and withdrawing from the restrictions. UKIP has tried to sell people in Grimsby the myth that we would return to 1960s levels of fishing if only we were no longer burdened by Europe's regulations. That is simply not true. We need not to hark back to the past, but to secure a real, sustainable future for the industry, which will only come from working with our allies in Europe.

With that in mind, there is much to welcome in the recent reform of the common fisheries policy. Changes such as the decentralisation of management and decision making are certainly steps in the right direction. Fishing is a diverse industry, particularly when the whole continent is considered. No catch-all policy can work without exceptions. There has also been a feeling that decisions on everything in the industry have been made for fishermen by people who have never been on a fishing ship in their lives. Moving away from that will restore confidence in the process and ensure better decisions. A more localised approach, as mentioned by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), working from the bottom up with industry, regions and nations, allowing those people most affected by the decisions to have a real role in making them, is surely the best way of doing things.

Some will say that we should follow that logic to the inevitable conclusion: opt out of the CFP and the EU altogether and make all our decisions at the national and regional level. Yet we have to face the challenges of sustainability of the industry and of stock levels together. Breaking apart will only make that harder. It is necessary that some overview and decisions are taken at a macro level—that's macro, not mackerel. We cannot have a free for all where each nation tries to outdo the other on fishing levels. That is recognised by Governments, whether they are in or out of the EU.

We should not allow the lie to spread that withdrawal from the EU would somehow allow our fishing fleets to do whatever they wanted, regardless of the effects. Norway, despite being outside the EU, still has to negotiate shared management of the seas within Europe. Were we to leave Europe, there is no guarantee that we would be able to negotiate a more generous quota share than is allocated to the UK today. We would also have no influence over the future of the common fisheries policy, but the seas we fish would still be affected by it.

Mr Carmichael: This is the first occasion that I have participated in a debate with the hon. Lady. I am delighted that she is here as successor to Austin Mitchell, who took part in these debates for many years but in a very different manner.

On Norway, the sensible regional management of the North sea would involve the coastal states that are members of the EU and Norway. The point about the current EU architecture is that that is simply not possible. With a different constitutional architecture, there could be genuine regional management involving Norway and EU member states.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Lady answers, I just want to say that I will call the shadow Minister at 3.8 pm and there is one more speaker. I would like to get the SNP speaker in as well, but I will be calling the first Front-Bench spokesman at 3.8 pm.

Melanie Onn: I am happy to have further discussions regarding the right hon. Gentleman's point.

Turning to the discards ban, those in the fishing industry to whom I speak seem to agree that it is one of the most significant changes to the CFP since its creation. They tell me that the big picture of the fishing industry is currently positive after a painful few decades, but the uncertainty around the landings obligation is their biggest concern right now. Clearly, discarding usable fish does not make economic or environmental sense. Moving away from a system that creates the perverse outcome of thousands of unused fish being thrown back overboard is certainly a move in the right direction. It is also vital for preserving and rebuilding stocks.

However, in 2012, the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs reflected the feeling among many in the industry when it argued that an immediate ban could lead to further unintended consequences, which would not necessarily solve the issue. The example the Committee gave at the time was of the landings obligation simply moving unwanted fish from the sea on to the land, presumably to be discarded in another way.

I therefore welcome the efforts of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, the Marine Management Organisation and indeed the Government to find potential uses for undersized fish that are unsuitable for human consumption—fish oil, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and so on. It is no good replacing one form of discard with another, so we need to ensure that the catches have markets. It is important that the Government and the EU work with the industry throughout the staged implementation of the discard ban. They must ensure that the rules are responsive to the evidence gathered over the next five years, which will be particularly important with regards to mixed fisheries. Some in the industry are worried about the prospect of fleets being prevented from going out halfway or two thirds of the way through the year, leaving people unable to work and earn. That is a concern in many of our already struggling coastal communities. Can the Minister say how that potential situation is being avoided?

Another unintended consequence of the landing obligation that was raised with me by the chief executive of Port of Grimsby east is the issue of transportation of

[Melanie Onn]

unwanted fish once they are landed; I believe he has had previous discussions with the Minister on that matter. While Grimsby has a fishmeal plant to which unwanted fish can be taken, ports elsewhere have to shoulder the cost of trucking the discards to fishmeal plants or landfill sites. Can the Minister clarify where the responsibility lies for the cost of that transportation?

3.58 pm

Calum Kerr (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this important debate. As someone new to these Chambers and new to some of my portfolio, I found the dialogue positive, engaging and constructive. The comments have been high quality and I am sure that all of us—not least the Minister—will reflect on the many interesting points.

Fishing is of huge importance to Scotland. The Scottish fishing zone makes up more than 60% of UK waters and accounts for 80% by weight of landings of key stocks, as we have heard. The marine industry is also of significant importance to Scotland and the UK's economy. In 2012, it was worth an impressive £4.5 billion to Scotland, and directly and indirectly employed no fewer than 45,700 people.

None of that is a surprise to the hon. Members present in the Chamber. We all understand the importance of the industry. Scotland has a long and proud history as a fishing nation and we remain a leading player in the sector. Clearly, therefore, we should be a key participant in the EU's fishing discussions and policy formulations. The Scottish Government are a strong supporter of the industry and fight for our fishermen in Brussels.

The Scottish Government work hard to win backing from our European partners to minimise new burdens and to maximise the catch. I am pleased that our reputation is as a co-operative and responsible fishing nation, which allows us to exert influence over the outcomes of international fisheries negotiations. I encourage the UK Government to engage our Government in Scotland as much as possible, especially because of that record of success.

We must, of course, pay testament to our fishermen, who have invested in the long-term recovery of stocks—cod, in particular—by agreeing not to over-catch. That self-denying ordinance has been painful, but in the northern North sea it has worked, and worked well. The Scottish Government argued for and secured agreement among EU member states for a phased introduction of the landing obligation in 2016 in order to avoid a “big bang” approach for our fisheries. That has been helpful, but Scotland's record on discarding is already making good progress.

In the North sea, combined discards of cod, haddock and whiting have fallen from 40% of the catch in 2008 to only 18% in 2014. Of course more needs to be done, but we should be satisfied and pleased with progress. All in all, the picture in much of the Scottish fishery is a positive and encouraging one. A vital natural resource is being restored, and that is good for the environment, for conservation—and, of course, for our fishing and food industries.

The common fisheries policy is the cornerstone of Europe's fisheries management. It was designed to cement the sustainability of the EU's fishing stocks by managing them as a shared resource, but historically it has not been effective, as it has paid out large subsidies against a backdrop of declining stocks and poor resilience. Today we have heard some worthwhile contributions about the CFP's inadequacies.

Earlier this year, DEFRA revealed that 32 stocks of fish species were being fished at maximum sustainable yield, a figure that was up from 26 in 2014. An EU publication has also highlighted that as many as 75% of EU stocks are being overfished, compared with a worldwide average of only 25%. That is unacceptable. To put it bluntly, the common fisheries policy is not working. It has been extended, as the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) explained only too well, beyond its original limits. We want to see a framework that delivers meaningful regional fisheries management and gives fishermen a greater say and greater involvement in their own industry.

Despite our deep cynicism about the CFP, we travel hopefully. At an EU level, we believe in negotiation and in moving things forward by persuasion and partnership. The Scottish Government have approached reform constructively and have worked successfully to win key concessions on reform of the policy. Ministers have championed the move to a regional fisheries management approach in order to enable tailored measures to be identified and implemented on a fisheries-by-fisheries and region-by-region approach. Over time, that will mean that those working in the industry will have greater say and there will be less of a top-down, one-size-fits-all model dictated by the EU.

In our dialogue today, we have heard a number of important suggestions and ideas about how we can improve the common fisheries policy. Despite some differences, even over the EU itself, we have consensus on the need for reform and on the huge opportunity presented by the renegotiation that we understand the Government to have under way.

This Minister seems to be my favourite Minister at the moment, because he replies to all my written questions, so I am delighted that he is present today. This area is new to me, but someone does not have to have worked in it for all the years that some of our predecessors have to understand its importance or that we need change. Not only do we need change, but we have an opportunity such as we have not had before. I urge the Minister to consider all the points made today and I look forward to hearing his proposals.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): I hope that the two Front Benchers will allow our mover of the motion a minute to speak at the end of the debate.

4.5 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): It must be your benign supervision, Mr Walker, but every debate that I attend when you are in the Chair involves a remarkable degree of consensus. This debate has been good-natured and exceptionally well informed. I put that all down to you, sir.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate about an industry that has been in decline for far too long. I

pay tribute to the courage and sheer hard work of our fishermen, who brave the dangers of the coastal seas and the open oceans to bring fish to our tables.

No one present can remember the time when our fish stocks were at their most productive. Old postcards show harbours crammed with fishing boats, about which the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous)—for Lowestoft—and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) were trading stories. Sepia photos show giant fish dwarfing the men who caught them, and those who represent fishing communities today have heard the stories of quaysides buried in haddock and cod—but they are stories from their grandparents. The truth is that the UK fishing industry was at its most productive not a few decades ago, in the 1980s or before, but more than 120 years ago, in the 1880s. The peak year was 1889.

Today, even with satellite navigation systems and sophisticated mechanical gear, not to mention sonar and metal-hull vessels, our fishermen have to work 17 times harder to catch fewer and smaller fish than people did in the age of sail and steam in wooden-hull vessels. Decades of poor fisheries management have led to a collapse in the productivity of our fisheries and a continual loss of jobs and livelihoods. For every hour spent fishing today, fishers land only 6% of what they did 120 years ago.

In June this year, the Commission set out its proposals for fishing opportunities for 2016. This debate will be able to inform the Minister's contribution to that consultation and, I trust, will shape the recommendations and suggestions that the UK has to make to the Commission by 1 October. The fishing opportunities for 2016 will operate under the objectives of the new CFP, which was so ably set out by former Commissioner Damanaki. In particular, it will aim to bring fishing mortality—what the Commission refers to as

“the impact of fishing fleets on the stocks”—

into line with the levels required to allow stocks to rebuild to biomass levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield, or MSY, and to do so in the shortest possible timeframe.

The Commission wants to achieve good environmental status in European seas by 2020 and to reduce the impact of fishing on the marine ecosystem, as set out in the marine strategy framework directive. The Commission proposals for fishing opportunities are based on the available scientific advice that it receives from ICES, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, and other scientific and technical bodies. Where no such advice is available, the Commission has stated that it will apply the precautionary approach in line with the CFP objectives.

The Minister knows that I have had occasion in the past to challenge his Department's failure properly to apply the precautionary principle on a number of fronts. I trust that he will be able to provide assurance to the House today that the UK will argue on the side of the Commission against increasing total allowable catch for those species for which the science is less than secure, and that he will not risk giving a green light to overfishing.

With that in mind, it is worth noting that 2016 is the year in which the landing obligation for demersal fisheries in the North sea and the Atlantic EU waters comes into force, bringing an important part of the EU fleet in the

north-east Atlantic under the obligation to bring, retain on board and land all catches. The discard ban, as it is more popularly known, will ensure that quotas for stocks falling under the landing obligation take into account catches rather than landings. That has been controversial with fishing communities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby outlined, but it will enable everyone to get a far better picture of precisely what is happening with the stock as it has to be landed and recorded. If we are to proceed on the basis of sound science, as all parties say they want us to, the landing obligation will improve our capacity to properly assess the biomass and health not only of the target species that people like to eat but of the whole marine ecosystem. That is fundamental.

Many hon. Members are aware of the issues that the landing obligation creates in the short term for fishing boats beset by the problems of choke species. Fishers can find themselves unable to pursue a stock for which they have remaining quota because of fears of catching a stock for which they have no quota or no quota left. Various suggestions have been made as to how to resolve that problem, including quota leasing and even transferring 10% of quotas from year to year. Will the Minister outline the Government's preferred way of addressing those real, live issues for fishermen up and down our coastal waters?

After the reform of the CFP, a taskforce was set up to solve the inter-institutional deadlock on multi-annual plans. It finalised its work in April 2014 and concluded with a framework to facilitate the development and introduction of multi-annual plans under the CFP. The new generation of multi-annual plans should include targets for MSY, with deadlines, for the stocks that define the fisheries. The plans may, in addition, introduce ranges of exploitation rates considered to be in accordance with MSY.

On the basis of the taskforce conclusions, the Commission just last week tabled a proposal for a multi-annual plan covering Baltic sea fisheries that includes proposed target values and deadlines for achieving MSY. The proposal for 2016 sets the total allowable catch from the Baltic sea's 10 main commercial fish stocks for EU fishermen. This year, for the first time, the TAC for plaice has been set in line with the MSY approach, bringing the total number of Baltic stocks covered by MSY to seven out of 10. For seven out of 10 stocks, the available data from the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea has allowed the Commission to propose catch limits at sustainable levels for more stocks than ever before. The EU aims to achieve MSY for all fish stocks by 2020 at the latest.

Under the proposals, the TAC for all stocks except salmon would decrease by about 15% compared with 2015 and would be set at approximately 565,692 tonnes. The catch limit for salmon, which is measured in pieces rather than tonnes, would increase by 6%, to 115,874. The Commission proposes to increase the catch limits for herring in the western and central Baltic, as well as for main basin salmon and plaice. Decreases for the remaining stocks either reflect the natural fluctuations within the MSY range or are linked to the improved perception of stocks' status as a result of recent data revision. The European Council will discuss the Commission's proposal

[Barry Gardiner]

at its October meeting. Will the Minister indicate whether the UK will be supporting this new and more scientifically rigorous approach to quota setting at that meeting?

Other proposals are under discussion with stakeholders for both a North sea and a western waters demersal mixed fisheries plan, and a multi-annual plan for the Atlantic pelagic fisheries is under consideration. In preparation of its proposals for these plans, the Commission has requested that ICES provide MSY ranges for the stocks concerned where quotas are fixed by the Council for use in the management of mixed fisheries under plans. I understand that ICES has provided such ranges for an important number of those stocks. Will the Minister advise us as to whether he has had the opportunity to examine that scientific evidence and advice? If so, will he be minded to accept it and argue that it should be respected when the Council meets in October?

The Council has achieved significant progress in setting TACs in line with MSY over the last few years, from five in 2009 to 36 for 2015. That has resulted in an increase in the number of stocks that are fished at levels corresponding to MSY to 26 stocks in 2015. The Commission has made it clear that it believes it is necessary to continue along that path for 2016 and 2017, and to create the conditions for achieving MSY as soon as possible, and by 2020 at the latest. It therefore intends to propose total allowable catches in line with achieving MSY in 2016.

The Minister will be only too well aware, however, that there are those who would like to ignore the science and look for short-term gain by arguing for an uplift in TAC. Will he confirm that he shares the Commission's view that it would be unacceptable to delay the objective of setting TAC in line with MSY beyond 2016 unless doing so would imply very large annual reductions in quotas that would seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fleets involved?

A few weeks ago, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) has already said, I had the pleasure of visiting Lancaster and Fleetwood and discussing the challenges facing the fishing community. It is a perfect example of the sort of local community I spoke of at the beginning of my remarks. The glory days of the past, when Fleetwood was a major fishing port, are no longer, but for those still carrying on the great fishing tradition of their grandparents the dangers of their trade seem not to have diminished at the same pace as the rewards have.

I was privileged to go out with one of the under-10 fleet there and discuss with skippers the problems they face. I thank them for the robust honesty with which they shared their fears and concerns about the challenges facing their industry, and pay tribute to the way in which many of them have embraced wider net gauges and other progressive ways of restoring biomass.

On behalf of those skippers, I want to ask the Minister one final question. It echoes the remarks of the hon. Member for Waveney—I will call him my honourable friend—whose admirable speech was absolutely spot on, on so many fronts. The Government won a significant court battle that established that the UK fishing quota was the UK's to dispose of, and that we could effect a redistribution of quota that took little away from the offshore fleet of larger vessels but could be of significant

benefit to the smaller under-10 fleet that is the mainstay of fishing ports such as Fleetwood. When will the Minister begin to exercise that right and redistribute quota to the under-10 fleet so as to redress the balance and make it easier for these brave individuals to carry on the livelihood of their grandparents?

4.17 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate. I know that the fishing industry is of huge importance in his constituency. I welcomed the opportunity that I had last year to make the long journey to visit his constituency and meet industry representatives.

I will try to cover as many of the points raised by hon. Members as I can. However, I will first give my reflections on my job from the two years that I have been Fisheries Minister. The marine environment is incredibly complex. No man-made policy designed to manage it and deliver sustainable fisheries will ever be perfect. The science will never be perfect, and we will never be able to pick up every interaction between different elements of the marine environment. If we want sustainable fisheries, there is no alternative but to have some kind of catch limit on vessels and some kind of quota system. Whether we were in or out of the common fisheries policy, we would have that quota system, just as Norway, the Faroe Islands and other states pursue catch limits, and we would still have arguments with other countries about allocation of fish stocks and seek reciprocal access arrangements.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked about forums for discussion with countries such as Norway and Iceland. Those forums exist. The coastal states meeting takes place each autumn, where we argue about, for example, the allocation of mackerel quotas in his part of the world. There is already an EU-Norway agreement that precedes the discussions at the December Council.

We should all pay tribute to the great work of my predecessor in this post, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who I believe made some important breakthroughs on reform of the common fisheries policy. Unlike the negotiations on reform of the common agricultural policy, which were very difficult and where we made little progress, even I, a strong Eurosceptic, recognise that good progress was made on CFP reform.

Four key things were delivered. First, there was a legally binding commitment to fish sustainably—to fish at MSY by 2016 where possible, and everywhere by 2020. Secondly, there was the discipline of a discard ban to ban the shameful practice of discards. Thirdly, in order to help deliver the policy and make it a reality, there was the regionalisation of policy making, so that nation states multilaterally agreed between themselves how they should manage the waters in which they have a shared interest, with the role of the Commission reduced to simply rubber-stamping those agreements at the end. That is really important. Although it is sometimes difficult to get member states to reach those agreements, it forces them to work through their differences, and these are the countries that actually have an interest in an individual fishery.

The final important element in making the discard ban work, as a number of colleagues have alluded to, was the introduction of flexibilities in the quota system. Those flexibilities include the ability to bank and borrow quota from one year to the next, which has been extended, and an inter-species flexibility, so that if a fisherman runs out of quota for one species—say, haddock—he can count some of his cod quota against haddock within certain limits. There were exemptions involving survivability on certain flat fish, for instance, and a quota uplift to take account of the fact that fishermen are no longer discarding. The deal to the fishermen is, “Stop discarding the fish and we will increase your quota by the amount that we estimate has been discarded previously.”

We should also recognise that good progress has been made. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) said, the most recent assessment shows that we now have 32 stocks being fished at MSY. That is up from 26 in 2014 and from only around 13, if we go back around a decade. That progress is starting to feed through into benefits for the fishing industry. In relation to the north sea, last year’s December Council was much easier, and there were recommendations for increases. In fact, in certain species, such as cod and haddock, there is a similar situation this year, so where we have shown restraint, we are starting to see benefits accruing to the fishing industry. I always try to get this point across to fishermen: “If you show restraint now and allow stocks to recover and achieve that maximum sustainable yield, you are safeguarding your own financial future, because you will have more fish tomorrow.”

We have made good progress with the regional groups. A number of people have mentioned the importance of getting the industry involved, and I confirm that there is an industry regional group. The regional groups have been successful in developing the discard plans, both for the pelagic species, which is now in place, and for the demersal landing obligation, which was submitted in May. Following on from that discard plan, we now have the multi-annual plan for management, for instance, of the Baltic area, and we will shortly be beginning work to take forward ideas for our own plan. Therefore, good progress has been made, and as we made clear in our manifesto, our primary objective during this Parliament is to ensure that we get the hard-won CFP reform properly implemented.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland commented that some of the science is out of date, and it will not surprise him to learn that I hear that all the time from fishermen. The reality is that we always try to make sure that we have the most up-to-date science. At last year’s December Council, we brought scientific results that were collected during the month of November/December straight to the Council. ICES always tries to project trends, so when it publishes its advice for a particular Council, it is not as dated as people suggest, because it factors into that the ongoing trends. I sometimes hear fishermen say that it goes where the fish are; that it goes to the same part of the ocean each year when it does its surveys. That is true, but some kind of basic yardstick is needed, which is consistent from one year to the next, so there is a control. In addition to that, we put scientists on actual fishing vessels, so that they can see fishing activity and the stocks that fishermen are landing.

The right hon. Gentleman and a number of colleagues asked about the renegotiation and the Prime Minister’s plans to renegotiate our relationship with the EU. The Prime Minister probably would not thank me if, here in a Westminster Hall debate, I were to add something to his renegotiation list, but I will say that, in common with the CAP, we have regular reforms of the common fisheries policy. They happen every 10 years. The next one is due to commence around 2019 and to be implemented from 2022, so there is a natural timetable for the next reform of the CFP.

Although our focus now is on making the existing reform work, I can say that the next reform might look at a couple of areas—it is too early to say whether it will. The first is to move from the rather arbitrary single-stock quota system to something a bit broader that recognises that biomass would be a natural step forward from MSY—but that is difficult to achieve. The second is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and a number of colleagues mentioned, to look at the issue of relative stability. The reference period for the quota system that we have was set between 1973 and 1978. It is undoubtedly dated. However, we should not enter that venture lightly, because many other countries would believe that they have a claim for more fisheries, and we always have to be cautious that we are not unlocking something that would leave our industry at a disadvantage. They were set in that way at that time to end disputes about who should have access to what.

Mr Carmichael: Will the Minister give way?

George Eustice: I will carry on, if I may. My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) gave us a very detailed history lesson, and I will not challenge her historical knowledge of these things. However, we should recognise, as the shadow Minister said, that fish stocks were in a really bad place in the 1930s. We had suffered overfishing. Although we hear now about the discard ban and how the common fisheries policy created that, the truth is that as long ago as 1942, George Orwell was complaining about the discarding of fish. The fish stocks were basically saved by the second world war. We then had a period of plenty for the fishing industry during the ’50s and ’60s, but we then needed to move on to a quota system.

Along with a number of other colleagues, my hon. Friend mentioned the issue of access. She is right that when we joined the EU there was equal access in the 12 to 200-mile, or median, line in our waters, but access to the six to 12-mile line was for countries that had access agreements prior to accession. It is also important to recognise that we have access to other European countries’ waters. If someone were to talk the French industry, they would find that it complains, usually to the fishing Minister, about British access to, for instance, the bay of Biscay and the baie de Seine, which is important to part of our fleet. We also have access to waters in Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney made a very important point about the under-10s, which I recognise. We have consulted on top-slicing 25% of the quota uplift for stocks and allocating that to the under-10s, on the basis that at the moment, they have to discard quite a lot of the fish that they catch because they do

[George Eustice]

not have enough quota. He is right that during the reference period in the late 1990s, there was patchy reporting, which means that the under-10s do not really have a fair deal at the moment. We have already taken on Mr Bumble, as he would have it, and we have had legal challenges with the producer organisations to realign some of the quota. We will be doing more on that as well.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) raised the issue of choke species, among other things. The flexibilities that we have in the common fisheries policy can, I believe—if deployed correctly—deal with those problems. We start by not having every species covered from year one with the discard ban, and with the key species that define the fishery. For instance, in Scotland, fishermen often cite hake. Hake does not define the fishery in the North sea, and it is a species that would be returned to later in that window, closer to 2020. However, I was pleased to meet her, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) earlier, with representatives from fish processors in her constituency. I recognise its importance there.

The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) mentioned relations with the Scottish Government. We are fully engaged and work very closely with my opposite number, Richard Lochhead. He attends trilaterals with the Commission at December Council and we will be working closely together, leading up to that.

Finally, the shadow Minister asked lots of questions that I cannot answer in full now, but he also asked about the precautionary principle. Of all the countries in the European Union, the UK has the strongest history of relying on and arguing the science, so we do have a science-led approach to fisheries management.

4.29 pm

Mr Carmichael: That was an impressive canter by the Minister through the issues raised in this debate. I have only one point that I want him to take away. I accept and welcome the progress that he has outlined in reform of the common fisheries policy. He has my support and the support of my family—well, my family certainly, but also my party. *[Laughter.]* He has our support in moving towards the next stage of CFP reform. The truth is that that strengthens, rather than weakens, the case for reforming the constitutional architecture on which the policy base sits. That is the architectural framework that really has to reflect the policy that we now have. There is an opportunity here and I do not think that the Government should be resistant. They could become heroes at the end of the day.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

4.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 10 September 2015

EDUCATION

GCSE and A-level Subject Consultation

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): Today 10 September 2015 I am launching a public consultation on revised subject content for 6 GCSEs and 9 A-levels which will be taught from 2017.

We are reforming GCSEs and A-levels to be rigorous and more knowledge-based and to match the qualifications used in the best education systems in the world. Our objective is to ensure that young people leave our education system equipped to compete with the best performers across the globe.

The reforms aim to ensure that GCSEs are more academically demanding and will be qualifications in which students, employers, and further education colleges and universities can have confidence. At A-level, our reforms aim to ensure that they prepare students for undergraduate study.

A priority in the development of the new qualifications has been to ensure that subject experts, particularly university academics in the relevant subjects, are involved in determining the subject content.

The subject content documents being published today set new expectations which all awarding organisations' specifications must meet. Awarding organisations have drafted the content, working with subject experts, the Department for Education and Ofqual. An additional consultation will be published in the autumn with content for Government and politics and geology A-levels.

This consultation is an opportunity for all those with an interest in these subjects to provide their views which will be considered when redrafting the content for final publication.

Summary of changes to subjects

Accounting A-level retains the current requirement for students to acquire a solid knowledge of, and the ability to apply, double entry accounting methods. There is also an increased emphasis on the use of accounting concepts and techniques in the analysis and evaluation of financial information.

Ancient history GCSE requires the study of the history of at least two ancient societies drawn from 3000 BC to 500 AD. Each ancient society must constitute 20% or more of the qualification, and at least one of them must be Roman or Greek. Students will have to undertake: one period study covering at least 50 years; one longer period study covering at least 200 years; and two in-depth studies focusing on substantial and coherent shorter time spans.

Ancient history A-level requires the study of ancient history drawn from 3000 BC to 500 AD. A-level students must study both Roman and Greek history, with each constituting 20% or more of the qualification. At AS-level, students must study at least one of either Roman or

Greek history, which must constitute 50% or more of the qualification. Students will have to undertake: two period studies covering at least 75 years; and (at A-level only) two in-depth studies focusing on substantial and coherent shorter time spans. Students will have to study ancient historical topics from a span of at least 400 years.

Classical civilisation GCSE provides much greater detail on the requirements to be studied for literature and visual/material culture, which consists of architecture and/or artefacts and artworks. Literature must form at least 40% and visual/material culture must form 20% or more of the total qualification. There is also a comparative, thematic study, which must form 20% or more of the total qualification. Both Roman and Greek civilisations must be studied, forming at least 20% each of the total qualification.

Classical civilisation A-level provides much greater detail on the requirements to be studied for literature, visual/material culture and philosophy and thought. All three of these areas must be studied at A-level. At AS-level literature plus one of the other two options must be studied. Literature must form at least 40% of the total qualification at both AS and A-level.

Electronics GCSE sets out the detailed knowledge and understanding required by students. The content increases the demand of the subject by increasing the breadth and depth of content required, including demanding mathematical requirements.

In the electronics A-level, the depth and breadth of the content has been reviewed. A number of new topics has been added and depth has been increased by including additional content in current topic areas. The content also strengthens the mathematical requirements. New mathematical requirements have been added and the formulae to be recalled and used are clearly identified in the subject content, adding to the overall level of demand.

In the film studies GCSE, students have to study at least six films, of which three must have been produced in the US (an independent film, a film produced between 1930 and 1960, and a genre film), one must be British, one must be an English language film produced outside the US and one must not be in the English language. All films studied have to be specified by the awarding organisation and must be critically recognised and culturally and historically significant.

At A-level, film students must study an historical range of films, compare two films and must study at least two major movements or stylistic developments. For AS, students have to study at least six films and for A-level at least 12 films. All films studied must be specified by the awarding organisation and must be critically recognised and culturally and historically significant.

Law A-level content will ensure students study a greater number of areas of substantive law. At AS-level there is a requirement to study two areas of law (one public and one private area) and at A-level there is a requirement to study three areas of law (at least one public and one private area). There is also a requirement to study the English legal system and nature of law

Through media studies GCSE students will gain an understanding of academic theories and will be required to apply specialist subject specific terminology and theory. The subject content is based on four central areas of knowledge: media language; representation;

media industries; and audiences. Students will learn about media regulation and the different funding models for media institutions and how they operate on a global scale.

Media studies A-level places greater emphasis on academic knowledge and understanding. The study of a wide range of specified theories is now required at both AS and A-level. Students will apply their theoretical knowledge and use specialist subject specific terminology to analyse and compare media products and the contexts in which they are produced and consumed. Students will critically debate key questions relating to the social, cultural, technological and economic dimensions of media through sustained discursive writing.

GCSE statistics has new subject content which outlines the key stages of the statistical enquiry cycle. Students are required to have knowledge of key statistical calculations, e.g. calculating of moving averages to identify trends and, at the higher tier, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient formula. There is some overlap with reformed GCSE mathematics content, but the majority of content is unique to statistics. Because of the emphasis on the statistical enquiry cycle in GCSE statistics, much of this knowledge will be applied in different ways from mathematics GCSE.

A-level statistics builds upon the statistics and probability components of GCSE mathematics and helps students make sense of data trends and to solve statistical problems in a variety of contexts, supporting progression to HEI in subjects such as psychology, biology, geography, business and the social sciences. The qualification includes study of the statistical enquiry cycle with students required to perform key statistical calculations. The content has been drafted to articulate the mathematics content, while, at the same time, care was taken to avoid too much overlap with the mathematics and further mathematics A-level.

[HCWS187]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I will attend the EU General Affairs Council (GAC) on 14 September. The Council will be held in Brussels and be chaired by the Luxembourg presidency.

The GAC is expected to focus on: the Luxembourg presidency Work programme; preparation of the agenda for the European Council on 15 and 16 October 2015; and the 2016 Commission Work programme.

Luxembourg presidency Work programme

The GAC will discuss the Luxembourg presidency Work programme. Luxembourg has set out seven "pillars" for its presidency: stimulating investment to boost growth and employment; deepening the European Union's social dimension; managing migration, combining freedom, justice and security; revitalising the single market by focusing on its digital dimension; placing European competitiveness in a global and transparent framework; promoting sustainable development; and strengthening the European Union's presence on the global stage.

The UK shares many of the priorities of the Luxembourg presidency, particularly those based around supporting growth and European competitiveness.

Preparation of the October European Council

The GAC will prepare the agenda for the 15 and 16 October European Council, which the Prime Minister will attend. The draft October European Council agenda covers: migration; economic and monetary union; and an update on the UK's EU renegotiation, including the state of play of technical talks and intentions for the process ahead. The European Council may also consider external relations issues.

2016 Commission Work programme

GAC Ministers will hold an exchange of views on the Commission's letter of intent for their 2016 Work programme.

[HCWS185]

HEALTH

Foods Standards Agency (Triennial Reviews)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I am today announcing the start of the triennial review by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) of the six Scientific Advisory Committees for which the FSA is the sole or lead sponsor. The six Committees are:

- the Advisory Committee on Animal Feeding Stuffs;
- the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food;
- the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes;
- the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment;
- the General Advisory Committee on Science; and
- the Social Science Research Committee.

The triennial review programme ensures that all Government Departments review their non-departmental public bodies on a regular basis.

Reviews are conducted in two stages. The first stage will examine the continuing need for the functions provided by each committee, and whether the organisation's form, including operating at arm's length from Government, remains appropriate. If the outcome of this stage is that delivery should continue, the second stage of the review will assess whether the bodies are operating efficiently and in line with the recognised principles of good corporate governance.

The FSA is reviewing all six bodies as a cluster, which will provide for a more efficient review process, and allow the review to consider any gaps or overlaps in the committees' functions and opportunities for efficiencies in their operation,

The FSA will consult widely with relevant stakeholders, including: the Select Committees on Science and Technology for both the House of Commons and House of Lords, on Health, and on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Government Departments and their agencies; the devolved Administrations; and others with an interest in the

work of the committees. The FSA will also launch an open call for evidence so that all those with an interest can contribute.

I will inform the House of the outcome of the review when it is completed and the findings of the review will be published.

[HCWS183]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is today laying before Parliament the 2014-15 annual report of the appointed person under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, copies of which are available in the Vote Office. The appointed person is an independent person who scrutinises the use of the search power to support the measures in the Act to seize and forfeit cash used for criminal purposes.

The report gives the appointed person's opinion as to the circumstances and manner in which the search powers conferred by the Act are being exercised. I am pleased that the appointed person, Mr Douglas Bain, has expressed satisfaction with the operation of the search power and has found that there is nothing to suggest that the procedures are not being followed in accordance with the Act. He has made no recommendations in his report this year.

From 1 April 2014 to the end of March 2015 over £75 million in cash was seized by law enforcement agencies in England and Wales under powers in the Act. The seizures are subject to further investigation, and the cash is subject to further judicially approved detention, before forfeiture in the magistrates' court. These powers are a valuable tool in the fight against crime and the report shows that the way they are used has been, and will continue to be, monitored closely.

[HCWS186]

JUSTICE

Inquests into Deaths of Service Personnel Overseas

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinage): My hon. Friend, the Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans, and I now present the latest of our joint statements on the progress of coroner investigations into the deaths of UK service personnel on active service overseas. We wish to express the Government's and the nation's continued deep sense of gratitude to the brave members of the armed forces who have served on our behalf. We particularly acknowledge the sacrifice of those who have given their lives in this service and the loved ones they have left behind.

This statement provides details on the progress of investigations conducted by the senior coroners for Oxfordshire, for Wiltshire and Swindon and for other coroner areas in England and Wales as at 26 August 2015.

There is also additional information to supplement this statement in tables which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and which give details of all cases, including whether there has been or will be a service inquiry—formerly known as a board of inquiry.

The defence inquests unit of the Ministry of Defence continues to work with coroners—including the specially trained cadre of coroners—to make sure that investigations are thorough and that inquests are timely and effective. Section 12 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 now allows investigations to be held in Scotland, where appropriate.

We offer our sincere thanks to those who support and assist bereaved families; to coroners and their staff who conduct thorough investigations with such families at their heart; and to the Chief Coroner who provides leadership and oversight of the coroner service.

Our two departments have provided funding for the additional resources required by the coroners in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and Swindon since 2007 as service personnel who have lost their lives overseas have been repatriated to RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire and RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire. This has enabled the coroners to conduct investigations into these deaths while still dealing with their local case load.

Current status of inquests

No further inquests have been concluded into deaths of service personnel on operations in Iraq or Afghanistan since our last statement on 4 June. Therefore the total number of inquests into the deaths of service personnel who have died on active service in Iraq or Afghanistan, or who have died in the UK of injuries sustained on active service remains at 624. Three deaths of injured service personnel did not lead to a formal inquest although two of these were taken into consideration at inquests into other deaths which occurred in the same incidents. The third death was of a serviceman in Scotland who made a partial recovery but later died from his injuries, and a fatal accident inquiry was not held.

Coroners' investigations which remain open

As at 26 August, there remain seven open coroner investigations into the deaths of service personnel in Afghanistan. Five of these relate to the Lynx helicopter crash on 26 April 2014 and have been retained by the senior Oxfordshire coroner. A pre-inquest hearing for this case is scheduled for 24 November 2015 with an inquest scheduled for 7 to 18 March 2016. The other two outstanding investigations, into the death of Lance Corporal James Brynin on 13 October 2013 and Sapper Adam Moralee on 5 March 2014 are being conducted by the senior coroners for West Sussex and for Gateshead and South Tyneside whose courts are closer to the next of kin. A pre-inquest hearing date of 2 October 2015 has been confirmed for Lance Corporal Brynin. Hearing dates have not yet been listed for Sapper Moralee.

An investigation is also open into the death of Private Jamie Sawyer who died while serving on the UN peace-keeping mission in Cyprus. This investigation is being conducted by HM senior coroner for Birmingham and an inquest has been scheduled for 1 to 2 December 2015.

We will continue to inform the House of progress.

A table detailing inquests into service deaths can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-09-10/HCWS184/>

[HCWS184]

Petition

Thursday 10 September 2015

OBSERVATIONS

CABINET OFFICE

Royal City status for Leicester

The petition of residents of Leicester East,

Declares that the city of Leicester is one of the oldest settlements in the United Kingdom which over two millennia has developed into an area of major cultural and economic significance within the country and further that following the discovery of the remains of Richard III in the city, and his subsequent re-interment on Thursday 26th March in Leicester Cathedral, Leicester has established a clear and irrefutable royal connection.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons debates the possibility of Leicester being permitted to use the title 'Royal', and be attributed the title, 'The Royal City of Leicester'.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Keith Vaz, Official Report, 20 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 1340.*]

[P001535]

Observations from the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose):

The title 'Royal' is a privilege granted by the Queen on the advice of Her Ministers. The title is granted extremely rarely, either in recognition of a very strong Royal connection or as a civic honour in recognition of a town or city's unique contribution to public life. Only two towns have been granted the title during Her Majesty's reign.

Leicester is right to be proud of its ancient history and as the location of the final burial place of King Richard III. That is a very strong and impressive case but, after careful consideration, I regret to say that it does not satisfy the extremely tough standards required to prove a truly exceptional Royal connection, which would enable me to make a recommendation to Her Majesty to bestow on the city the title Royal.

I am delighted to note that Leicester is already benefiting from a City Deal agreed in March 2014 and a Local Growth Deal secured in January 2014. These will ensure that Leicester continues to grow as an important cultural and economic centre.

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