

Tuesday
1 September 2020

Volume 679
No. 92



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 1 September 2020

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE RT HON. BORIS JOHNSON, MP, DECEMBER 2019)

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY, MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MINISTER FOR THE UNION—
The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS AND FIRST SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Dominic Raab, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP

LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE—The Rt Hon. Robert Buckland, QC, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE—The Rt Hon. Ben Wallace, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY—The Rt Hon. Alok Sharma, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS—The Rt Hon. Dr Thérèse Coffey, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION—The Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. George Eustice, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—The Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt Hon. Grant Shapps, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis CBE, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. Alister Jack, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt Hon. Simon Hart, MP

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND LORD PRIVY SEAL—The Rt Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—The Rt Hon. Oliver Dowden CBE, MP

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO—The Rt Hon. Amanda Milling, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Alok Sharma, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Kwasi Kwarteng, MP (Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth)

Lord Grimstone of Boscobel, Kt (Minister for Investment) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Nadhim Zahawi, MP

Amanda Solloway, MP

Paul Scully, MP

Lord Callanan

Cabinet Office—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY, MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MINISTER FOR THE UNION—

The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO—The Rt Hon. Amanda Milling, MP

PAYMASTER GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Penny Mordaunt, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Chloe Smith, MP

Lord Agnew of Oulton §

Lord True CBE

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—

Julia Lopez, MP

Johnny Mercer, MP (Minister for Defence People and Veterans) §

Defence—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Ben Wallace, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Jeremy Quin, MP (Minister for Defence Procurement)

Baroness Goldie DL

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

James Heappey, MP (Minister for the Armed Forces)

Johnny Mercer, MP (Minister for Defence People and Veterans) §

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Oliver Dowden CBE, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Caroline Dinenage, MP (Minister for Digital and Culture)

The Rt Hon. John Whittingdale, MP (Minister for Media and Data)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Matt Warman, MP

Nigel Huddleston, MP §

Baroness Barran MBE

Education—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Michelle Donelan, MP (Minister for Universities)

The Rt Hon. Nick Gibb, MP (Minister for School Standards)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Gillian Keegan, MP

Vicky Ford, MP

Baroness Berridge of the Vale of Catmose §

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. George Eustice, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Rebecca Pow, MP

Lord Gardiner of Kimble

Victoria Prentis, MP

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND FIRST SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Dominic Raab, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. James Cleverly, MP (Minister for the Middle East and North Africa) §

The Rt Hon. Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Minister for the Pacific and the Environment) §

Nigel Adams, MP (Minister for Asia) §

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

James Duddridge, MP §

Wendy Morton, MP §

Baroness Sugg CBE §

Health and Social Care—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Edward Argar, MP (Minister for Health)

Helen Whately, MP (Minister for Care)

Nadine Dorries, MP (Minister for Patient Safety, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Jo Churchill, MP

Lord Bethell of Romford

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP (Minister for Security)

Kit Malthouse, MP (Minister for Crime and Policing) §

Baroness Williams of Trafford

Lord Stephen Greenhalgh §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Victoria Atkins, MP

Kevin Foster, MP

Chris Philp, MP §

Housing, Communities and Local Government—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Simon Clarke, MP (Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government)

The Rt Hon. Christopher Pincher, MP (Minister for Housing)

Lord Stephen Greenhalgh §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Luke Hall, MP

International Trade—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—
The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Greg Hands, MP (Minister for Trade Policy)
Lord Grimstone of Boscobel, Kt (Minister for Innovation) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Graham Stuart, MP
Kemi Badenoch, MP (Minister for Equalities) §
Baroness Berridge of the Vale of Catmose (Minister for Women) §
Ranil Jayawardena, MP

Justice—

LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Robert Buckland, QC, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Lucy Frazer, QC, MP
Kit Malthouse, MP (Minister for Crime and Policing) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Alex Chalk, MP §
Chris Philp, MP §

Law Officers—

ATTORNEY GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Suella Braverman, QC, MP
SOLICITOR GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Michael Ellis, QC, MP
ADVOCATE GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. Lord Keen of Elie, QC

Leader of the House of Commons—

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP

Leader of the House of Lords—

LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Earl Howe CBE

Northern Ireland Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis CBE, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Robin Walker, MP

Scotland Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Alister Jack, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—
Iain Stewart, MP
David Duguid, MP §

Transport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Grant Shapps, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Andrew Stephenson, MP
Chris Heaton-Harris, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Kelly Tolhurst, MP
Rachel Maclean, MP
Baroness Vere of Norbiton

Treasury—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY, MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MINISTER FOR THE UNION—
The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Stephen Barclay, MP
FINANCIAL SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Jesse Norman, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Lord Agnew of Oulton DL §
ECONOMIC SECRETARY—John Glen, MP
EXCHEQUER SECRETARY—Kemi Badenoch, MP §
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Mark Spencer, MP
LORDS COMMISSIONERS—
James Morris, MP
Rebecca Harris, MP
David Duguid, MP §
David Rutley, MP
Maggie Throup, MP
Michael Tomlinson, MP

ASSISTANT WHIPS—

Leo Docherty, MP
 David T. C. Davies, MP §
 Alex Chalk, MP §
 Tom Pursglove, MP
 Maria Caulfield, MP
 Nigel Huddleston, MP §
 Eddie Hughes, MP

UK Export Finance—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP
 PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Graham Stuart, MP

Wales Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Simon Hart, MP
 PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—David T. C. Davies, MP §

Work and Pensions—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Dr Thérèse Coffey, MP
 MINISTER OF STATE—Justin Tomlinson, MP (Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work)
 PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
 Mims Davies, MP
 Guy Opperman, MP
 Will Quince, MP
 Baroness Stedman-Scott OBE, DL

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt Hon. Earl Peel GCVO, DL
 LORD STEWARD—The Earl of Dalhousie
 MASTER OF THE HORSE—Lord de Mauley
 TREASURER—Stuart Andrew, MP
 COMPTROLLER—Mike Freer, MP
 VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Marcus Jones, MP
 CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt Hon. Lord Ashton of Hyde
 CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD—Earl of Courtown
 BARONNESSES IN WAITING—
 Baroness Penn
 Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE
 Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist
 LORDS IN WAITING—
 Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay
 Viscount Younger of Leckie

§ Members of the Government listed under more than one Department

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING THE CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Andrew Selous, MP
 REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION—Bridget Phillipson, MP
 REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY—Sir Charles Walker, MP
 REPRESENTING THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—Pete Wishart, MP
 CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION—The Rt Hon. Sir Edward Leigh, MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Dame Eleanor Laing, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Mr Nigel Evans, MP

PANEL OF CHAIRS—

Rushanara Ali, Sir David Amess, Hannah Bardell, Mr Clive Betts, Mr Peter Bone, Sir Graham Brady, Ms Karen Buck, Sir Christopher Chope, Judith Cummins, Geraint Davies, Philip Davies, Peter Dowd, Ms Angela Eagle, Clive Efford, Julie Elliott, Yvonne Fovargue, The Rt Hon. Sir Roger Gale, Ms Nusrat Ghani, The Rt Hon. Dame Cheryl Gillan, James Gray, Sir Mark Hendrick, Mr Philip Hollobone, Stewart Hosie, The Rt Hon. Sir George Howarth, Dr Rupa Huq, The Rt Hon. Sir Edward Leigh, Steve McCabe, Siobhain McDonagh, The Rt Hon. Esther McVey, The Rt Hon. Maria Miller, The Rt Hon. David Mundell, Mrs Sheryll Murray, The Rt Hon. Caroline Nokes, Ian Paisley, Mark Pritchard, Mr Laurence Robertson, Andrew Rosindell, Mr Virendra Sharma, Sir Gary Streeter, Graham Stringer, Derek Twigg, Sir Charles Walker

SECRETARY—Chris Stanton

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—

The Rt Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Dr John Benger (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service), Jane McCall (External Member), Dr Rima Makarem (External Member), The Rt Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP (Leader of the House), The Rt Hon. Valerie Vaz, MP, Sir Charles Walker, MP, The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP, Pete Wishart, MP

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—Marianne Cwynarski

ASSISTANT SECRETARY—Robert Cope

ADMINISTRATION ESTIMATE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS ESTIMATE AUDIT COMMITTEE—

Dr Rima Makarem (Chair), Mr Clive Betts, MP, Jane McCall, Bob Scruton

SECRETARY OF THE COMMITTEE—Hannah Bryce

COMMONS EXECUTIVE BOARD—

Mostaque Ahmed (Finance Director and Managing Director, Finance, Portfolio and Performance), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Dr John Benger (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service), Isabel Coman (Managing Director, In-House Services & Estates), Sarah Davies (Clerk Assistant and Managing Director, Chamber and Committees), Mandy Eddolls (Managing Director, HR and Diversity), Eric Hepburn (Director of Security for Parliament), Tracey Jessup (Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service), Dr Edge Watchorn (Managing Director, Participation), Penny Young (Librarian and Managing Director, Research and Information)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD—Rhiannon Hollis

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—Helen Wood

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—Saira Salimi

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—The Rev. Canon Patricia Hillas

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Kathryn Stone

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 17 DECEMBER 2019]

SIXTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 679

ELEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2019-2021

House of Commons

Oral Answers to Questions

Tuesday 1 September 2020

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Secretary of State was asked—

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

NHS Test and Trace

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 4 June).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: The House will know that a Member has been arrested in connection with an investigation into an allegation of a very serious criminal offence. I have received assurances from the Member and from the Government Chief Whip that the Member has voluntarily agreed not to attend the House of Commons for the period of bail.

I, the House of Commons Commission and the House Service take the safety of our staff and of the parliamentary community as a whole very seriously and are ensuring that any necessary measures are taken in respect of MPs, employees and staff. All Members and staff have access to the Independent Sexual Misconduct Advisory Service by contacting the new single, independent ICGS helpline and should not hesitate to use it.

While the investigation is ongoing, I believe that it would be wholly inappropriate for any further reference to be made to this matter in the House, including any attempt to name the Member concerned. I would appreciate your co-operation on this matter.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of NHS Test and Trace. [905224]

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): What recent assessment his Department has made of the reach of NHS Test and Trace. [905230]

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What recent assessment his Department has made of the reach of NHS Test and Trace. [905241]

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): What recent assessment his Department has made of the reach of NHS Test and Trace. [905245]

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of NHS Test and Trace. [905259]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): NHS Test and Trace is consistently reaching tens of thousands of people who need to isolate each week. In the latest week's data, 84.3% of contacts were reached and asked to self-isolate where contact details were provided. Since its launch, we have reached over 300,000 people who may have been unwittingly carrying the virus and transmitting it, to ensure that they keep themselves safe and keep their community safe.

Sam Tarry: Scientists in the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies have continually warned that, for the test and trace system to be successful, 80% of people in contact with those who have covid must be reached.

We are well off that target, I am afraid to say. Will the Secretary of State consider seeking advice from our European partners who have had a functioning system since May, or is he going to continue to allow the private sector to do this, on which it has no proven track record, and protect the interests of particular companies that certain civil servants allegedly may have links with? Are we going to see a serious approach to this?

Matt Hancock: Unlike the question, we will have a serious approach to this. I will absolutely defend to all ends the teams who work on our NHS test and trace system, the private sector companies without which this would be impossible and the civil servants who are working day and night to make this happen. I will not have disparaging remarks about civil servants, who have done so much during this pandemic, made in this House by the hon. Gentleman. I do not think he was listening to my answer, because the latest week's data show that 84.3% of contacts were reached and asked to self-isolate where contact details were provided.

Mary Robinson: Cheadle residents welcome the release of the intervention measures that will take place tomorrow and the more local approach to this. Effective test and trace has been a vital part of getting us to this position and keeping the rates low. To continue with that, will the Secretary of State consider devolving the testing of cases to local authorities such as Stockport, which has a 99% rate of success?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend has played a very important role, and I pay tribute to her and her community for playing a role in the success of the local action that we had to take in Stockport and other parts of Greater Manchester, which meant that we were able to release the measures last week. I am grateful for her work, the work of her council and other local leaders and, most importantly, the people of Stockport, who have worked hard and followed the rules, and the case rate is coming down. She is right that the integration of a national system that can move fast at scale and a local system, which can often reach more contacts because there are boots on the ground and people who know the communities inside out, is critical.

Jack Lopresti: In my right hon. Friend's assessment, how does our track and trace programme compare with those of other countries, and what lessons are we learning from countries such as Germany and South Korea, which seem to be having some success with their systems?

Matt Hancock: Of course we learn the lessons, and I talk to my international counterparts, including those in Germany and South Korea. Compared with international systems, with the figures that I just read out, we are absolutely in the top tranche, and we are constantly looking all around the world to see how we can improve the operation of test and trace.

Selaine Saxby: Devon's director of public health has confirmed that we in North Devon have had no statistically significant increase in cases as a result of the return of tourism. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that test and trace will ensure that that remains the case?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for everything she has done to stick up for North Devon at this difficult time. I am really pleased that there is no

evident increase in covid in Devon as a result of tourism. So many people go to Devon, during the summer especially, because it is such a wonderful place. We must ensure that, through test and trace and through social distancing, which is the first line of defence against this virus, that remains the case.

Sarah Jones: Covid hit Croydon and the rest of London early and hard, but Croydon has done us proud, and the number of infections has been very low for a number of weeks, thanks to the hard work of the people in the borough. We welcome the move towards more local track and trace, where expertise and local knowledge make all the difference, but as my director of public health said to me, we have just finished the beginning of this thing and we are now starting the next chapter. One of the things that keeps her awake at night is the need for certainty about budgets for outbreak control plans beyond the end of the year. Can the Secretary of State provide some reassurance?

Matt Hancock: Absolutely. I am glad to hear what the hon. Lady says about the constantly improving integration between the national and local systems. We have worked hard to make that happen, and I am glad to hear that it is happening in Croydon, as it is in other parts of the country. The budgets in that respect are of course important, and we have been clear that financial provision will be made. I cannot make any more definitive statement than that at this stage, but it is of course an important consideration.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: Since June, the Scottish public health-based tracing system has managed to trace 99.7% of positive cases and almost 99% of their contacts, yet in England the commercial Serco call centres have traced less than 60% of contacts. Will the Secretary of State clarify whether any targets are included in the £10 billion contract with Serco? If so, are they being met?

Matt Hancock: If I may correct the hon. Lady, there is no £10 billion contract with any private company. The private companies have been critical in the work to make sure that the whole testing system could be built at the scale that it has been. As I said, the improvements are continuing. We are seeing local engagement, which is critical, and we are seeing testing rolled out right across the UK. For instance, when there was a local outbreak in Aberdeen over the summer, we were able to use UK resources to get huge amounts of testing into Aberdeen, thanks to the collaborative work between the UK Government, who provided the UK testing, and the Scottish Government, who were responsible for the lockdown.

Dr Whitford: That does not address the fact that the call-centre system run by Serco has managed to contact only 60% of people's contacts. Regional Public Health England teams have been working flat out for the past seven months and are tracing more than 95% of the cases with which they deal. Does the Secretary of State really think that the middle of a pandemic is a good time to be threatening the job security of those teams with a huge reorganisation?

Matt Hancock: The answer to the first part of the hon. Lady's question is that when we are trying to reach scale fast, we use the national system. That then engages with the local system—for instance, in Croydon, as we just heard—so that we can get the boots on the ground to find those contacts who cannot be contacted through the national system. It is the combination of the two that works best. As for making sure that our systems are in the best possible place to tackle coronavirus going forward, I absolutely think that it is right constantly to be seeking to make improvements to how things operate, which is why I announced the changes that I did.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): In some areas, the private companies involved in test and trace have been reaching less than half the contacts they are supposed to reach, not the 80% that the Secretary of State has claimed. We do not need an algorithm to work out that those companies' performance, compared with that of local public health teams, is where test and trace is failing. Why, then, are the Government rewarding private sector failure by extending the contracts?

Matt Hancock: As I have just explained, the test and trace system at the national level makes the immediate and rapid first attempt at contact. If no contact is made, the local teams can then go in. It is the combination of the two that works best. I really think that the Opposition—especially coming from the Front-Bench team—are making a mistake in trying to divide people between public and private. Actually, everybody is working very hard together to deliver the control of this virus.

NHS and Social Care Resources: Winter 2020-21

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on ensuring that the (a) NHS and (b) social care sector are adequately resourced during winter 2020-21. [905225]

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): We recognise that there will be increased pressures on the NHS and social care during winter, and substantial preparations have been and are being made. The NHS has already published its winter plan, and we will shortly publish the winter plan for social care.

Patrick Grady: That is exactly why there is a need for significant additional funding to prepare for a surge this winter, and that has to include a fully funded pay rise for health and care staff. At the height of the crisis, the Secretary of State was saying, "Now is not the time to consider a pay rise." When will the time be? Is it now or some time in the future?

Helen Whately: As I expect the hon. Gentleman knows, we have announced £3 billion of additional NHS funding for the winter and are continually looking at additional funding needs for social care.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): There is a looming mental health crisis this winter, and as such it is vital to meet with experts. I know the Secretary of State believes that that is important, so I asked him several parliamentary questions wanting to know how many mental health trusts and organisations he had met during the first three months of lockdown. I was

told that he "holds these meetings regularly", but a freedom of information request revealed that he and the Mental Health Minister organised only two meetings with mental health trusts and organisations during that entire period. Can the Secretary of State confirm that he did not attend either of those two meetings? Does he think that is an acceptable track record?

Helen Whately: The Secretary of State has regular meetings with stakeholders about the future of mental health.

Public Health Protection

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve public health protection. [905226]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): On 18 August, I announced the establishment of a brand-new organisation to provide a world-leading approach to public health protection and resilience, the National Institute for Health Protection. It will bring together the health protection expertise of Public Health England, the Joint Biosecurity Centre and NHS Test and Trace under unified leadership and will start work immediately so as to boost the UK's ability to deal with covid-19.

Sir David Amess: Everyone accepts that my right hon. Friend's priority at the moment is fighting the invisible enemy, but with winter approaching many people will be worried about the threat of flu, so will he tell the House if there are any special arrangements for those people who want the vaccine? Does he have any further news about the reopening of all GP surgeries?

Matt Hancock: The flu vaccination programme this year will be the biggest in history. As I was going to say in my statement—I will say it now for my hon. Friend—we will be putting before the House proposals to expand the number of NHS qualified clinicians who can administer vaccinations, whether for the flu programme, which is coming, or for a covid vaccination programme, should a covid vaccine come out.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The NHS Confederation, the British Medical Association, the British Dental Association, NHS Providers, the Royal Society for Public Health and many health charities have expressed real doubts about the Secretary of State's plans for Public Health England. It is evident that, come what may, he will have his own organisation for tackling disease and that, come what may, he will pick which of his pals he wants to lead it, but he seems to have ignored the fact that Public Health England also leads crucial work on tackling drug and alcohol misuse, reducing smoking, promoting sexual health and much more. Six weeks ago, obesity was the Prime Minister's priority, and now the Health Secretary wants to cut the organisation that leads our fight against it. Will he end the confusion today by committing to the remaining functions of Public Health England continuing to be led by a dedicated national organisation?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not read the announcement, because part of the purpose of having a dedicated national institute for health protection is also to ensure that the ill health prevention agenda—the

health improvement agenda—is embedded in the health system, including the NHS. This is a good day to discuss this, because just this morning the NHS set out the next steps in its diabetes prevention and remission programme. Embedding the anti-obesity drive right across the health system, including the NHS, is a critical part of its future, and we are consulting widely on making sure we have the right and best organisational structure to deliver that.

NHS Capacity: Winter 2020-21

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase NHS capacity for winter 2020-21. [905227]

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase NHS capacity for winter 2020-21. [905235]

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase NHS capacity for winter 2020-21. [905236]

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): In July this year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced £3 billion of additional funding to help the NHS to address the challenges of winter. In addition, in August this year, we set out an £300 million for the enhancement of urgent and emergency care capacity and to provide infection control measures.

Suzanne Webb: I thank the Minister and the Secretary of State for the forward-thinking measures to support winter capacity in our hospitals. We should not, however, forget the work of our hospices, which have no seasons and work compassionately all year round. Will my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State join me in visiting one of the jewels in the crown of my constituency—Mary Stevens hospice, which due to covid-19 has had to delay the official opening of its day services unit?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to pay tribute to the amazing work of hospices. She is also right to highlight the work of Mary Stevens hospice in her constituency, of which she is a great champion. I very much look forward to taking up her offer to visit.

Andy Carter: I thank the Secretary of State for the investment into Warrington A&E announced recently. An additional £4.3 million will create a treatment plaza and, most importantly, a new paediatric A&E unit for the hospital. This investment is very welcome for the short term, but will the Minister and the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the longer-term issues for our hospital—plans for a better healthcare facility in Warrington South, better parking, and, in the long term, a new hospital?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to highlight the investment we are making in NHS infrastructure, as he did recently in his *Warrington Guardian* column. He is well known for his energetic campaigning, on behalf of his constituents, for a new hospital. Although such decisions are for the spending review, I would be very happy to meet him.

Tom Hunt: I welcome the extra £1.6 million the Government are investing in Ipswich Hospital's A&E department ahead of the crucial winter period, but will the Minister build on this work by ensuring that the new plans for a £25 million A&E department at Ipswich Hospital are accelerated? If this were to happen, it would go some way towards alleviating my constituents' concerns about the merger with Colchester Hospital.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. When I visited him earlier this year, he made a powerful case for the longer term for a new A&E department at his hospital—a cause that he has been a driving force behind. I know that the trust is keen to progress this, and I would hope and expect that it is engaging with him. Although the spending review will see the Chancellor's final decision on spending on this, my hon. Friend's voice is being heard loud and clear.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): The capacity of Barnet Hospital to cope with winter pressure is being assisted by a brand-new modular ward with 35 beds. Can the Minister assure me that there will be continued investment in expanding NHS services in Barnet so that it can cope with any covid pressures this winter and also help to clear the backlog of people who have been waiting for treatment for other conditions?

Edward Argar: As my right hon. Friend highlights, the new modular 35-bed ward at Barnet Hospital will add to its capacity to cope with winter pressures. More broadly, we have invested £2.5 million in the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust, of which Barnet is part. She is of course right to make the case for continued investment in the longer term, with her typical effectiveness and commitment to her constituency, and I am always happy to discuss that further with her.

Covid-19 Testing

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase covid-19 testing capacity. [905228]

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of covid-19 test availability. [905239]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): We have developed capacity to over 200,000 antigen tests per day across the testing programme. We are planning for the next phase of testing and are committed to rapid and accessible testing at scale for everyone who needs one. Localisation of testing in accessible places is absolutely critical.

Aaron Bell: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. He may well be aware of the outbreak in my community of Newcastle-under-Lyme centred on Silverdale working men's club. The outbreak appears to be under control. I praise his Department for its support, and also Staffordshire County Council. Close to 2,000 tests have been carried out, a number of those at the new local centre at Ryecroft. If I could make one suggestion based on our experience of this outbreak, it is that the online booking system needs to react more quickly to make spaces available. Spaces always have been available, but not always online. Will he comment on that?

Matt Hancock: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for the work he has put in over the summer to make sure that the challenges we have seen in Newcastle-under-Lyme are dealt with as well as possible. Of course, when we put in extra testing and extra mobile testing units, making sure that that is tied in with the online booking system is critical. I am very happy to work with him to resolve the specific issues in Newcastle.

Mr Perkins: Alongside the need to increase capacity, there is a real need to make sure that what is already there is working properly. In Chesterfield, I have had many people contact me over the summer to say they have been waiting four or five days to get a test result back. I have also had people who have applied online and been told to go for testing 20 or 30 miles away, when there is a testing centre in Chesterfield. With Chris Hopson of the NHS Providers organisation saying that the current system is not even

“fit for purpose, much less world class”,

will the Secretary of State tell us what he can do to ensure that the system is ready when we approach the potential increase in cases in the autumn and winter?

Matt Hancock: Of course, we are constantly working to improve the system, but as the statistics that I read out at the start of this Question Time show, we have made very significant progress over the summer. NHS Test and Trace is just over three months old, and is now reaching 84% of contacts when contacts are given. On testing expansion, of course when a testing site is full, people will be directed to a nearby but not immediately close testing centre. That does sometimes happen when there is an increase in demand for testing, but we try to respond by putting in more testing where it is needed and in the highest-risk areas, of which, thankfully, Chesterfield is not one.

Covid-19: Support to Scottish Government

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): What support the Government are providing to the Scottish Government to tackle the covid-19 outbreak. [905229]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): The UK Government are supporting the covid-19 response right across the country. We have established the Joint Biosecurity Centre, ensuring decision makers in Scotland and across the UK have the best possible information when responding to outbreaks. The UK-wide test and trace programme has significantly enhanced the ability to respond to covid-19 in Scotland, notably through the six Department-funded testing sites and 18 mobile testing units, with additional ones deployed such as the one to Aberdeen during the recent outbreak there.

Andrew Bowie: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. One of the things that has been welcomed in Scotland has been seeing both of Scotland's Governments working together to fight this pandemic—for example, the British Army working with the Scottish Ambulance Service and local NHS boards to increase our testing capacity. Can he confirm that this one nation approach to tackling covid will continue in the future?

Matt Hancock: There is absolutely no doubt about the combination of the UK Government putting in place the capacity that we can get only because we are one united nation, working in concert with the Scottish Government and local councils, which have people on the ground who are in the communities. That combination is the strongest possible approach to responding to an emergency such as covid-19.

Cancer: Alternative Therapy Regulation

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What plans he has to introduce additional regulations for practitioners of alternative therapies for cancer treatment. [905231]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): The Government are clear that we will do everything we can to protect the most vulnerable. We will not tolerate the false advertising of alternative cancer treatments. It is dangerous, but it is also cruel, and we will ensure penalties are handed out for any breaches of the law. While there are no plans to bring complementary therapies into regulation at present, many are registered on voluntary registers accredited by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care, ensuring patients can access safe care.

Christian Matheson: My constituent Linda died of untreated breast cancer after she had been seduced, we believe, by advertising on the internet offering alternative therapies such as scans and pastes that were actually caustic to her body. She died alone in my constituency some months ago. Will the Minister consider bringing in tough restrictions on advertising on the internet, particularly as people are accessing internet therapies more now, and also tough restrictions on the people who practise these bogus therapies?

Jo Churchill: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I was really saddened to hear of the death of his constituent, and fully agree that we must protect people who are often so desperate to find something that will help them and give them hope of recovery. Under the Cancer Act 1939, all advertising of cancer services and treatments is prohibited wherever advertised—online or in the paper—including complementary or alternative services and treatments that purport to be able to cure cancer. We know the role that the internet can play in spreading harmful messages about alternative treatments. It is dangerous, and I have discussed the issue in its broadest sense with my Digital, Culture, Media and Sport colleagues. I give him an assurance that we are committed, across government, to taking any further action needed. He knows that my door is always open, and I would be happy to continue this conversation at any point.

Social Care: Covid-19

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the social care sector during the covid-19 outbreak. [905232]

John Howell (Henley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the social care sector during the covid-19 outbreak. [905237]

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): We know that those who receive social care are among the most vulnerable in our society. The Department of Health and Social Care has strived to support the sector throughout this pandemic, providing it with a sense of guidance, extra funding, emergency supplies of personal protective equipment and prioritising access to testing.

Mark Menzies: May I express my very sincere thanks for all the help that social care services have provided throughout this ongoing crisis, but can the Minister assure me that we have learned all the lessons from the shielding programme and that the social care sector is adequately prepared for the coming winter months?

Helen Whately: I join my hon. Friend in thanking all those who work in social care for their commitment and compassion since the start of the pandemic. We have indeed carried out work to understand the impact of shielding on people's health and we will shortly be publishing our winter plan for adult social care, setting out our preparations for the winter and in the event of a second wave.

John Howell: Can my hon. Friend confirm that every care home in England has either received a coronavirus test or is about to receive one?

Helen Whately: Yes, I can confirm that. Every Care Quality Commission-registered care home in England has been offered testing. Care homes for those who are over 65 and with dementia have been offered repeat testing. We have now opened up repeat testing to care homes for working age adults.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Following on from that question, Ministers initially promised weekly testing for care home staff by 6 July. They then abandoned that pledge and said that routine tests would not happen until 7 September. With more than 15,000 deaths from covid-19 in care homes so far and with winter and the flu season fast approaching, regular weekly testing of care home staff is critical. Will the Minister now guarantee that every care home will have weekly testing for their staff by Monday to help all of our loved ones in residential care keep safe?

Helen Whately: We are indeed determined to support social care, particularly care homes, with repeat, regular testing. As the hon. Member knows, because we have spoken about it, there has been a delay with our repeat testing of care homes because of a particular issue with some of the test kits. That was communicated to her and to the sector. As I said in my previous answer, we have now been able to offer repeat testing to all care homes for older people, to open up the portal to those care homes with working-age adults as residents and to initiate our second round of repeat testing for the older sector.

Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of funding for hospitals in the Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust. [905233]

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He and I have had the opportunity in the past to discuss his hospital trust and I pay tribute to its work. I am conscious that his trust has faced financial challenges, running a £57 million deficit a year ago. That has now been halved, meeting the financial control total. I also understand that income levels at his trust increased by 22% from 2015-16 to last year.

Martin Vickers: I thank the Minister for replying and also for meeting me and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) before the recess. May I emphasise the importance of the Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital in Grimsby that serves my constituency as well? It needs £150 million to £200 million of major infrastructure work to avoid infrastructure failure. I urge him to consider that and bear in mind the pressures on the trust as he considers the additional resources?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend quite rightly raises the Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital in Grimsby. He has raised it with me before, and I give him that commitment.

Obesity Reduction

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce obesity rates. [905234]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): The Prime Minister is clear that we must care for the health of our population. In July, we published the ambitious strategy to empower adults and children to live healthier lives, taking forward actions from the previous three chapters of the childhood obesity plan and laying out a series of initiatives. It sets out an overarching campaign to reduce obesity and has measures to get the nation fitter—to protect, importantly, against covid-19, to protect the NHS, but most importantly, to improve individuals' health and wellbeing and quality of life.

Alun Cairns: There is strong support for the Government's ambition to reduce obesity among children and young people, in particular. There are many calls for advertising bans for broadcasters for high salt and sugar content, for example, but those are not as straightforward as is suggested, because there is the risk of driving advertising online, which is far more targeted and, as some believe, might be much more effective in communicating the message to attract people to buy those products. Does the Minister recognise that this is a complex picture that needs lots of analysis before clear policies are decided upon?

Jo Churchill: I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. I know that as a keen marathon runner, he has a keen interest in us all keeping fit. I could not agree with him more: our children's online watching is considerably greater than their watching of terrestrial television, and that is precisely why we have included a consultation in the online space to ensure that we have fully considered all the impacts that he just mentioned before we move forward and any changes to advertising restrictions before they are introduced.

Nurse Recruitment

Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to recruit additional nurses to the NHS. [905238]

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to recruit additional nurses to the NHS. [905248]

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): We will deliver 50,000 more nurses for our NHS. We are increasing the number of student nursing places on degree courses and improving the experience of working in the NHS so fewer nurses leave, and we will also add to our home-grown nurses through international recruitment. I am happy to report that we now have 13,840 more nurses in the NHS than a year ago.

Mrs Wheeler: I thank my hon. Friend for her answer. Does she agree that the changes made by Project 2000 in 1986 led to a large group of caring people being excluded from training to be nurses? If we are to recruit many more nurses, this approach should be rethought, with recruits once again being able to learn on the job, as they did prior to 1986. This would bring nurses' education much more in line with the Government's recognition that university is not for all children and fulfil our objective to have apprenticeships in all walks of life.

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. We want all those with the capability and aspiration to become nurses to be able to do so. That is why we are supporting multiple routes to becoming a nurse. While the majority of new nurses take the university route, another option is the degree apprenticeship, which enables students to earn while they learn. Last month, we announced a £172 million funding package to double the number of nursing apprenticeships.

Angela Richardson: I am delighted to hear that we are successfully recruiting into the nursing profession. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just school leavers, but dedicated and caring people of all ages and diverse working backgrounds who have the transferable skills needed to start nursing qualifications? Will she outline what steps her Department is taking to engage with these individuals and encourage them to consider nursing as a vocation?

Helen Whately: I completely agree that nursing should be open to all men and women from diverse backgrounds. Our £5,000 grant to all nursing degree students, starting this autumn, will help students with the cost of that degree course. In addition to the apprenticeships route that I just mentioned, in January we are launching an online blended nursing degree to give another route into nursing.

Diabetes Screening: Covid-19

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on diabetes screening. [905240]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): Diabetic eye screening has continued throughout the pandemic for those at the highest risk. NHS England and NHS Improvement are working closely with service providers to ensure that where services took the decision to reschedule screening appointments during the pandemic, those services are restored as soon as it is safely possible to do so, to minimise any risk to individual patients and with appointments based on clinical need.

Jim Shannon: It is nice to see you in your place again, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for her response, which is, as always, comprehensive. In relation to diabetes, I wish to ask about both screening and weight loss. What funding has been set aside for those who are morbidly obese and need gastric procedures urgently to set them on the path to better health, in line with the Prime Minister's statement and reaction to the massively increased risk of death from covid-19 for those who are obese? It is important that we address all the issues.

Jo Churchill: As well as our world-leading obesity strategy, we have today announced a targeted dietary approach to diabetes. From next week, thousands of people will be able to access a rigorous weight-loss programme to help tackle type 2 diabetes. The diet and lifestyle plans have been shown to put diabetes into remission for many people who have been recently diagnosed. This will provide 5,000 more patients with the first stage in an NHS drive to increase access to the NHS diabetes prevention programme and builds on the commitment to get another 200,000 people into the life-changing programme. We know that diabetes increases the risks of other health challenges and coronavirus, so it is vital that we take immediate action to help people.

NHS Expenditure and EU Negotiations

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the potential effect on NHS expenditure of negotiations on the future relationship with the EU. [905242]

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): As the hon. Lady knows, the negotiations with the EU on our future relationship with it following the end of the transition period are ongoing. This Government are delivering on their pledge to respect democracy and the referendum result, with the UK engaging continuously and constructively in the negotiations. We must await the outcome of those negotiations, in which health-related aspects are very important, rather than prejudging what will emerge from them.

Kirsten Oswald: In just four months' time, new customs bureaucracy will lead to increased drug costs for the NHS, including for insulin, which the UK does not produce. Pharmaceutical and medical supply firms report that they are struggling to rebuild last year's stockpiles because of global shortages due to covid. How does the Minister plan to ensure that patients will not face shortages next year?

Edward Argar: The Department is putting in place a multi-layered approach to help to ensure continuity of supply of medicines and medical products in any case

that might fall out of the negotiations and the end of the transition period. We are confident that we will maintain continuity of supply.

Covid-19 Testing for GPs

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the availability of covid-19 testing for GPs required to attend care homes. [905244]

The Minister for Patient Safety, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (Ms Nadine Dorries): GPs with symptoms can be tested through the self-referral portal. In addition, we are launching pilots in Northamptonshire, Peterborough and Cambridgeshire to provide regular covid-19 testing for professionals who visit care homes regularly and provide services within 1 metre of residents.

Daniel Zeichner: That is all in the future, of course. I was talking to GPs in Cambridge last week, and they told me about the difficulty they have with getting tested before going into care homes. Indeed, one of them told me she had to pretend to be a care worker to get a test. That cannot be right after all this time, can it?

Ms Dorries: As I said, the pilots are now being launched in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire to provide regular covid-19 testing for professionals, and I think that problem has probably been resolved.

Medicine and Medical Device Safety

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to implement the recommendations in the July 2020 Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review report. [905247]

Mr Speaker: I call Yasmin Qureshi to ask her supplementary question.

Yasmin Qureshi [V]: The Minister is aware that the Cumberlege review has clearly set out Government failure, with Primodos not being withdrawn and thousands of babies being born with severe deformities. Does she think it is acceptable to cite legal action, which has no bearing on the report's findings, to continue to delay justice for the families? Will she meet me and the all-party parliamentary group to discuss a road map to implement the recommendations for all the three causes without further delay?

The Minister for Patient Safety, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (Ms Nadine Dorries): We welcomed the Cumberlege report and we are looking into the recommendations made, but the hon. Lady knows that, as a result of live litigation, I am not able to comment further.

Face Coverings

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government guidance for people unable to wear face coverings due to medical or other reasons. [905250]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): Guidance to explain the Government's policy on face coverings continues to be updated and fully takes into account groups with protected

characteristics. This guidance makes it clear that there are exemptions for people who are unable, for a variety of reasons, to wear face coverings. We have also run a proactive communications campaign to ensure that people are aware that some people are unable to wear a face covering in certain circumstances.

Bambos Charalambous: Georgina Fallows is a rape survivor who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder when her mouth is covered. Georgina and others like her have been challenged for not wearing a mask in shops and on public transport, and this causes further stress and anxiety. Does the Minister support Georgina's campaign for a badge to identify people who legitimately cannot wear a mask, and will she consider raising awareness of this issue via a public information campaign?

Jo Churchill: I was incredibly sorry to hear what Georgina has been through and fully understand that she and others who have undergone traumatic experiences cannot wear a face covering without distress. That is why our guidance and public messaging have been very clear that there may be people who should be exempt from wearing a covering for a variety of reasons. It is also clear that people do not need to prove it when challenged. We are actively engaging with stakeholders and charities to ensure that these messages sensitively get across, and we will continue to do so, but I would welcome a fuller discussion with the hon. Member about anything we can do further to help individuals such as Georgina.

Topical Questions

[905284] **Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): As well as our work to fight coronavirus, we are continuing our historic levels of investment in the NHS. Good progress is being made in the projects for 40 new hospitals. The number of NHS nurses in England has increased by more than 13,000 compared with this time last year, and the number of doctors is up by over 9,000. This landmark investment is bearing fruit.

Mr Speaker: I welcome back my good friend, Tony Lloyd.

Tony Lloyd [V]: Thank you very much for that welcome, Mr Speaker. I am one of those who most certainly owes an awful lot to the care and dedication of NHS staff. May I ask the Secretary of State a very simple question? One waiting list that is going up is the amount of time that overseas doctors offered jobs in the UK have to wait for a visa. Will he have a quiet word with Home Office Ministers to ensure that we have a joined-up Government and that these doctors, who are part of the solution, can get their visas?

Matt Hancock: May I join you, Mr Speaker, in welcoming the hon. Member back to the screens—and hopefully, one day soon, back to the House in person? The question that he raises is an important one. I am working with the Home Office to introduce the NHS visa, which will mean not only that the numbers are

uncapped, but that the administration around visas is much reduced. It is not just about Home Office administration; it is also about reducing the burden of bureaucracy from the General Medical Council and others. The GMC is working incredibly hard to reduce the bureaucratic requirement while still ensuring that any doctors who come to practise in this country are fully qualified and can speak English to a high enough standard, as the people of Rochdale and the whole country would expect.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): The ongoing problems in maternity units in Shrewsbury, Telford and east Kent hospitals have shown that independent, blame-free investigations into baby deaths have never been more important. Will the Secretary of State confirm that it is still the Government's intention to put the healthcare safety investigations branch on to a statutory footing and that those plans will remain in the Queen's Speech later this year?

Matt Hancock: Nobody has done more for the cause of patient safety in this country than my right hon. Friend. We are seeking to put the health service investigatory branch into law at the earliest legislative opportunity. He will know that, as a Minister, I could not possibly pre-empt what Her Majesty might say in a few months' time in the other place, but I will say that, in the same way that we introduced the Health Service Safety Investigations Bill just before the election, it is our full intention to legislate for it at the earliest chance.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's response to the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). Can he guarantee that he has currently sourced enough flu vaccine to vaccinate all 50 to 64-year-olds by Christmas?

Matt Hancock: We have the biggest flu vaccination programme in history, and we set out very clearly when we announced the plans our proposals, which are that we will vaccinate those who are clinically most vulnerable—that starts with the over-65s and those with another health condition that causes them to be particularly vulnerable to flu—and then move to vaccinate the 50 to 64-year-olds. We set that out several weeks ago. It is exactly as clinically recommended, to make sure not only that we have the biggest flu vaccination in history but that we get it to the people who really need it first.

Jonathan Ashworth: I think the Secretary of State was saying there that he cannot guarantee vaccinations for all 50 to 64-year-olds. We are heading into a difficult winter. He knows that; the whole House will know that. One area of the health service that is particularly under pressure is rehab services and community mental health services, because they often now treat people who have had covid and have long-term conditions associated with having covid, yet many local areas are currently putting local community and public health contracts out to competitive tender. That could mean staff being made redundant. It could open the door to Virgin Cares coming in. At the very least, it is distracting and wasteful.

Will the Secretary of State halt all competitive tendering of community and public health contracts until the end of the pandemic?

Matt Hancock: What I will do is ensure that we put in the best possible resources to improve the public health of the nation. That is our goal; that is our policy. It of course follows on from the policy that was put in place by the Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a behind-the-scenes part. He knows very well that I admire the work that he did when he was trying to expand the provision of health services. No matter where those health services come from, what matters is the quality of the service that people get on the frontline, and that is what we on the Government Benches will be focused on.

[905287] **Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): Tomorrow, the people of Burnley will have the additional restrictions that have been in place for the last month removed. That is possible only because of the efforts and sacrifice of people across Burnley, so I want to start by putting on the record my wholehearted thanks to people in Burnley, Padiham and all our villages. These have been difficult measures, but they have been effective at driving down the virus. Can the Secretary of State reassure me, though, that as an area of enhanced support, we will still get access to Government support to ensure that we continue to make progress?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend has been a tireless advocate for Burnley. He is quite right to praise the people of Burnley, who have had local restrictions put in place. Because of the actions they have taken—because they have followed their duty and followed those tougher rules—and the sacrifices they have made, the case rate has come down in Burnley, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and to every single resident of Burnley who has played their part. Absolutely, the enhanced support will continue in Burnley, as it does across those parts of Greater Manchester, East Lancashire and West Yorkshire that we have been able to take out of the most restrictive measures, and we continue to watch with vigilance.

[905285] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that on Friday, the Royal College of Nursing launched a campaign for a 12.5% pay increase, which would do only a little more than restore real pay to the value it had in 2010 when the Conservatives were elected. There is huge public support for all who work in our health and care system, so, ahead of the Budget, will the Secretary of State commit to pressing the Chancellor for the funds necessary to pay all our health and care staff properly?

Matt Hancock: Of course we have put in over the last two and a half years some very significant pay rises for nurses, and the whole House commends the work that the nursing profession as a whole, and each individual nurse, has done during this pandemic. Of course we are putting unprecedented sums into the NHS, and we work to make sure that everybody has the best possible working conditions, both now and in the future.

[905289] **Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): LGBT so-called conversion therapy is an abhorrent and fraudulent practice, so please will my right hon. Friend

confirm to me and all my Conservative colleagues across the House who care deeply about this issue that he will do all he can to end this abusive practice at the very earliest opportunity?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I will. I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend that so-called conversion therapy is abhorrent. I praise her for the campaign she is running on this. I agree with the Prime Minister who, from this Dispatch Box, committed to ensuring that that practice is stamped out. We have a review under way. I will make sure that I work very closely with my hon. Friend, who has done so much to make the case.

[905288] **Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): Care homes in my constituency and right across the country are currently waiting several weeks to access coronavirus tests and those in supported living still cannot access regular testing. I wrote to the Care Minister last month about this issue, but I have yet to receive a reply. So will the Secretary of State please confirm today when regular and swift testing will be available in care homes and supported living, or will he finally admit that the so-called protective ring for social care simply does not exist?

Matt Hancock: Yes, we have been rolling out the asymptomatic testing for residents and staff in care homes. As the hon. Member will know from the statement I gave to the House in July, we had a problem with the supply of tests from one particular company, which caused some difficulties. We have spent the summer catching up on that programme.

[905291] **Simon Baynes** (Clwyd South) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the appointment of Jo Whitehead as the new chief executive of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in north Wales, and wish her every success with resolving specific issues, such as the cramped doctors' surgery premises in my constituency of Clwyd South and Hanmer, and more generally in reducing the stubbornly high waiting lists in north Wales?

Matt Hancock: Yes. The direct provision of healthcare is of course devolved, but as the UK Health Secretary, I take an interest in ensuring we have high-quality healthcare right across the country. I am very happy to work with my colleagues in the Welsh Government on improving the delivery of services in the Betsi Cadwaladr health service. I wish the new chief executive all the very best. I am sure she will take the service, improve it and work with her colleagues in this House to make sure that the people of north Wales get the very best health services that they deserve.

[905290] **Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): Having used the coronavirus testing kit produced by Randox, which was awarded a £133 million contract by the Government, care homes in Blackburn were told that the kits were unsafe and re-tests should be carried out. As the Secretary of State knows, people in Blackburn have worked extremely hard to get the virus rates down. However, when care homes asked for replacement kits, they were informed that they had already received their quota and that no kits would be available until September. On the one hand the Government are

saying, "Don't use the kits," and on the other hand they are saying, "We have no kits to replace them with." When will the Government reassure care homes in Blackburn that they will receive test kits regularly and, more importantly at this stage, the rapid results of those tests?

Matt Hancock: In response to the last point, the turnaround time for test results is now the next day for almost every one. However, there has been a challenge, referred to just now and in a previous question, with the Randox kits. The test results from the Randox kits that were withdrawn were accurate. The challenge was that the Randox kits did not pass our very high and stringent standards; essentially they were not as clean as we would have wanted. I am informed by the clinicians that there is no evidence of any health threat from that, but of course we have to make sure that we protect people as much as possible. Hence, we had to withdraw the kits. As I said, we have a catch-up programme that is under way.

Mr Speaker: So they will be replaced, just to help the Member.

[905292] **Matt Vickers** (Stockton South) (Con): During the pandemic, I have been volunteering at my local hospital and have seen first-hand the outstanding dedication, enthusiasm and care given by all who work at North Tees Hospital. This fantastic, award-winning workforce deserve to work in a modern, fit-for-purpose building. Will my right hon. Friend join me in visiting this ageing building to see how we can make it fit for the future?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I would love to come up to Stockton and have a look round. I have enjoyed my many visits, especially the one in December, which went particularly well, just before the House reconvened after the general election.

[905296] **Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): Yesterday, a dear friend of mine died of stage 4 pancreatic cancer. It has the lowest survival rate of all common cancers, yet it receives less than 2% of funding for cancer research. Half of all the diagnoses come about only after emergency admissions to hospital, because patients commonly visit their GPs three or four times with symptoms before being referred to a consultant. What will the Secretary of State do to improve early diagnosis of this disease, because it is killing 10,300 people a year, which is 28 people a day?

Matt Hancock: My heart goes out to the hon. Member and to the family and friends of his friend, about whom he spoke so movingly just now. He is absolutely right to raise this. The early diagnosis of cancer is a critical part of improving cancer survival rates in this country. We have talked an awful lot in this House over the last six months about the testing and diagnosis of covid, but frankly this country needs to increase its testing and diagnosis of all diseases, including cancer. For a generation, we have not had enough testing. He is quite right to raise this issue, because it is not just about people coming forward; it is also about the problems being spotted earlier. We are investing £2 million in more

rapid diagnostic centres, and we are trying to get diagnostics not just in the major hospitals but out into the community so that they are closer to primary care. There is also a major piece of work under way to recover the backlog that was necessarily built up during covid—that is under way and the backlog is down by about half—and also to go further and never give up on trying to have earlier diagnosis of cancer.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members who have participated in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am now suspending the House for three minutes.

3.31 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19

3.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): With your permission, and indeed your encouragement, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on coronavirus. The latest figures demonstrate how much progress we are making in our fight against this invisible killer. There are currently 60 patients in mechanical ventilator beds with coronavirus—that is down from 3,300 at the peak—and the latest daily number for recorded deaths is two. However, although those figures are lower than before, we must remain vigilant. I said in July that a second wave was rolling across Europe and, sadly, we are now seeing an exponential rise in the number of cases in France and Spain—hospitalisations are rising there, too. We must do everything in our power to protect against a second wave here in the UK, so I would like to update the House on the work we are doing to that end.

To support the return of education, and to get our economy moving again, it is critical that we all play our part. The first line of defence is, and has always been, social distancing and personal hygiene. We will soon be launching a new campaign reminding people of how they can help to stop the spread of coronavirus: “Hands, face, space and get a test if you have symptoms.” Everyone has a part to play in following the social distancing rules and doing the basics. After all, this is a virus that thrives on social contact. I would like to thank the British public for everything they have done so far, but we must continue and we must maintain our resolve.

The second line of defence is testing and contact tracing. We have now processed over 16 million tests in this country, and we are investing in new testing technologies, including a rapid test for coronavirus and other winter viruses that will help to provide on-the-spot results in under 90 minutes, helping us to break chains of transmission quickly. These tests do not require a trained health professional to operate them, so they can be rolled out in more non-clinical settings. We now have one of the most comprehensive systems of testing in the world, and we want to go much, much further.

Next, we come to contact tracing. NHS Test and Trace is consistently reaching tens of thousands of people who need to isolate each week. As I mentioned in answer to a question earlier, the latest week’s data shows that 84.3% of contacts were reached and asked to self-isolate, where contact details were provided. Since its launch, we have reached over 300,000 people, who may have been unwittingly carrying the virus. Today, we also launch our new system of pay to isolate. We want to support people on low incomes in areas with a high incidence of covid-19 who need to self-isolate and are unable to work from home. Under the scheme, people who test positive for the virus will receive £130 for the 10-day period they have to stay at home. Other contacts, including, for instance, members of their household, who have to self-isolate for 14 days, will be entitled to a payment of £182. We have rolled out the scheme in Blackburn with Darwen, Pendle and Oldham, and we will look to expand it as we see how it operates on the ground.

The third line of defence is targeted local intervention. Over the summer, we have worked hard to integrate our national system with the local response, and the local action that we are taking is working. In Leicester, as the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) knows well, as a local MP, in Luton and in parts of northern England, we have been able to release local interventions, because the case rate has come down. We also now publish significantly more local information, and I put in place a system for building local consensus with all elected officials, including colleagues across this House, wherever possible. Our goal is that local action should be as targeted as possible. This combination of social distancing, test and trace and local action is a system in which we all have a responsibility to act, and this gives us the tools to control the virus, while protecting education, the economy and the things we hold dear.

Meanwhile, work on a vaccine continues to progress. The best-case scenario remains a vaccine this year. While no vaccine technology is certain, since the House last met, vaccine trials have gone well. The Oxford vaccine continues to be the world leader, and we have now contracted with six different vaccine providers so that whichever comes off, we can get access in this country. While we give vaccine development all our support, we will insist on safety and efficacy.

I can update the House on changes to legislation that I propose to bring forward in the coming weeks to ensure that a vaccine approved by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency can be deployed here, whether or not it has a European licence. The MHRA standards are equal to the highest in the world. Furthermore, on the development of the vaccine, which proceeds at pace, I will shortly ask the House to approve a broader range of qualified clinical personnel who can deploy the vaccine in order of clinical priority, as I mentioned in questions. As well as the potential vaccine, we also have a flu vaccination programme—the biggest flu vaccination programme in history—to roll out this year.

Finally, Mr Speaker, in preparation for this winter, we are expanding A&E capacity. We have allocated billions more funding to the NHS. We have retained the Nightingale hospitals to ensure that the NHS is fully prepared, and we published last month updated guidance on the protection of social care. As well as this, last month, figures showed a record number of nurses in the NHS—over 13,000 more than last year—and record numbers of both doctors and nurses going into training. We are doing all we can to prevent a second peak, to prepare the NHS for winter and to restore as much of life and the things we love as possible. As schools go back, we must all remain vigilant, and throughout the crisis we all have a role to play.

This is a war against an invisible enemy in which we are all on the same side. As we learn more and more about this unprecedented virus, so we constantly seek to improve our response to protect the health of the nation and the things we hold dear. I commend this statement to the House.

3.42 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): We are indeed all on the same side in fighting this virus. I hope that the Secretary of State understands that when we raise issues, we do so because we urge the Government

to improve their response to fighting this virus. This remains a lethal virus that leaves many with serious, debilitating sickness. Everything must be done to drive down and eliminate infections and suppress the virus completely.

With that in mind, I hope that the Secretary of State can answer a few questions today. I am grateful for advance sight of his statement. First, to avoid a second national lockdown, which we all want to avoid, an effective test and tracing regime is vital. I listened carefully to the figures that he outlined, but he did not tell the House that the numbers going into the system have actually fallen in the past week, from 79% to 72%. This system is not yet world beating.

Throughout questions, the Secretary of State has rejected criticisms of the private sector contractors who are involved in delivering the system, so there is no point in me raising them again, but would it not be better if money was spent on investing in local public health teams, particularly in those areas where restrictions are in place, so that they can do more door-to-door testing, as we have seen, for example, in Leicester? Surely that would be a better use of public funding, for example, than paying for so-called influencers on Instagram to big up test and trace.

On testing itself, the Secretary of State now supports mass testing as a policy aim. It is something I have been calling for, for some months. It is something the former Health Secretary, the Chair of the Health Select Committee, has been calling for. Indeed, we tried to persuade the Secretary of State of its merits before the summer when we asked him to introduce regular testing of NHS frontline staff. He whipped his MPs to vote against it, but will he now, given that he is in favour of mass testing, introduce regular weekly testing of all frontline NHS workers?

To move to mass testing means evolving our testing regime from one that provides antibody tests and diagnostic PCR—polymerase chain reaction—tests effectively to a system of mass screening using more rapid, on-the-spot antigen tests. The Secretary of State referred to rapid tests in his statement. Can he tell us when rapid, on-the-spot antigen tests will be rolled out across society and which sectors of the workforce will be first in the queue to access those tests?

Will the Secretary of State also look at introducing saliva testing, which is being used in Hong Kong, for example, and will he ensure the quick turnaround of tests? I wonder whether he has seen the study from Yale that suggests that saliva testing could be as sensitive as nose and throat swabs. What is his attitude towards pooled testing, which would surely increase the capacity in areas of low prevalence? Does he have a plan to introduce pooled testing? Will he allow GPs to carry out testing or, at the very least, to arrange a test for their patients directly? They currently have to ask their patients to log on to the national system, which is causing huge delays.

On local lockdowns, the Secretary of State said that he wants to involve MPs and elected officials. What process will be used to properly consult local Members of Parliament? What can MPs expect? When a decision has been made to put a local area into restriction, will he publish the specific evidence behind that decision?

Why is it, for example, that our constituents in Leicester are not able to gather in private gardens? Can he publish the scientific evidence for that decision?

In Trafford, we have seen infections increase. The local authority leader and the director of public health felt that restrictions should continue, but the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) felt that they should be lifted. Why did the Secretary of State overrule the advice of the director of public health and instead endorse the representations of the chairman of the 1922 committee? There was a similar story in Bradford, and in Bolton, where restrictions are due to be lifted tonight, infections are increasing. Is it still his plan to lift restrictions tonight in Trafford and Bolton, even though infections are increasing compared with last week, when he made his initial decision?

The Secretary of State is right: in the end, a vaccine is our best hope to stop this pandemic. Vaccines save hundreds of millions of lives every year, and I repeat my offer to work with him on a cross-party basis to promote uptake and challenge the poison of anti-vax myths, including those that we witnessed at the irresponsible and dangerous demonstration this weekend in Trafalgar Square. We will work constructively with him on the proposals he brings to the House. Does he share my concerns about those leaders, such as Putin and Trump, who are trying to short-cut testing to rush out a vaccine, undermining safety and efficacy, potentially damaging millions of lives and giving succour to the anti-vax movement?

Finally, health protection is built upon good population health. Poverty makes people sick. Ending cuts and tackling deprivation as a determinant of ill health is vital to improving and protecting people's health. But the Secretary of State is now embarking on a risky, distracting restructuring of Public Health England in the middle of a pandemic. Tory MPs like to blame Public Health England—it is such rotten luck that these decent, hard-working, competent Ministers are always let down by the people who work for them—but is not the reality that this restructuring will sap morale and focus and should wait until the end of the pandemic? The UK has suffered the highest per capita death rate of any major world economy. To get through this winter safely, our NHS and public health services need resources, and staff need personal protective equipment, fair pay, security and support. I hope he can deliver that.

Matt Hancock: I will answer as many of the hon. Gentleman's questions as possible. His first question about the effectiveness of NHS Test and Trace is very important. He is right that we are investing in public health teams, and so we should. As we discussed in Health questions earlier, it is important to have the combination of the national system and the local one. It is also important that we communicate to people that it is important to engage in testing and contact tracing for those who test positive and their contacts. It is important to be able to communicate to people so that they get those messages, and we will do that in whatever way is effective to get those messages across.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the importance of mass testing. I bow to no one in my enthusiasm for mass testing and am glad that he supports my drive for it. He might remember the exchanges we had some time ago when I rather stuck my neck out in pushing for mass

[*Matt Hancock*]

testing when we needed to get to hundreds of thousands of tests. We now need to increase the number of tests again.

The hon. Gentleman mentions both saliva tests and pool tests; we are trialling both of those. As with vaccines, to which I shall come briefly, we will only use testing that is validated and for which the results are safe, so it is important that we use the world-class facilities that we have at Porton Down to make sure that tests are validated before we use them in public. Saliva testing and pool testing are both options that we are working on.

Local lockdowns are working. Local action, taken jointly between national and local government, is having an effect, as the hon. Gentleman knows well from Leicester, where the case rate is right down. We do publish the data on which such decisions are made. In fact, from last Thursday, we now publish data at lower-super-output-area level, which is the lowest level in terms of how local the test results can be reasonably published. We also provide extensive data to directors of public health.

It is important that all elected officials are engaged in the process of making lockdown decisions, so, as we set out the week before last, we require councils to seek consensus with local elected officials, which includes colleagues in this House. For instance, if your area, Mr Speaker, were under consideration for the need for intervention, we would require your local council to seek consensus with you—although that consensus is not always possible, and there have been a couple of examples where it has not been—and would then make as targeted an intervention as possible. We want to get to the point at which everybody is on the same side in the battle against the disease. I am glad to say that in nearly all council areas the process has worked well. I urge all council leaders to work to engage with their local MPs and with colleagues from across the House to make sure that colleagues' views are taken into account in trying to seek consensus.

The hon. Gentleman makes the point that a vaccine must be deployed only when safe and effective, and he is completely right. He and I are as one, along with every single Member of this House, in our abhorrence at the anti-vax people who peddle lies and in our abhorrence at the anti-test people who similarly try to argue that testing is somehow wrong when it is not. In the UK, a vaccine will be deployed only when it is safe and signed off by the regulator. The UK health regulator, the MHRA, is one of the finest regulators in the world. It is robust, independent and technically brilliant. People should know that we will sign off a vaccine only when it is safe. Having said that, we will also work incredibly hard and give all the resources that the vaccine development teams need to try to get a vaccine over the line as quickly as possible.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): The Secretary of State has made impressive progress in making testing available to everyone with covid symptoms, but I wish to press him on the availability of tests for people who are asymptomatic. Will he confirm that it is the Government's intention to introduce regular weekly testing for NHS staff, teachers and other people who

are in regular contact with the public and who could potentially transmit the virus? Even if it cannot be done right away, is it the intention to do that as soon as possible? Surely that is the best way to reassure patients that their hospital is safe and parents that their kids' school is safe.

Matt Hancock: It is my intention to deploy as much testing as possible using the new testing innovations coming on stream and to do so as widely as possible following clinical advice. We have set out the process we propose to use for the current generation of testing capability, but if a new, easier type of test gets over the line, of course we will always keep that under clinical review, being guided always by clinicians.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: Is the Secretary of State aware that some people are being refused home-testing kits because the credit-checking company TransUnion has not found their names on the public version of the electoral register? Can he explain why he contracted this American company to verify people's identities and what he will do to resolve the issue? He still has not addressed the poor performance of Serco, which has failed to trace 40% of contacts and apparently did not even have contact details for over 2,500. This compares poorly with the public health-based systems of the devolved nations, which are managing to trace 90% or more. Instead of breaking up PHE, will he not provide it with the necessary resources to develop a public health-based tracing system for England, too?

Finally, Chris Whitty says it is not possible to open up everything and keep the virus under control. While it is really good to see the number of deaths from covid falling, the number of new cases in the UK is currently higher than when we had to go into lockdown in March. If getting children back to school is his Government's priority, why are they pushing people back into offices at the same time?

Matt Hancock: I have addressed several of those points already in questions. The idea that, instead of the large-scale national system working together with local contact tracers, we should disparage one part and praise the other—this divisive approach proposed by the SNP spokesperson—is wholly wrong and would lead to things getting worse, not better. Instead, we need to work together to improve the system, in the same way the Scottish Government and the UK Government worked together to provide testing capability right across Scotland.

On the arrangements for the future of PHE, we look around the world for the best way to ensure we have systems at a national level that can respond to the virus, in the same way we put in place the Joint Biosecurity Centre, when we worked closely with the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Administration to ensure the best possible system—for instance, when cases move over a border. Some of the best systems in the world, such as the German system, have an institute dedicated to infectious disease control. I am convinced that the enormous amounts of extra money we are putting into health protection, along with the extra support going in and the clarity and dedication of the new National Institute for Health Protection, will be a step forward. I pay tribute to all those who have worked in PHE and right across the board to keep people safe during this crisis.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement of two groundbreaking tests that will allow people to be tested for coronavirus in less than 90 minutes. Will he aim for these tests to be rolled out as soon as possible, particularly in care homes, and may I suggest that the roll-out begin in Buckinghamshire, particularly Beaconsfield?

Matt Hancock: I will certainly look into whether the roll-out can start in Buckinghamshire. Thankfully, it has a relatively low rate of the virus, which is good news, and we are working to ensure that the testing system there is as effective as it can be. That will include using this new generation of testing when we can begin to roll it out more broadly than the current pilots.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Cancer is rapidly becoming an even bigger catastrophe than anything else. The number of new cancer patients presenting is down by more than a quarter this year. The number of appointments for cancer specialist treatment is down by more than a quarter. The amount of money available for clinical trials has completely fallen through the floor. There is a real danger that lots and lots of people are going to die of cancer this year unnecessarily, when there is treatment that could be available, and that new treatments will not come online. Will the Secretary of State please put together a single taskforce to deal with cancer during this process, increase the amount of money for new kit, in particular in radiotherapy, make sure that we have enough pathologists, histopathologists and haematologists for the future, and make up the additional money for the clinical trials?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman's point about research is important. In the places where research has paused because of the virus, the programme of restart is well under way. I am glad to say that although the backlog of cancer cases had increased—because it is not safe to treat cancer during a pandemic and because of some of the surgery that had to be paused—we are now halfway through recovering from that backlog on the latest figures. Obviously, that recovery is incredibly important, and it is important to look at the catch-up as well as the absolute drop in overall delivery of cancer services. It is also critically important that people who fear that they may have cancer come forward to the NHS.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. My question today is about support for people with mental health conditions during covid-19. One of my constituents, Nicola Kulawsky, went missing just over a week ago. Thankfully, she was found within four days. During 2018 and 2019, there were approximately 176,000 reported incidents of people going missing. Charities such as Missing People have highlighted the huge strain that the covid-19 pandemic has put on people with mental health issues. Charities working in this sector have had to make budget cuts. Will the Secretary of State do everything he can to ensure that individuals who suffer from mental health conditions during covid-19 get the support they need, as part of the wider covid-19 strategy?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise these issues, which are very important. I acknowledge and can see the challenges that mental health services face. Some cautiously positive news announced today

by the Office for National Statistics shows that the number of suicides during the peak of the pandemic was down from 10.3 per 100,000 to 6.9 per 100,000, but of course we have to ensure that mental health services are there for people as we come out of lockdown, so that they can access them again more easily and that we do all we can to support those who need them.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Following on from the Secretary of State's answer to the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) asked about cancer, obviously winter is a time of huge pressures on NHS services, with pressures on acute beds in recent years. Can he tell us more about his plan to tackle the backlog and deal with cancer patients and about the treatments they will receive in the wintertime?

Matt Hancock: Yes; the hon. Gentleman is right to raise exactly this point. Now is the time to get through as much of the backlog as possible. At the same time, we have introduced changes to the way that the NHS operates so that it is more risk-based, so that infection control procedures, which are important, can also be more risk-based, to try to increase the amount of surgery that can happen, essentially splitting the NHS into areas that are deemed "covid green", which are secure from covid, and "covid blue", which means the areas where there may be covid, to allow the throughput of surgery to increase. Of course, cancer services have continued all the way through, but obviously they were diminished during the peak. With winter coming, we want to put the extra funds into the NHS to try to ensure that those services can continue all the way through, as much as is possible. The flu vaccination programme is also an important part of protecting the NHS from higher demand this winter.

Mr Speaker: May I help the House by saying we are going to finish at 4.40 pm? I am sure the Secretary of State will want to help as many Back Benchers as possible to ask their questions by giving shorter replies. That would be helpful.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the announcement last month of £900,000 extra for Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust to upgrade A&E facilities in the county ahead of winter. That will make a huge difference as we continue to battle coronavirus as well as prepare for other winter illnesses. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give me that those very welcome upgrades will be completed in time for this winter to treat Buckinghamshire patients?

Matt Hancock: It is very good that we have been able to give funds to over 100 A&Es across the country so that they can expand, both to be able to cope with infection control procedures and to ensure that there is more space. I pay tribute to the Minister for Health who has driven through this programme along with the NHS. I am confident that this can be built in time for winter to ensure that we are ready by December.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): All of west London rejoiced when the Secretary of State axed the hated "Shaping a healthier future" programme, which was established by his predecessor. Will he now

[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

stave off the rumours circulating and confirm that the stopping of services at Ealing Hospital—that programme would have put an end to those services, as we know it—does not mean that the closure programme is coming in through the back door? There are a lot of rumours around. Will he start by restoring in full the CEPOD surgery and trauma services, so that we ward off the second spike that he and I do not want?

Matt Hancock: We have indeed stopped “Shaping a healthier future”, as it was called. We are continuing with the investment into primary healthcare services that was a part of that programme, but not with the rest of it. I am happy to arrange a meeting between the Minister for Health, who is brilliant on this stuff, and the hon. Lady and other west London colleagues, to ensure that that commitment is kept to.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and his Department for the additional funding for Milton Keynes University Hospital of £1.5 million for winter preparedness. May I stress—and hope that he agrees with me—that it is not just about the threat of covid this winter, but the dual threat with the winter flu?

Matt Hancock: Yes. Both my colleagues from Milton Keynes have been assiduous in making the case for the need for expansion at Milton Keynes Hospital. The team there have been absolutely brilliant, even while the chief executive has also been stepping up to national responsibilities in response to this crisis. I hope that the expansion of A&E will help to ensure that my hon. Friend’s constituents can access emergency services when they need them.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Given that the Secretary of State decided to announce the scrapping of Public Health England in the middle of recess, when there was no opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny, I find it astonishing that his statement did not make a single reference to the bureaucratic reorganisation in the middle of a pandemic. The King’s Fund described scrapping PHE without a full public inquiry as finding it “guilty without a trial”. The Prime Minister has committed to an inquiry. Will the Secretary of State now set out when that inquiry will happen?

Matt Hancock: This is all about ensuring that we are as well prepared as possible for tackling this virus and that the total focus of the new National Institute for Health Protection is on the prevention of infectious diseases. I have set that out very clearly, as I did in my speech. Sometimes we have to make changes to ensure that our systems are working as effectively as possible, and, critically, we had to do so to bring together the different parts of the infection response that had ended up in different places and needed to be brought under single leadership.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: What work is ongoing to ensure that all the PPE needed by the NHS this winter is procured in good time, and will details of all previous

PPE contracts be published immediately in order to address serious concerns about the appropriateness of some of the earlier deals?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely; we are working very hard to ensure not only that we have PPE for now and for winter and that we rebuild the stockpile that we used during the peak of the pandemic, but that as much as possible of the PPE available and used in this country is made in this country, so that we are less reliant on international contracts and the international flow of PPE, which obviously became difficult at the height of the crisis. We are one United Kingdom in ensuring that we have the provision of PPE for now and in the future.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that achieving the biggest ever flu vaccine programme will need local GPs and pharmacies to work together, not compete for revenue, so can he find a way of incentivising such working together, not fighting for every jab?

Matt Hancock: It is incredibly important that pharmacists as well as GPs and others are able to make the flu jab available. We have got to make sure that happens as effectively as possible, and it is a massive operation. If I may, I will talk to my hon. Friend and we can have a discussion about the specific problems he has found and try to resolve them, but it is going to be one huge national effort.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for all he has done: he has not been found wanting when it comes to responding in the way he should. Can the Secretary of State further outline if he has reviewed routine operations—such as for tonsillitis and hip, knee and shoulder replacement surgeries—and when will he be able to address the massive backlog, which has occurred because of coronavirus, but must now be worked on?

Matt Hancock: We are working through that backlog. I am glad that, over the summer, we were able to re-contract with private providers of healthcare to help us to get through that backlog, and on a better contract than before—better value for money. I pay tribute to the private providers of healthcare that have been there and delivering improvements for people throughout the summer and now on into winter. They play an important part in improving people’s health, and it is a big team effort.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): It is very reassuring to hear how far we have come in terms of our lines of defences against this invisible killer over the past six months. May I, through the Secretary of State, thank everyone who has helped us get here? On the second line of defence, the testing, may I have an update on how the NHS is working with the private sector to make sure that all aspects of our economy can reopen safely?

Matt Hancock: If I understand the question correctly, the ability to provide tests to parts of the private sector that need to know people do not have the virus in order to be able to reopen parts of the economy or just enable things to happen is a very important part of where we

would like to get to when we have the next generation of testing. At the moment, we of course have to follow a clinical protocol for the roll-out and the use of the capacity we have. We have very significant capacity, having built it up over the pandemic, but the work with the private sector is very important, and we will be publishing more details on this shortly.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab) [V]: I have had personal experience of track and trace over the last couple of weeks. Having filled in my initial form, I was contacted at least three times to be asked for the same information again, so it is a question not just of the contacts, but of what is being done with the data. My assessment is that there is poor management of the data and a waste of time and effort in duplication, including in contacting members of my household and telling them to isolate from the wrong date. Improvements are needed to what is done once track and trace gets in touch with people. Does the Secretary of State agree?

Matt Hancock: I am very happy to look into these individual circumstances. Of course, we are constantly seeking to improve the system. I am very glad that the hon. Gentleman was contacted so assiduously by the system, and I take the point about the need for the data to be collected as effectively and efficiently as possible. I hope that he and members of his household are following the rules and doing the isolation that is necessary.

Jack Breerton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Following the recent outbreak in Stoke-on-Trent, I would like to thank local authorities and the community for their actions, which have helped to stem the spread of the virus locally. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is thanks to these rapid actions that we are now seeing positive covid results decline and that everyone must continue to play their part by closely following Government guidelines if we are to see cases fall further?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely. Stoke-on-Trent provides another example of a local action that worked. We did not have to go to a full lockdown, which I am very glad about. The combination of enhanced support from the national system plus assiduous work locally and the responsible and strong voice of the local MPs, including my hon. Friend, has meant that the cases are coming right down. I am very grateful to the people of Stoke-on-Trent for responding as positively as they did to what were challenging circumstances. At one moment, it looked like there might be a full-blown local lockdown, but that did not happen because Stoke-on-Trent got in there fast and acted.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Secretary of State mentioned the importance of local efforts in keeping infections down, so can he tell me what additional financial support the Government will now provide to support local test and trace efforts, specifically in those areas where the level of infection places them on the watch list or under lockdown?

Matt Hancock: We do enter into those sorts of discussions. Of course local councils have a statutory obligation as well, but what matters most is that the response is as effective as it can be. Thus far we have been able to ensure that councils have the support and

the capability to be able to respond, but, with their statutory duties, it is absolutely at the top of their priority list to prevent a local outbreak as well.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The truth is that young people of working age who are fit know that there is very little chance of their becoming seriously ill from this thing. I know that the Secretary of State will say, yes, but they can pass it on to older people, but may I speak on behalf of older people? I am one. I think that, at 70, I am the oldest person here and I am still kicking—just. What I can say to him is that older people do not want to be patronised. They are very well aware of their own health needs. They can be trusted to isolate if they have to. We do not want to have this thing whereby the man from Whitehall knows best. The man from Whitehall does not know best, especially as he changes his mind every two minutes. Can we get back to being a proper Conservative Government who trust the people and who let the people decide how to look after their own health?

Matt Hancock: The challenge is that this disease passes on without people knowing. I have seen the challenge of older people trying to stay away from and stay safe from the continuing spread. In the United States of America, we saw that, at first, the increase in rates was among younger people and then it spread and the hospitalisation rate went up and then the number of deaths went up. Unfortunately, we are seeing a similar pattern on parts of the continent. I understand where my right hon. Friend is coming from. The goal is to have as little intervention, as targeted intervention, as possible, subject to keeping the virus under control. That is what we are trying to do. Essentially, we want to protect the ability of schools to go back and to make sure that we get the economy going as much as possible. These localised interventions, whether through test and trace to the individuals who have tested positive or to a local area where there is an outbreak, is the approach that we propose.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: Office for National Statistics data show that 75% of disabled people are extremely worried about life post lockdown and a further 46% report that this is having a serious impact on their mental health. Will the Minister tell me what the Government are doing to support them, and will he commit to ensuring that disabled people, who have felt like an afterthought throughout this crisis, are at the heart of any recovery plan, as called for by Scope and many other charities?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely. Our approach is to ensure that the support that is given, including with the vaccine if and when that comes, goes to those who are clinically most at risk. That is the answer to ensuring that disabled people get the support that they need. People who are disabled for different reasons have different needs. We must be cognisant of that and not try to treat all disabled people with different disabilities the same. Instead, we should support people according to their needs and that is at the heart of the approach that I take.

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the recent coronavirus outbreak from the Crown and Anchor pub in Stone in Staffordshire

[*Theo Clarke*]

next to my constituency demonstrates how vital it is that we all—including businesses—follow the track and trace guidance that has been put in place, so that we can reopen our economy safely and control this virus?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely. Everybody has a role to play. Businesses have a role to play especially, including with contact tracing, so that people can safely go to the pub and know that if there is a problem they can be contacted. We all have that part to play.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State share my concern that, of the £2.5 billion of covid-related Government procurement activity, at least £1 billion has been awarded without recourse to open competitive tendering, including a contract to a close friend of the Prime Minister's chief adviser? Why is it that, six months into this pandemic, the Government are still citing unforeseen circumstances to explain a lack of openness in the tendering process for contracts?

Matt Hancock: We need to move fast sometimes in the response to a pandemic, and we need to move fast to contract with those who are best able to provide the support that people need. The constant attempt by those on the Opposition Benches to divide people in this way runs precisely counter to what people want to see—what people want to see is people working together, instead of these divisive tactics.

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): I want to start by thanking my right hon. Friend and his officials for the way in which they have communicated with me and my colleagues in Sandwell, as we have seen some rather concerning figures, particularly during the summer. May I ask him for some clarification? We have had a unique situation in Sandwell, where certain parts of the borough have had an exponential rise in the number of cases, which have been very localised. The number of cases in other parts of the borough—particularly in the west, in my communities of Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton—has thankfully been quite low. Can he confirm that local authorities should be taking a targeted and pragmatic approach when instituting local restrictions?

Matt Hancock: That is absolutely right. From the first nationally imposed local lockdown, in Leicester, we worked with the local authorities to decide what the appropriate geography was, and it is not necessarily the entire local authority geography. In the very first of those interventions, we worked with the Leicestershire leaders to decide what areas should be in it—the Minister for Health who is one of the representatives of that area, is nodding away. Indeed, last week, in parts of West Yorkshire, we went down to a sub local authority geography. That is absolutely one of the options available. Sometimes it is at a local authority level, and sometimes it is at a sub local authority level. We are driven by the data.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: The Secretary of State has always rightly claimed that he is guided by the science and data, so I welcome his decision to release Stockport from local measures. The data, the director of public health, the council and the borough's four MPs support it, but I represent a cross-borough seat. Local measures have been tough for us,

and we need confidence in them. Does he understand the interconnected nature of Greater Manchester's boroughs? What is his message to my Tameside constituents on whether the decisions he has made to lift restrictions in Bolton and Trafford, where covid is now spiking, will keep the rest of us in lockdown for longer?

Matt Hancock: The detailed local nature of the question shows how important it is that we engage with local representatives, including colleagues in this House, so that the local intelligence that the hon. Member has can be brought to bear on this decision, for instance. The decision to take Stockport out of and leave Tameside in the measures was taken with the agreement of the leaders of both councils. I absolutely concur with the hon. Member that we should have as targeted an approach as possible, and local councils need to ensure that if it is appropriate for some of their area to come out of a local lockdown and some to stay in it, that is what we should do. We should be driven by the data.

Mary Robison (Cheadle) (Con): Joint partnership working and effective test and trace have been essential in ensuring that we have reduced covid cases in Cheadle and kept the pressure off our NHS. Public Health England has indicated that the flu jab is one of the most effective measures that we can take to further reduce the pressure on intensive care units. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, to avoid a flu outbreak at the same time as we are tackling coronavirus, we need to encourage people to take up flu jabs and ensure that we get test and trace and flu jabs working in conjunction?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I emphatically agree with my hon. Friend. I could not have put it better myself.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Over the next few weeks, hundreds of thousands of students will be returning to universities, which is very, very welcome, but what we are seeing at the moment is each institution having to make its own decisions. Universities UK tells us that most students will be getting in-person teaching, but what advice is the Secretary of State giving to those universities and what support is his Department giving?

Matt Hancock: We are working very closely with the Department for Education to have a successful and safe return of universities, just as, from today onwards, we are seeing a successful and safe return of schools.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I am really pleased to hear my right hon. Friend talk about the largest flu vaccine programme ever being put in place, particularly for those over the age of 50. In normal times, that would be a challenge and it is going to be even more difficult in the light of covid. I would be grateful if he talked about the practical steps he is taking to make sure that things are simple and secure enough to deliver it, but not too prescriptive for those delivering the vaccine; whether or not adequate funding is in place to support the flu vaccine; and any other steps he has taken to make sure we have a successful flu vaccine campaign over the winter, given the covid situation.

Matt Hancock: We are putting enormous sums into the flu vaccine programme and have released extra funds to buy more vaccine. We are deregulating and

making sure that we have a wider group of people—who will all be clinically qualified—who can administer the flu vaccine; those regulations will come before the House shortly. My hon. Friend is right to say how important it is to get the communications out that everybody should get a flu jab. We will start with the free jabs for the over-65s, the frontline healthcare workers and those who are clinically vulnerable, and we will then move on to the 50 to 64-year-olds. But everybody, of every age, can get one—it is just not free to others. I encourage everybody to get one. We must tackle these online rumours that spread the pernicious anti-vax lies.

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab): Only 40% of the 90 care homes in Enfield have had covid testing to date, so when will the Secretary of State roll out the mass testing promised to the care homes? What progress is being made to increase the use of rapid turnaround tests in care homes, in Enfield and across the country?

Matt Hancock: We are introducing more rapid turnaround tests and validating that technology. We are also rolling out asymptomatic testing to care homes. We did have a problem with the delivery of tests from Randox—these were the leading tests we were using with care homes—as I made clear to the House in July. We have spent the summer recovering that programme.

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, and recognise his and his Department's herculean efforts in leading our national fight against the virus. Throughout my constituency, there exist growing concerns that the lockdown measures to tackle localised spikes of covid-19 that have been imposed on swathes of West Yorkshire, across the Pennines and beyond may well be imposed on Wakefield, thus harming livelihoods. To help to manage these fears and encourage adherence to the guidelines, will he publish the criteria that inform his decisions to impose or ease specific lockdown measures in certain areas, such as Kirklees, Greater Manchester and Leicester?

Matt Hancock: We publish the data on which the decisions are made and we have published the so-called contain framework, the one in which those decisions are taken, in consultation with the local authority and local representatives, should such an intervention be needed. What I would say to residents of Wakefield, and indeed of any other area, is that the best way to avoid local action and a local intervention is to follow the social distancing rules: "hands, face, space, and get a test if you have any symptoms". By following social distancing we are more likely to be able to control the virus without the need then to resort to local action.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I would like to start by paying tribute to public health officials and community partners in the east end of Glasgow, who have been managing some of the local clusters. It really has been a team effort.

Part of the Secretary of State's test, trace and isolate strategy is based on people following the advice to isolate when they show symptoms. What discussions is he having with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy regarding the pitiful levels of statutory sick pay? Anecdotally, a lot of constituents

tell me that they are worried about the financial pressure of having to isolate. So what discussions on that is he having with his colleagues in government?

Matt Hancock: As I set out in my statement, we have introduced a new scheme today.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Research on immunity once people have had covid remains critical. What progress has been made in understanding how immunity is developed and how long it lasts? What work is being undertaken in terms of rapid testing for immunity and analysis, and the technology that sits around that?

Matt Hancock: This is a very important question. Essentially, part of the research into the vaccine is research into its efficacy, which is about research into the immune response that it provokes—the antibody response and the T cell response, both of which have an impact. We are doing a huge amount of work on that and I am very happy to write to my hon. Friend with more details.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Could the Secretary of State now answer a question that he has been asked repeatedly this afternoon about the creation of the National Institute for Health Protection? What persuaded him, in the middle of August, that it was a great idea to reorganise the structure of public health in the middle of the worst pandemic for 100 years, which is a bit analogous to reorganising the fire brigade in the middle of a blaze?

Matt Hancock: It is important to bring together the leadership on test and trace, the Joint Biosecurity Centre and the leadership from Public Health England into one place to make sure that our response is as effective as it possibly can be and that we are constantly searching to have the best possible response to the virus.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I know my right hon. Friend will share my excitement over the two new groundbreaking tests that can detect coronavirus in as little as 90 minutes. Does he agree that we should get that tech rolled out as quickly as possible, but particularly in care settings?

Matt Hancock: Yes I do, and I put everything I possibly have into driving it as fast as possible, subject to it working effectively.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Today's Office for National Statistics suicide statistics show that middle-aged men remain at the highest risk of suicide. It is well established that recessions can lead to increases in suicides, but that is not inevitable. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that suicide prevention is a Government priority and that this group of people is supported through the recession caused by the covid-19 pandemic?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Lady is quite right to raise this issue. It is good to see the figures showing that suicide rates have fallen, but we absolutely must and will remain vigilant.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the written ministerial statement he published after my last question to him in July. May I ask a bit more about the National Institute for Health Protection? Who was consulted before the decision was made? What is the legal basis for its present operation? Does it require legislation? What kind of public body is it intended to be: a non-ministerial department, an executive agency or a part of the Department of Health and Social Care? How will it be funded? When will there be a proper White Paper or Green Paper on the subject? Will the political appointee put in as interim head be replaced by a properly appointed public appointments-approved person? I could go on—there are plenty of unanswered questions.

Matt Hancock: I counted eight questions. Let me try to answer them. The National Institute for Health Protection does not require a legal basis; these PHE duties were not done on a legal basis. It will take on some UK-wide responsibilities, but also have responsibilities for England only. It is funded from the Department of Health and Social Care. It will be an executive agency of the Department. There is a global search under way for long-term, permanent leadership. As I said in response to the previous question, it will bring together the leadership of several different parts of the response. It was imperative, as far as I could see, to try to make sure we have that single unified leadership for the next stage of our response to the crisis. I pay tribute to the work of Public Health England. It has done an enormous amount, especially through its scientific work, which has truly been among the best in the world and has helped us to respond as well as we possibly could. I think that the new National Institute for Health Protection, established on the basis that I have set out, will make sure that we are constantly learning to have the best response, in terms of both the science and the scale, and to deliver for this country.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments in relation to dealing with anti-vaxxers. He will recall that I asked him a question before the recess and he said he was meeting Sir Nick Clegg, formerly of this House and now of Facebook fame. I wonder whether he can update the House on that discussion. It is still a reality that Facebook takes millions of dollars from anti-vax sites, and it is still the case that an increased number of people in this country fear what the vaccination could or could not mean, so may I press him to start a campaign to tackle anti-vaxxers head-on and to ensure that all Members across the House are able to take a lead on this? It really is a cross-party issue.

Matt Hancock: That campaign is under way. We are constantly looking to strengthen it. Of course Facebook and other social media providers have an important role to play. I had that meeting with Nick Clegg, who in fact broke off his holiday to take the meeting. *[Interruption.]* Zoom reaches all parts. In fairness to my former coalition ministerial partner, he absolutely understands the importance of this issue, and Facebook has been doing very significant work. That does not mean that there is not more that it can and must do, but the response was positive. Further work needs to be done to make sure that we get the positive messages across.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that, as somebody who knows PHE well and knows what it actually does, I have some concerns about the changes that he announced last month. Although I can see the arguments about future health protection and future pandemics, of which sadly there will be more, we need to know who is taking ownership of the long-term public health work on smoking, air quality, obesity and childhood vaccinations, and the inequalities work that PHE does. Is he considering bringing that experience and vast expertise, which I benefited from as a Minister, back into the Department of Health and Social Care, for instance?

Matt Hancock: My former ministerial colleague, a distinguished former Public Health Minister, raises an incredibly important point. We are undertaking consultation on precisely this question right now; in fact, I invite him to come into the Department to give his views. The critical thing is that we need to ensure that we drive the health improvement agenda, the obesity agenda and the wider health improvement agenda forward very strongly. Local councils have a huge role to play in this, and they must be bound yet further into the health improvement agenda. The NHS has a huge role to play, and that must be bound more strongly again. Today's announcement is good progress from the NHS. This is incredibly important. We are going to get it right. It is a very high priority of the Prime Minister, and I look forward to working with him on making it happen.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: Will the Secretary of State commit to raising healthcare funding to help prevent a potential second wave, while ensuring that Scotland's NHS receives the necessary levels of Barnett funding to help it prepare effectively for a potential winter wave and ensure that Scotland's health workers have all the resources that they need?

Matt Hancock: Yes. This country has never increased health spending in a year more than it has this year, and the Barnett consequentials mean that many billions of pounds have flowed to Scotland to improve the response in Scotland, too.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Will the Health Secretary join me in thanking the people of Kirklees for the sacrifices that they have made during the period of the local restrictions? As he knows, thanks to the use of localised granular data, much of Kirklees will come out of those local restrictions tomorrow. Will he continue to work with me, with parliamentary colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood), with the leadership of Kirklees and with the local director of public health, and use that data, so that we can get the rest of Kirklees out of these local restrictions very soon?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has behaved with great dignity in arguing that people need to follow these restrictions but that the restrictions should be targeted and based on the data. Our approach is to have objective local action where it is necessary—only where it is necessary—based on the data. We have reached a good solution to this question in Kirklees, which will be put into force tomorrow, but I look forward to continuing to work with Kirklees to make

sure we get the virus under control right across the district so that every part of Kirklees can be released from these measures, which nobody wants to put in place but which are there for a reason.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members who have participated in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am now suspending the House for three minutes.

4.39 pm

Sitting suspended.

Schools and Colleges: Qualification Results and Full Opening

4.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the full opening of our schools and colleges from this week, but before I do I would like to update the House on the current position regarding exam results for this year's GCSE and A-level students.

As the House will be fully aware, exams had to be cancelled this year because of the covid-19 outbreak. Students have now received results for GCSE, AS and A-levels, as well as vocational and technical qualifications, which will allow them to progress to the next stage of their lives. The independent regulator Ofqual had put in place a system for arriving at grades that was believed to be fair and robust. It became clear, however, that there were far too many inconsistent and unfair outcomes for A-level and AS-level students and that it was not reasonable to expect them to be dealt with through even a boosted and enhanced appeals process. Instead, students have been awarded the grades that schools and colleges estimated they would most likely have achieved, or their calculated grades if they were higher.

The situation has, I know, caused a great deal of stress and uncertainty, and I am deeply sorry that those who have borne the brunt of it have been students themselves. I can only apologise to them again for that. We took immediate action to provide certainty as soon as it was clear that if we did not, too many students would have received grades that did not reflect their hard work and ability.

For vocational and technical qualifications, the situation was different because most were not subject to standardisation like GCSE and A-level grades. Awarding organisations that used a similar model have, however, also reviewed their results to ensure that each student has been treated as fairly as possible. We recognise, however, that some students may still be unhappy with their summer grade and that for some—such as home-educated students—there was not enough evidence for any grade to be awarded at all. To support those students, in the autumn we are running an extra exam series in all subjects at GCSE, A-level and AS-level. Additional opportunities will also be provided for some other vocational and technical qualifications that received calculated grades.

We have been working with the further and higher education sectors to manage applications for this year's places. To ensure that students can progress to higher education, we intend to remove the temporary student-number controls that had been introduced for the coming academic year. We set up the higher education taskforce and are working closely with the sector to create additional capacity and encourage it to be as flexible as possible. Providers have agreed to honour all offers to students who meet the conditions of their offer, wherever that is possible. If a course is full, universities will give students a choice of suitable alternative courses if they are happy to take one, or a deferred place if they would prefer to wait an additional year. This year, many more students have been successful in meeting the grades required to study medicine and dentistry. The Government have removed the caps on student numbers that were in place for both subjects.

[Gavin Williamson]

The Ofqual board has agreed temporary arrangements with Ofsted to support the ongoing work on this summer's GCSEs, A-levels and AS-levels, and on vocational qualifications, including appeals and autumn exams, as well as preparations for next year's exam season. We are determined that exams and assessments will go ahead next year and are working with the sector to ensure that that is done as smoothly as possible.

The former chief regulator, Sally Collier, decided that the next stage of the awarding process would be better overseen by new leadership. As a result, the Ofqual board has asked Dame Glenys Stacey to act as acting chief regulator until December 2020. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sally Collier for the commitment that she has shown over the past four years and wish her well.

Although none of this disruption is what we wanted for our students, I believe that they now have the certainty and reassurance they deserve and will be able to embark on the next exciting phase of their lives. I hope the whole House will join me in wishing them all the very best for their future.

Let me now turn to the full opening of our nation's schools and colleges. Welcoming pupils back will be a massive milestone for schools throughout the country. On 2 July, we published detailed plans for nurseries, schools, special schools and colleges that set out what was required to deliver full return as safely as possible for all our children. The guidance has been developed with medical and scientific experts and Public Health England and follows regular engagement with the education sector. The recent letter from all four UK chief medical officers, which emphasised the low risk of long-term harm from covid-19 due solely to attending school in comparison with the high risk of long-term harm from not attending school, particularly for more vulnerable children and young people, has, I hope, given parents extra assurance that with the protective measures in place, our pupils are returning to a safe environment, and an environment they will gain so much from.

As they return, pupils will be kept in consistent groups and the older children will be encouraged to distance wherever possible. At a minimum, this will mean keeping whole year groups in schools and colleges separate. This is in addition to the other protective measures, such as enhanced cleaning and hand washing. We have also advised that pupils in secondary schools should wear face coverings in communal areas if there is a local lockdown in place, unless they are exempt.

Strict hygiene protocols are in place and PPE has been distributed to every school to bolster their supplies for use in the unlikely event that a pupil develops covid symptoms on the premises. A small number of home-test kits are also being distributed for anyone who develops symptoms and who would not otherwise have access to testing themselves. All schools will also have access to direct support and advice from local health protection teams to deal with any cases that may occur.

Together with colleagues from the Department for Transport, we have announced an additional £40 million in funding for local transport authorities to ease pressure on public transport. We have also published guidance for local authorities to manage capacity and reduce the

risk of infection on school transport. We have urged all students and staff to walk or cycle to school or college if this is a suitable alternative for them.

I know that these past few months have been some of the most challenging that schools, parents and, most of all, children have faced. I would like to take this opportunity to applaud all our dedicated education staff for the incredible efforts that they have made to keep children learning at this difficult time. I am confident that we have the necessary preparations in hand to ensure a successful return for all our pupils. I commend this statement to the House.

4.52 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement this afternoon, but, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am afraid I must complain that I did not receive advance sight of it until 4.36 pm. You will know that, under the ministerial code, I should have had it much, much sooner.

I welcome the Secretary of State back to his place after a summer of chaos, incompetence and confusion that has caused enormous stress to children, young people, their families and their teachers. Ministers must now learn from their mistakes and ensure that keeping schools open and pupils learning is a national priority. Labour is absolutely clear: we want children back in school and we want them to stay there. I will always work constructively with the Secretary of State to achieve that and I hope he will hear my questions this afternoon in that constructive spirit, because while I am delighted that the vast majority of schools will reopen fully in the next few days, there remain many issues of concern.

Let me start with the ongoing situation regarding this summer's exam results. After days of confusion following A-level results day, the Secretary of State finally heeded calls from young people and from the Labour party and accepted the centre-assessed grades—the CAGs. While that was the right thing to do, it leaves many of the problems created by his previous flawed standardisation model unresolved.

The Secretary of State should have known of the risks. It has been reported that a former senior official of the Department raised serious concerns, so can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House when he first knew of the potential problems with his approach and what he did about them? What advice was he given specifically about BTEC students, who faced more uncertainty and delay? Can he now assure us that all BTEC students have received their results?

The Secretary of State alluded to external candidates, who do not have a CAG and who remain in a difficult situation. I do not think they will find the offer of resits sufficiently reassuring, but perhaps he can tell us what support they will receive as they undertake those exams.

There are also significant consequences for higher education, as the Secretary of State rightly noted. Can he tell the House how many young people who missed their first-choice university because of his now discredited approach to awarding grades have now been granted those places? What assessment has he made of the impact on universities that will lose students because they can now take up their original choice? What discussions has he had with the Treasury about providing those institutions with additional financial support?

With the reopening of schools, we are all pleased to see children returning to class. School is the best place for them to be, not only for their learning but for their emotional and social wellbeing, and I pay tribute to the school staff who have worked through the holidays to welcome them back safely. The test now for the Secretary of State is whether pupils continue to receive a full education throughout the year and catch up on the learning they have lost. When will pupils begin to receive support through both the catch-up premium and the national tutoring fund? Why are early years and post-16 providers ineligible for the catch-up premium? Why is the funding available for just a single year, when the impact of any further disruption to education is so significant? Can he guarantee that every child will have full access to learning in the event of a local lockdown?

Parents' top priority as schools return is the wellbeing of their children. What plans does the Secretary of State have to provide additional pastoral support? What extra support will be available for children with special educational needs and disabilities? Parents will not be able to return to work without childcare and wraparound care. What plans does he have in place to ensure that every parent can access the care they need? Can he tell us a little more about how he will ensure that all children travel safely to school, including respecting social distancing on public transport? Finally, what additional financial support, if any, will schools receive to cover any additional covid-related costs this term?

Looking at the year ahead, I was glad to read this morning that the Secretary of State has apparently once again listened to Labour and will delay exams in summer 2021. Pupils entering year 11 and year 13 have already experienced significant disruption to their learning, and the assessment process must recognise that, but schools, colleges and universities need time to plan. What discussions is he having with the sector and UCAS to ensure that workable arrangements are in place? Can he guarantee that a contingency plan will be put in place this month in case exams are disrupted again?

Children and their families should have been the Government's top priority, but for weeks their interests have taken a back seat while the Secretary of State U-turned on everything from CAGs to face masks and left officials to take the blame. He must now take responsibility for ensuring that a summer of incompetence does not descend further into an autumn of disaster and dismay. I implore him to listen to the concerns of parents, of teachers and of the Labour party. He must now make the education of our children and young people a national, and his personal, priority.

Gavin Williamson: I apologise to the hon. Lady for her receiving the statement late. I will ensure that it does not happen again.

I am delighted to hear that it is the Labour party's priority to see all children going back. The leadership the hon. Lady is showing is a refreshing change from that of her predecessor, who was more ambivalent about children returning to school. The Conservatives have continuously argued for children to be back in the classroom at the earliest possible stage.

The hon. Lady raises some important issues about children who are not in school and so were not able to receive centre assessment grades. We always recognised that that situation was going to present challenges.

That is why we put forward an autumn series as there was going to be no other viable way to be able to provide the assessment.

The hon. Lady raises important points about higher education, which is vital. I would also like to flag up some of the challenges in the further education sector. As not everyone will be progressing on to university, many youngsters will want to take the opportunity to progress on to further education. We have been working with both sectors to ensure that that is the case. We will be increasing funding for the higher education and university sector through the teaching grant. We have also lifted the cap on medicine and dentistry places to create extra capacity within the system. We have seen a drop-off in the number of students coming from European Union countries who would traditionally have come to the UK to study, and this has obviously created extra capacity within the system as well.

We have already delivered a £1 billion covid catch-up fund that is targeted at helping youngsters from the most disadvantaged and deprived backgrounds. We have used evidence to see how we can help to improve their outcomes, working with the Education Endowment Foundation to ensure that that money is targeted at interventions that will deliver results.

The hon. Lady touches on the potential for moving exams back. Back in June in this House, in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), I said that that was something we highlighted that we would be doing. On 2 July, Ofqual held a public consultation about potentially moving the exam dates back. I have checked whether the Labour party suggested that it would support this move and found that it did not make a submission supporting the idea. Therefore, I very much welcome the Labour party to our position.

We will continue to work with local authorities in ensuring that we have the transport infrastructure in place. I have touched on the fact that £40 million has been made available. Transport for London and other transport authorities have been working very closely with the Department for Transport and the Department for Education—and, most importantly, with schools—to try to deal with any transport bottlenecks that may occur. We will continue to work with all local authorities to ensure that this is done as smoothly as possible. It is absolutely vital that we do everything we can do to ensure that every child has the opportunity to get back to school. I think we all know, on both sides of this House, how important it is to see all children benefiting from a brilliant education—having the opportunity to be back in the classroom to be inspired by their teachers. That is what we will be delivering. That is what we will see over this week and next week as all schools return and welcome their pupils back.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for this statement. In July, our Education Committee report suggested a delay in the date of the exams. Given that we now know that millions of children have not been learning during the lockdown, does he agree that the way forward should be an urgent assessment, or benchmarking, of all children in school, with data collected by the Department for Education and regulators to inform the Government's decision on when the exams are to take place next year?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about the importance of benchmarking and making an assessment of where pupils are. We will be doing that, working right across the sector to ensure that there is a clear understanding of where some of the learning gaps are in order for us to best deal with them. It will also be absolutely vital in informing policy for the year ahead.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement; I nearly had time to read it before he started speaking.

Scottish schools have been back for three weeks now, and although there have been cases of covid, track and trace has meant that disruption has been kept to a minimum. May I thank everyone who has helped to prepare our schools for reopening? May I also wish schools in Northern Ireland, England and Wales the very best of success as they start to return?

This has been a summer of confusion for young people across the UK, who found themselves at the mercy of algorithms. When Scotland's young people received their results on 4 August, it became clear that something had gone wrong. But John Swinney sat down; he listened to the young people; he apologised for the turmoil; and, crucially, he took decisive action. Predicted grades were awarded and new funding was found for universities to ensure that any young people with the entry grades would secure their place. Despite what the Secretary of State has said this afternoon, his actions were certainly not immediate. He had both foresight and time on his side, but squandered both, and managed to mess up further over the validity of appeals. By the time of his U-turn on results, university places had been lost.

The schools Minister has maintained that he did not see the algorithm until results day, suggesting that something went wrong with its implementation. So what questions were Ministers asking prior to the publication of results? Did anyone ask for a trial run of the algorithm? Although there are calls to delay next year's exams, any postponement introduces further issues in terms of marking and certification, so what consideration has been given to rationalising courses, which would allow quality, rich learning, rather than superficially covering everything in a reduced time?

I know the Secretary of State is reluctant to follow Scotland's lead on anything, but Scottish youngsters have accepted the need for masks in corridors without any great issues. Why is he determined that England will not follow World Health Organisation advice? We do not need local lockdowns for people to wear masks; young people are willingly participating. He has a duty of care to young people and teachers.

In any normal Cabinet, the Secretary of State's repeated failure to take responsibility would lead to his sacking, but in this blame-passing Government, when the PM himself talks of mutant algorithms, his coat is not even on a shoogly peg. Will he now listen to the scientific advice and ensure that pupils, staff and the wider school community are as safe as possible as their schools return?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady will probably have witnessed the fact that over 1.6 million children returned to school before the summer holidays here in England.

It is interesting that she raises the issue of listening to the best scientific and medical advice, which is exactly what we do. We have followed the best scientific and medical advice at every stage. That is something the Scottish Government did not do when they did not listen to the chief medical officer in Scotland, who did not support their proposal on face masks, which was basically a political decision, as against one that was informed by the best science and medicine.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): There have been many individual initiatives over the summer to help children to catch up, including the brilliant Invicta Academy, which was started in Kent. Can my right hon. Friend outline the steps that his Department is taking to help all children to catch up, especially the most deprived, who we know have been hardest hit by the gap in education?

Gavin Williamson: It is great to hear about the brilliant work of the Invicta Academy. We have seen brilliant examples right across the country of schools doing so much to support learning when children have been out of school, but also over the summer as well. The reason for the £1 billion covid catch-up fund is that we recognise that more needs to be done and more assistance and help needs to be available. That is why £350 million of the fund is targeted at children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds—those who need the most support to catch up—to ensure that their life chances are not impacted by this virus. I very much hope that my hon. Friend will receive the benefits of that in Sevenoaks and right across Kent.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): More than 14,000 schools submitted a claim for exceptional costs since schools closed in March. What does the Secretary of State think will happen when that support is simply cut off this term?

Gavin Williamson: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we announced last year a £14.4 billion increase in school funding. That was a three-year deal, and we are seeing it rolled out in this academic year, the following academic year and the year after that. It will have a truly beneficial effect on every pupil right across the country.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the statement that he brought to the House today, and I also thank him and all his team for the huge efforts they have put in over the summer in an evolving situation that must have been really difficult to manage. Does he agree with the result of a recent study showing that the risks to children from covid-19 are actually very tiny and that the benefits children will gain from a return to school far outweigh any risks posed by covid?

Gavin Williamson: I am very aware that my constituency neighbour, who has been out campaigning and doing everything he can to get all children in his constituency back into school, is a real champion of their educational achievements and what children are doing right across Dudley North. He is right to highlight that study and the fact that there will be more harm done to children by their not returning to school than by coming back to school. We all know the benefits, and this is not just

about education; it is also about the physical health and mental health that children gain from being back in school. That is why it was vital to open schools before the summer, and that is why it is so vital to have every child back in school enjoying the true joy of what school is able to offer them.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Deputy Speaker. Watching the A-levels results fiasco from back home in Wales, it seemed that the policy of the Labour Government in my country closely resembled the policy of the Secretary of State's Department. Can he outline how closely the Governments were working together?

Gavin Williamson: It is fair to say that the Scottish National party in Scotland, the Conservatives in England, Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Wales, and the Democratic Unionist party and Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland had a very common approach. The Labour party, as well as all parties, has been of the view that calculated grades and moderation within the system were an important part of ensuring fairness within the system. It was a common political consensus across the United Kingdom.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): I recognise the focus of the Secretary of State and the ministerial teams on supporting pupils, parents and teachers throughout what has been one of the most difficult periods in policy development. I also recognise that these challenges have been equal in all parts of the United Kingdom. My constituents have faced similar difficulties to those in England, as the Secretary of State has just recognised. May I pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend for the guidance that has led to so many pupils returning to school? Does he also recognise that guidance is guidance, that it cannot account for every circumstance and that judgments will need to be made at the most local of levels?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point. He will know all too well that many schools across the Vale of Glamorgan have different pressures, and we are seeing this right across England as well. Whether a school has 40 pupils or 1,400, it will need to adapt and change to ensure that it creates a safe and secure environment for the pupils and for those who are working in the school. By doing that, it creates greater safety and confidence in the wider community. Guidance is there to support teachers, headteachers and all those who work in schools, and it is leading to all schools returning and the opportunity for all pupils to benefit from a great education.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: Schools across the country could be spending hundreds of millions of pounds to meet the costs of covid-19. With budgets already at breaking point, many will have to cut spending in other areas, such as support for disadvantaged students, to afford these costs. To ensure that no child is left behind, will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government could meet the full costs of making schools covid-secure and ensuring that they can return safely?

Gavin Williamson: The Government have outlined increases in school budgets for not just this academic year but the next one and will be increasing school funding further in the academic year after that, in one of the most generous settlements of any Department.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: I would like to congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team on all their herculean efforts to get children back into schools, which is where they need to be. It is estimated that more than 2 million young people are behind in their education, so the additional funding is warmly welcomed. What guidance is he giving, for example, on extending the school day in secondary schools by 30 minutes, which would enable young people to catch up and teachers to catch up with teaching the curriculum, so that we do not have to reduce the impact of GCSEs or A-levels in examining what children have learned?

Gavin Williamson: As part of the advice that was worked up along with the Education Endowment Foundation, one of the key recommendations was looking at how to extend the school day and at provision on weekends, to support children who need that little bit of extra help and have a real impact on their educational attainment. All these measures can have an enormously positive effect. That is why we developed the £1 billion covid catch-up fund, so that schools have the ability to take such action.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): It is truly shocking that either the Government did not ask to see the A-level algorithm applied to real-world results, or they did ask to see it and did not notice that it hit pupils in disadvantaged schools the hardest. To understand what happened, will the Government publish details of the equality impact assessment that I am sure they conducted during the process that led to the original grading approach?

Gavin Williamson: One of the key reasons we took the decision to move to moderated grades in March was that many of the studies previously carried out showed that going to purely predicted grades was most likely to disadvantage those from the most disadvantaged communities and those from ethnic minority communities. That is what informed the approach. One of the key elements that I highlighted when I wrote to Ofqual was the need to ensure that those who are disadvantaged were not disadvantaged by any approach that was taken.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): We heard this morning that disadvantaged children and boys were likely to be most behind as a result of missed school. I also saw on the BBC a fantastically articulate child who said that she was anxious about going back school because she was fearful about how she would catch up. Can my right hon. Friend explain in greater detail when the tutorials that he is working so hard on with the Education Endowment Foundation will begin and what benefits children will see?

Gavin Williamson: We are working closely with the Education Endowment Foundation to ensure that those tutorials are rolled out through this academic year. All the studies point to the fact that the benefits that accrue to children are incredibly rapid, over quite a short period.

[Gavin Williamson]

Having small group tuition can deliver real leaps in learning within four to five months, so there is an immediate benefit from doing it, and that shows the urgency of bringing it forward. My right hon. Friend points to the slight trepidation of a child she saw on TV about returning to school. What we have seen across the board is that when children get to school, their faces light up, and the teachers are there to welcome them and are so keen to see them. That is what we want to see, and that is what we are seeing across the country. The benefits will be truly profound, not just for those children but much more widely in society.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: New research from the National Foundation for Educational Research reported that 98% of teachers believe that pupils are behind where they would normally expect them to be in the curriculum. Across the country, pupils have lost months of learning, and it is clear that many will need sustained support to catch up on the time lost. Can the Secretary of State tell me when those pupils will start to receive additional support from the catch-up premium and national tutoring fund?

Gavin Williamson: The national tutoring fund and the covid catch-up premium will be implemented for this coming academic year, so children get the benefit of it immediately.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): I pay tribute to the staff across the Aylesbury constituency for all the work they have done preparing for children to get back to class safely this week. Will my right hon. Friend set out what his Department is doing specifically to help support children with special educational needs and disabilities, particularly those who are in mainstream schools?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I join him in paying tribute to all those who work in the schools, nurseries and colleges across the Aylesbury constituency for the work they have been doing over the summer to welcome children back. We recognise that there are some unique challenges for children with special educational needs not just in the mainstream sector, but in special schools. This is why we have consistently provided targeted advice on how to support them, recognising that some of their needs are going to be extra for them and that schools are in the best position to be able to support them on their return.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab) [V]: Some BTEC students in my constituency have still to receive their grades. Qualifications such as those underpin the social mobility of some of our most disadvantaged students, 50% of whom got into university with at least one of them in 2018. Can the Secretary of State confirm when every BTEC student will receive their grades and what steps he will take to ensure that the life chances and career prospects of these students have not been fatally undermined?

Gavin Williamson: I know that the awarding organisation Pearson is working very closely with the centres where there are still some students who have not received their grades. This is something that occurs each year, and the number of youngsters who received their BTEC awards

was significantly higher than the previous year, but there are some centres where there continue to be some challenges. I know that Pearson is working closely with those centres to resolve them and ensure that those grades and qualifications are awarded as swiftly as possible.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It has been six months since many of our young children have been in school, and for many of us parents that means witnessing our children losing not just their educational opportunities, but their social development, so I congratulate the Department, the ministerial team and all in the sector on getting our schools open. It is the most important thing. The Secretary of State is aware that I have concerns about the use of face masks, but if that means we get the schools open, then so be it. Can we please keep that evidence under review, because it would be ideal if young children had the message that their school is safe and there is no encumbrance on their education?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend speaks incredibly passionately about the importance of ensuring that youngsters are in the best position to be able to learn in the best and most comfortable environment. We do not believe it is necessary for youngsters or people at school to wear face masks, except where we have made it mandatory in local lockdown areas. The chief medical officer and the deputy chief medical officer have been consistent in their approach—that this is not something needed in every school right across the country. Where people are not in local lockdown areas, there is no need to wear a face mask, but what is so important is to see all children welcomed back. That is what we will see over this next week, and I think the whole House joins me in thanking all the staff who have made that possible.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I think the World Health Organisation might disagree with what the Secretary of State has just said, but I want to reflect on the impact on universities and higher education. They are already feeling the impact of the lack of international students coming in to pay fees, and now funding extra places as a result of the regrading is also going to cost money. He talks about increasing capacity, but what that has to mean is increased funding, which of course, as Barnett consequentials, would be passed on north of the border to allow the Scottish Government to continue to do the same. What discussions is he having with the Treasury to make sure that universities are fully resourced throughout this crisis?

Gavin Williamson: I note the hon. Gentleman's comments about the World Health Organisation. He will no doubt have read the World Health Organisation's guidance, which mentioned areas of high transmission. I am aware that Aberdeen has had a local lockdown, but I certainly was not aware that the whole of Scotland was an area of high transmission. If World Health Organisation advice was followed, he would probably find that the measures need not have been applied right across Scotland, but that is obviously a devolved decision and I very much respect that. We continue to work right across the university sector with Universities UK. Obviously, funding follows English students as they go to university in all four corners of the United Kingdom, but we will continue to work with the devolved Administrations to ensure that the brilliant university sector continues to prosper in the future.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): I sincerely hope that no school in South Suffolk finds itself in full local lockdown at tiers 3 and 4, but I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has promised that all pupils will have access to remote learning if schools find themselves in that situation. Will he clarify a point? In partial lockdown—tier 2—where there is attendance by rota, would those pupils who were not attending physically also have the chance to participate in remote lessons?

Gavin Williamson: In what we would certainly hope to be a very unusual situation—whereby there was a local lockdown and where every other measure had been taken, including extra social distancing, and the closure of other businesses and facilities—we would then move to a tier 2 level. There is a clear expectation that in those circumstances, as was set out in the guidance on 2 July, there will be continuity of education, and youngsters—even if they are not in school, on a rota basis—would still be expected to be learning at home.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Secretary of State mentioned in his statement that there were far too many inconsistent and unfair outcomes for A-level and AS-level students and that it is not reasonable for these all to be dealt with, even through a boosted appeals system. Will he outline how he intends to provide additional support for students who wish to sit their exams to bring their grades up through no fault of their own, and will he cover the exam fees for those students?

Gavin Williamson: I can confirm that that is the case; we will cover those exam fees. We are looking at running the series in the autumn. Obviously, these are GCSE and A-level papers, some of which will be taken by Northern Ireland students, who use a number of the English boards to take more specialist subjects. We will be running this series in the autumn, and it is an important opportunity for young people if they want to take it up.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Some parents have raised issues about the quality of online learning for their children during the summer. Although I know that all schools in Gloucestershire are doing their best, I am struck by the campaign group “Sept. for Schools”, which has highlighted the discrepancies in online learning. Does my right hon. Friend agree with them and with me that it would help to create minimum quality thresholds for remote learning in all schools, with additional funds for digital disadvantage, so that pupils from whatever school—in Gloucester or elsewhere—will all get quality online learning whenever it is needed?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend raises an important point. This is why we set out in guidance a clear expectation of what is a minimum. As part of Ofsted’s inspection regime, it will be looking at the evidence to see what has been put in place to ensure continuity of education for children when there has been disruption to normal classroom learning.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): The postcode of where people are born should never limit where they end up in life; yet that is exactly how young people in Luton North felt when their results were downgraded. Some BTEC students have yet to receive their grades.

Does the Secretary of State truly understand the level of hurt that he has caused? And I will ask again, because I did not hear an answer earlier: when will BTEC students get the grades?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady tries to imply this was about postcodes. At no stage has the system been anything to do with postcodes, and it is misleading to imply otherwise. As one would expect, we have always aimed to ensure as much fairness in the system as possible; we have done that at every step of the way. On BTECs, I allude to the answer I gave a few moments ago. Where colleges are still awaiting final qualifications, it is usually because there is a gap in the final information that Pearson, the awarding organisation, needs to make the awards, but it has assured us it is making every effort to close that circle and ensure that all youngsters due a qualification receive one, once it gets all the information required.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): As many children and young people head back to school across Keighley and Ilkley in the coming days, they and their teachers, who have done an excellent job over the last few months, may naturally be concerned and have higher anxiety levels about going back. What measures is my right hon. Friend taking to support the mental health and wellbeing of children as they go back to school in the coming days?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I touched on it earlier in answer to another hon. Friend about the importance of going back to school not just for the educational benefits, but for physical and mental health. We recognise, however, that we have been living in extraordinary times, and that is why we have established a £9 million fund to help those youngsters and people who work in the sector to deal with mental health issues.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): As the furlough scheme comes to an end, there will almost certainly be a sharp rise in unemployment. Has the Secretary of State considered using this as a one-off opportunity to get a new generation of mature students into further and higher education so that when the economy does recover from the covid crisis, our workforce are fully skilled for the challenges that lie ahead?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Sadly, some people will be out of work as a result of this crisis. How do we retain that human capital and give them more skills to open up new opportunities, whether through the higher education sector or our further education colleges? Measures such as the skills toolkit we introduced for furloughed workers and the skills package the Chancellor announced before the summer recess are an investment in ensuring that not just young people but people of all ages can get the skills they need to succeed, skill up and get the best opportunities and jobs in the future.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): As I understand it, from what is reported, the overall results this year are 10% to 12% higher than they might have been if people had sat exams. I am thinking of next year’s cohort and particularly of those who have slipped their university

[Bob Stewart]

place to next year on their exam results this year. This will make it very difficult for people who might have got an A under this year's rules but get a B next year. There seems to be a measure of unfairness there that will have to be sorted out by universities and employers. Does the Secretary of State have any idea how we can equalise this apparent unfairness?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend highlights the challenges of competition between year groups and ensuring fairness across year groups. We will work with Ofqual and the whole sector to achieve that fairness because we do not want youngsters taking exams in 2021 to be disadvantaged in any way.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): What does the Education Secretary have to say to his friends the Scottish Conservatives? Just when he was copying the Scottish Government's approach to resolving the exams crisis, they were supporting a motion of no confidence in the Scottish Education Secretary, who was just doing what the Education Secretary was about to do. At any point, did they come to him and similarly ask him to consider his position? If they did not, would he like to comment on their consistency?

Gavin Williamson: One of the great pleasures that I have had over this period is working very closely with the Education Minister and Deputy First Minister, Mr Swinney. We have always tried to work together in a collaborative manner. We do recognise that there are some real shared challenges right across all four nations of the United Kingdom. What is clear is that, as a United Kingdom, we are so much stronger together, because the support that is there—whether it be job retention schemes or the extra £6 billion-plus towards universal credit—shows that every one of the four nations of the United Kingdom is richer and stronger as a result of a Union, which, sadly, the hon. Gentleman always wants to break up.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Government did the right thing in lifting the cap on places at medical and dental schools, but there is still a practical problem. Constituents like a number of mine are still waiting to know whether they will get places this year or have to defer. That is because the negotiations on funding have still not apparently been resolved between the schools and the Department of Health. Will my right hon. Friend tell his colleague the Secretary of State for Health as a matter of urgency that we need to give these young people, who are embarking on lengthy professional qualification courses and whose skills we desperately need, some certainty about when they are able to start their courses? It is a huge stress for them and their parents and hardly in the country's long-term interest.

Gavin Williamson: I would be more than delighted to meet my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to discuss this matter and ensure that we get as many young people as possible taking medical and dentistry degrees. We also want to consider how, if there is some expansion in the area, this can be something that is long term, by which I mean actually growing the

talent as much as possible within our own country, to support the NHS long into the future, as against bringing doctors from abroad to support the brilliant work of our NHS, which has so often been the case in the past.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that research from the National Foundation for Educational Research shows an increase of 46% in the gap between children from wealthy households and children from more deprived households. The Children's Commissioner estimated that 540,000 children would require a laptop because they did not have provision at home, but only 200,000 were supplied. In my question to the Secretary of State on 2 July, I asked why there were so few, why they were so late and why there was a discrepancy between the date I received in a written answer, which was mid-April, versus mid-May, which is when it was claimed that those laptops were actually ordered.

Gavin Williamson: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman because I do not quite recall the answer that I gave him in mid-April to his written question, but I will write to him with reference to that if he will be so gracious as to accept a letter. We saw the dispatch of more than 200,000 laptops, as well as additional devices for internet connectivity. We have ordered an additional 150,000 devices to support those communities that are most disadvantaged in terms of local lockdowns. This is one of the biggest purchases of computing equipment that the Government have undertaken, and I am sure he will understand that it is not feasible to procure that number of laptops and have them arrive within a week. They have to be procured and ordered and, as I am sure he will understand, there are some shipping delays. None the less, we have done it in good order and on time and when we said that we would do so.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): The Secretary of State rightly made mention of Ofqual's consultation over next year's exams that took place this summer. One idea that emerged was to increase optionality in written exams to help those students who would not have completed the full syllabus. Ofqual rejected that, arguing that students were "independent learners" and therefore did not need that assistance. Can he revisit that particular decision by Ofqual, because, in my view, it is far better to adjust the start of the exam process than the end of the exam process with the consequential impact on both college and university admissions?

Gavin Williamson: We have been looking at ways of reducing assessment burdens, but I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss in greater detail some of these thoughts and ideas.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: Education is rightly a devolved matter across the UK, but the past few weeks have shown that even good decisions taken in one jurisdiction can have knock-on effects on the others, on student flows across the UK and on the balance between higher and further education. Will the Secretary of State consider a more formal structure to engage the four education Ministers across the UK to ensure that lessons are learned and we can better prepare for other crises?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. He refers to the strength of the United Kingdom and of working together. I pay tribute to Peter Weir, the Northern Ireland Education Minister, who worked incredibly closely on some of the issues that all four nations of the United Kingdom have had to tackle. A co-ordinated approach across all four nations is important. What happens in one area has an impact on the other three. Ensuring that there is as much collaboration as possible, as is the tradition in the education sector, is vital if we are to get the best outcomes for all children and students in each of the four nations.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): My constituency has significant disparities in wealth, so I am concerned about the attainment gap that appears to be emerging between the affluent and the disadvantaged. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that we are doing everything to level up pupils from poor backgrounds?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is right to highlight this. It is why we made the unprecedented move of announcing the £1 billion covid catch-up fund back in June, recognising that there are some real challenges in communities, especially the most disadvantaged. We believe that it will have a direct impact on many of the youngsters in schools right across my hon. Friend's constituency.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Given the surge in demand for testing in Scotland related to the recent return of all children to full-time education there, which incidentally my family and I were part of last week, what engagement has the Secretary of State had with the Scottish Government to inform and mitigate a likely similar situation in England and support a successful safe return to learning?

Gavin Williamson: We are always learning right across the spectrum about some of the challenges that can occur. We had more than 1.6 million pupils back into school before the summer recess, and I am sure that that provided many lessons and benefits for the devolved nations in terms of what a safe return looked like for children.

The hon. Lady highlights the importance of having testing readily available. We have worked incredibly closely, hand in glove in fact, with Public Health England. The guidance that was developed, especially scientific and medical advice about how we ensure a safe return, has been informed by Public Health England, and it has collaborated with the public health authorities in Scotland. It is why we have test kits in every school. We recognise that not all youngsters—especially some of those from the most deprived families—will necessarily be in a position to access testing easily. We recognise how important it is that they have a test and return to school at the earliest moment possible.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Last week, I visited Inspire Suffolk in Ipswich with the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), the Children's Minister, to see the excellent work that they have done for their school holiday programme to help disadvantaged pupils stay engaged and motivated throughout the summer holiday. I welcome the significant DFE funding that is enabling Inspire Suffolk to run 1,700 sessions across Suffolk.

Will my hon. Friend commit to support charities such as Inspire Suffolk so that in future, as we tackle these challenges, we back charities that have a key role to play, in partnership with schools, in ensuring that our kids can catch up and get the support that they need?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend has raised this issue in the House before and has championed the work of holiday activity programmes across his constituency and more broadly. We have rolled out the holiday activity programme for a second year. We are looking at how we can do more and build on an incredibly successful programme. I would be happy to work with him and other organisations to see that delivered.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Regarding the departure of both his permanent secretary and the chair of Ofqual, when did the Education Secretary first realise that his handling of the examination debacle was so useless that other people's heads had to roll?

Gavin Williamson: At every stage, everyone, whether in Ofqual or the DFE—across the whole education sector—has been looking at how we ensure fairness and the very best for every child in this country. That is what we would all expect to see and that is what we have been doing. Yes, we did have to make changes, but the right thing to do was to make those changes, because fairness for young people is the most important thing for me and all those who work in education.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): May I join my right hon. Friend in commending everybody in schools and all they have done to ensure a full return this week and welcome the clear message that, if there were to be future localised outbreaks, all possible measures would come before restricting attendance in education? Will he outline some of the contingency planning going into that so that, even if there were to be disruption, education would still continue? Will he confirm that although IT and online lessons may be a part of what needs to be considered, it certainly is not all?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about how this is not just about IT; it is about ensuring that youngsters are supported at home in their learning and that can be done through so many means other than just through a laptop. However, we have made the commitment of rolling out and increasing the purchase of laptops by another 150,000 to ensure that, where communities are in local lockdown, schools who have children from the most deprived backgrounds have access to that resource. But that has to be an absolute last course of action we take, because we know that nothing substitutes for the learning a child gets through being in the classroom with their teachers and being inspired by those teachers, who are giving the enthusiasm to learn. That is why this Government will do absolutely everything we can do to ensure that schools remain open at every stage of our response to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I am afraid that this is just not good enough; the Secretary of State cannot wash his hands of responsibility for this summer's fiasco. I am afraid that it is worse than incompetence; it stems from his Government's obsession

[Lucy Powell]

with testing and grade inflation and their profound aversion to teacher assessment and coursework. So does he not agree that these are political, ministerial decisions, not bureaucracy? When will he take responsibility?

Gavin Williamson: I hate to remind the hon. Lady, but a Labour and Lib Dem Administration in Wales took the exact same policy decision on moderated grades, because of a belief that this was the fairest approach to ensure that there was a good standard of assessment and that youngsters got the grades they had worked for over the previous 11 or 13 years.

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): From speaking to teachers across my constituency this summer, I know that they share my passion for narrowing the attainment gap for children from more deprived areas. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend share his plans for ensuring that every child is given the best possible chance to achieve, regardless of where they are from?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend, who represents West Bromwich East, highlights exactly why we had to have the covid catch-up fund. It was because in so many constituencies such as hers youngsters from really deprived areas really need that extra support. That is why we have targeted that support in the way that is best going to assist them to do that catch-up. That is not just for years 10, 11, 12 and 13, but for youngsters right through the education system, to make sure they are in the best place to be able to succeed and to make sure that our agenda and our commitment to level up right across the country, on which we got elected back in December 2019, is something we deliver on.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Coming from the constituency that had the highest attainment gap, it is deeply troubling for me that research published today highlights the fact that the gap has increased by 46% in an education system in which disadvantaged young people already experience significant detriment. Does that not indicate that for this academic year and the next, a recovery curriculum should be put in place and end-of-year assessments adjusted away from exam-only assessment, so that inequalities are not entrenched and no young person is further disadvantaged?

Gavin Williamson: That is why we have introduced the covid catch-up fund: we recognise that there are challenges for youngsters who have missed out on learning and we need to make sure that we give schools and those youngsters the maximum amount of support so that they are able to catch up. One thing that is clear is

that the best form of assessment is always examination. Any other route is certainly less good than an exam route.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I welcome the fact that there is money in the tutoring fund for 16-to-19 providers, but sixth-form colleges such as St Brendan's in my constituency get less for pupils if they have to stay on for three years—perhaps because they are retaking GCSEs—than for pupils who just do the two years. Is it not time to rectify that anomaly and make sure that all pupils get the same funding, so that providers can give extra attention to those pupils who need it?

Gavin Williamson: The aim of the covid catch-up funding and the reason why we are covering across 16 to 19-year-olds is that we recognise the fact that youngsters of all ages have suffered as a result of coronavirus. I will take up the hon. Lady's point and write to her separately on her particular concerns about those youngsters who have to have a resit year and therefore do three years of study as against two years.

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): I had the pleasure of visiting Marshlands School in my Stafford constituency earlier this summer and was very impressed by the efforts of staff and Staffordshire County Council to support students during the pandemic. Will the Secretary of State outline today the steps that his Department is taking to assist children with special educational needs and disabilities, to ensure that they can return to school?

Gavin Williamson: First, I congratulate the schools in my hon. Friend's constituency and, of course, Staffordshire County Council on their work to ensure that there is a smooth opening of schools right across Staffordshire, as we are seeing throughout the country. We have been particularly careful to ensure that there is specialist guidance for special school settings because it is vital to ensure that every child has access to education. One decision that we took early on—we were one of the first nations in the world to do so—was to make sure that children who are vulnerable, including those with education, health and care plans, had access to continuity of education all the way through this crisis, because we recognise that some children with acute special needs, and their families, need support at every stage of the coronavirus pandemic.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Will those who are leaving the Chamber please take care? The sitting is suspended for three minutes.

5.53 pm

Sitting suspended.

Virtual participation in proceedings concluded (Order, 4 June).

Point of Order

5.56 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Earlier this afternoon, I asked a question of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about prevention of suicide, with reference to middle-aged men and today's Office for National Statistics figures. The Secretary of State replied briefly and started by saying that it was good to see suicide figures going down. Sadly, he was mistaken. The ONS figures published today show an increase over the previous year, particularly in the group to which I referred: middle-aged men. Can you advise me, Mr Deputy Speaker, how I can ensure that the record is corrected and whether you will request that the Secretary of State comes to the Chamber to correct the record?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the hon. Lady for advance notice of her point of order. I was not here for the statement, so I did not hear the question or the answer, but I would ask those on the Treasury Bench to bring that point of order to the attention of the Secretary of State. If he unintentionally made a mistake in the response that he gave, then I am sure that he will correct it in the normal way. Thank you.

Immigration (Health and Social Care Staff)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

5.58 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to grant indefinite leave to remain to health and social care staff; and for connected purposes.

It is fair to say that I did not appreciate that I would need the national health service and its medical staff to save my life until they did. When my hospital bed was surrounded by doctors and nurses in the middle of the night, talking in terms and about things that I was in too much pain and had too high a fever to understand, I did not stop to think about their visa status—and neither, fortunately, did they.

That was a while ago now, but sadly it is a feeling that has been all too common to too many people in this country—our families, our friends and even the Prime Minister—since covid-19 hit our communities this past spring. What has rightly mattered to all of us and all the staff is that people get the best care possible. I do not think it is stretching the point to say that it has felt at times that this country, like most of the world, has been at war with covid-19. Our hospitals and care homes have felt like this generation's frontline. Again, we have not stopped to think about anyone's visa status, and neither have they.

Our media these past few months have not been full of stories of foreign nationals in the NHS refusing to work because it is dangerous and puts their lives at risk. No; quite the opposite. What we have seen is row after row of pictures of NHS workers, many of them foreign nationals, who have lost their lives to this virus. We have seen their names; we have read their stories. The 57-year-old healthcare assistant who died on 14 April, and the 51-year-old dental nurse who trained in the Philippines before coming to Swansea and who died on the same day, were both on visas.

Earlier this summer, through the advocacy organisation EveryDoctor, I met someone who had been working on the frontline of this pandemic. A specialist in emergency medicine, he has lost colleagues and knows the daily strain of fighting to keep alive those people struggling to combat the virus, while never being completely sure whether he has been infected himself. He is a migrant. He has been working on the frontline, paying tax and national insurance to the Exchequer, working for us, contributing, but he will in time have to apply for a fresh visa and pay for it—£700.

One reason I find that difficult to accept is that I have been so immensely proud of the way our communities came out on their doorsteps every Thursday to applaud those working in our health and care sectors. I am sure that most, if not all, of us in this place took part. It was spontaneous; it was heartfelt; and it was moving—but was it enough? Will it be enough if we have to suffer this winter when, as is widely predicted, the virus returns? I think we all know that the answer to that question is no, it will not. There has to be more, and that has to be down to us in this place.

[Christine Jardine]

Our Government have not yet done enough, either for those born and brought up in this country or for those who have come here to work. For all those working in our NHS for the past year, there must surely be more recognition and thanks for putting themselves in harm's way. The virus has not discriminated in whom it attacks—we are all vulnerable; our black, Asian and ethnic minorities more than any other community—but what we are doing could be seen as discriminating in how we thank those who defend us. It is time we recognised properly the contributions that have been made.

To be fair, the Government have to some extent acknowledged that with their one-year visa extension for about 3,000 health and care staff with visas that are due to expire before 1 October—but why just 3,000, and why just for a year? Why not everyone? Why not indefinitely? Why are those who are doing vital frontline jobs excluded? What about the porters, cleaners and social care workers? Tell me where we would be without them now?

The biggest blow of all, I believe, is that even those who are included will be forced to renew their visas next year, and still have to pay that £700 each, or leave the country. We could lose them—people who have lived and trained in this country and contributed to our wellbeing; people who have helped to save lives and may one day help to save the lives of some of us. I believe that the UK should say loudly and unequivocally that those who have put their lives at risk for our country are welcome to live here. There is a precedent; we have done it before.

That anyone who has worked so hard to save lives during this emergency and put themselves at risk might one day be forced to leave should be unthinkable. Have we asked ourselves what will happen to the standard of care in this country if they are forced to leave? Where

will we find the staff we need—the doctors, nurses, porters and care home workers—if another wave hits and thousands of our valuable workforce have been forced to leave because we did not have the foresight or the compassion to help them to stay?

This country, all of us, will be the losers—our colleagues, our friends, our family. That is why the Liberal Democrats and other parties are fighting to give all existing health and care staff from other countries the right to stay in the UK with their families. That is why I am introducing this Bill to grant them and their families the right to settle here, without the costs or the bureaucratic hurdles that that usually involves. I also believe that this view is widely held in this House and that it has the support of MPs from other parties. Indeed, in the steps they have taken so far, the Government have indicated that they too recognise the contribution made by so many migrants, so I appeal to them to go a step further and support this move.

Let us send out a message that we recognise, value and appreciate the work that so many people have done for us all. This proposal would be a small way to recognise and celebrate the enormous contributions that people from all over the world make to our national health service and to our society, our economy and the wellbeing of our communities—and for, potentially, each and every one of us.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Christine Jardine, Sir Edward Davey, Wendy Chamberlain, Sarah Olney, Munira Wilson, Jamie Stone, Mr Alistair Carmichael, Caroline Lucas, Mr Virendra Sharma, Jim Shannon, Liz Saville Roberts and Bell Ribeiro-Addy present the Bill. Christine Jardine accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 October, and to be printed (Bill 170).

Fisheries Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I should say that the amendment in the name of Ian Blackford and others has been selected.

6.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Fishing is at the heart of coastal communities the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, from the Shetland Islands all the way down to Cornwall and some of the communities that I represent. Across the UK, the seafood sector employs about 33,000 people in often dangerous work, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all our fishermen, who risk the perils of the sea to bring fish to our tables, and, in particular, to remember the six fishermen who sadly lost their lives last year.

Of course, the industry has also been hit hard by the impact of the coronavirus on the export of fish, but once again, our resilient fishing communities have shown real ingenuity by finding new ways to sell fresh fish direct to our doors. However, the common fisheries policy has long been seen by these coastal communities as a policy that symbolised the unfairness of our EU membership and the failure of EU policy. It has granted uncontrolled access to UK waters for EU vessels. It has given the European Commission the legal right to trade UK fishing interests during international negotiations with our neighbours such as Norway and the Faroes, and the principle of relative stability has set in stone an anachronistic methodology for sharing quota dating back to the 1970s, which is profoundly unfair to the UK fleet and does not reflect the quantity of fish found in British waters.

For example, under relative stability, we receive just 10% of the overall quota for Celtic sea haddock, but our zonal attachment analysis suggests that our share should be around 50%. Overall, the UK fishing industry currently has access to just around half of the fishing opportunities that are in our waters, and that cannot be right. The CFP has also failed our marine environment. The misallocation of fishing opportunities combined with ill-conceived technical measures and a cumbersome decision-making process that is slow to correct errors, have all taken their toll on the health of our marine environment and the resources in our waters.

As we leave the European Union, we have the opportunity for the first time in almost half a century to correct these shortcomings. The Bill before the House today gives the UK the powers that it needs to chart a new course as an independent coastal state. It gives us the powers we need to implement the approach that we outlined in our fisheries White Paper published in 2018. The Bill sets out in statute the environmental and scientific principles and objectives that will inform future policy. It creates a legal requirement for a joint fisheries statement across the UK Administrations relating to those objectives, and it creates a legal requirement for the preparation of a series of fisheries management plans to ensure that continuous progress towards our objectives is secured.

The Bill also gives us the power to control access by individual foreign vessels to our exclusive economic zone. This includes the power to stipulate, through a vessel licence, where in our EEZ a vessel may fish, when it may fish there, what fish it may catch while there and what type of fishing gear it may or may not use. The ability to control and manage access to our waters will be crucial to ensuring that a fairer sharing arrangement prevails in future.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I suspect, I have received emails from campaigners calling for a ban on supertrawlers in UK countries' fisheries' waters. My understanding is that there is no UK-registered super-trawler. I suppose that many citizens will be perplexed as to why there is no mention of this in the Bill. Is it not the reality that these provisions will be made in future trade deals rather than in legislation coming from this House?

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in that the Bill does provide the powers for us to exclude all these trawlers through the licence conditions that we have, and that is not affected at all by any trade deals. The reason the super-trawlers are there at the moment is that they are allowed to be under EU law. Some of them are registered in countries such as, for instance, Lithuania. Under EU law, they are allowed to fish in our waters and there is nothing we can do about it. If the House passes this Bill, we will be able to exclude those vessels if that is our choice.

The Bill also gives us the power to modify and introduce technical conservation measures relating to matters such as the type of fishing gear that can be used and other requirements relating to equipment or area-based restrictions that help to conserve our marine environment and preserve stocks.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Minister talks about the welfare of fishermen. Apostleship of the Sea tells me that the industry after Brexit will be just as reliant, perhaps even more reliant, on non-European Economic Area nationals. They enter this country, or this industry, under a very opaque system that almost pretends they are not there. As a result, they have no rights and are often abused in the workplace. After Brexit, can we ensure that we work with the fishing industry and other regulatory mechanisms to ensure that these people are properly cared for and we have a robust visa system?

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. He is right that there is, in some sections of the fleet, quite a reliance on non-EEA crews. This issue has been raised. Of course, as we leave the European Union, we will also have an independent immigration policy. The issue that he addresses is very much one for the Home Office and for future immigration policy. But of course, as an independent country, we are free to make changes that we deem necessary or appropriate.

I know that there will be a great deal of interest in the House in the ongoing negotiations with the European Union and whether a future partnership agreement will include a fisheries partnership agreement. However, I would say to hon. Members that it is very important today to focus on the contents of this Bill. The powers in this Bill will be needed whether or not there is a

[George Eustice]

further negotiated outcome on a future partnership with the European Union. The Bill does not prescribe a particular outcome but gives us the powers that are needed irrespective of that outcome.

I turn now to some of the specific clauses. The objectives set out in clause 1 range from the ecosystems objective and the scientific evidence objective to the newly introduced climate change objective, putting sustainability at the heart of a new framework for managing our fisheries. As we become an independent coastal state, we are taking back control of fisheries in the UK's exclusive economic zone and leaving behind the outdated common fisheries policy, so clauses 12 to 19 end the automatic access to UK waters for EU vessels. As I said earlier, there has long been an historic injustice in the sharing arrangements set in stone under relative stability. However, the CFP has also previously prevented us from extending certain technical conservation measures required of our own vessels to EU vessels accessing our waters. Schedule 2 extends to foreign vessels for the first time the technical statutory instruments that protect, for instance, undersized or vulnerable stocks.

Clauses 38 and 40 propose powers to bring forward secondary legislation to introduce technical measures for fisheries and to ensure aquatic animal health. Those powers are essential so that we can make timely changes and adaptations to policy, to reflect a changing marine environment. The powers will enable us to follow the latest scientific evidence on fish stocks, respond to technological innovation and make our data collection more effective.

We will be working with the industry, scientists and local communities to develop a more transparent fishing management policy that will help us to achieve healthy fish stocks and a diverse marine ecosystem. The marine environment is complex, and we will make science and sustainability a core component of our approach. We remain committed to ending the wasteful discarding of fish at sea, and we will use a range of tools to ensure that the landing obligation works in practice, as well as in theory, including through the prevention charging scheme, which is introduced under clauses 30 to 34.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that using our own landing obligation will stop fishermen having to basically tie up because of the silly CFP by-catch rule?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend is a long-time expert in fisheries policy, with direct experience of all the difficulties and shortcomings of the CFP, and she makes an important point. We have a particular problem, due to the unfair sharing arrangements under relative stability, of what is called choke species affecting our fleet, where there simply is not enough quota for fishermen to even be able to land their by-catch. As she says, the lack of quota for choke species causes a risk that the fleet has to tie up because they simply do not have the quota available to them. We set out in our White Paper a fairer sharing arrangement, so that there will be fewer choke species, but also an approach to managing discards that will enable us to charge a disincentive charge on fishermen who land out-of-quota stock, rather than force them to discard it at sea in a very wasteful way—so we remove

the incentive to target vulnerable species but give fishermen left in a difficult position an option that they can exercise.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Will the Bill allow us to give grant aid to fishermen to have more selective fishing tackle, to enable them to not catch the choke species that cause these problems?

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. I know that he was involved in crafting some of these measures during his time in DEFRA, and I can confirm that those measures remain in place. We have powers in the Bill to make grant payments to fishermen, in particular to support them in fishing in a more sustainable way and investing in the gear that enables them to do that. I was about to come on to that point.

As we plan for our future, we need to recognise the immense value of fishing to our local communities, and we want to ensure that our own industry is able to benefit from the new opportunities that will arise. The powers in clause 35 mean that we can set up new funding schemes and grants to support the development of port infrastructure, the development of our fishing industry and its capacity to manage an increased catch and to manage those sustainability issues.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is, of course, important that we look to the future. Some 95% of the Welsh fishing fleet is under 10 metres in size, and it is essential that, with this Bill, we ensure that they, too, can gain an advantage from this. Will the Secretary of State consider the potential of the quota reserve in enabling that small fleet to go after different species and thus ensure diversity and a more prosperous economic future for Welsh coastal communities?

George Eustice: The right hon. Lady raises an important point. We have, over the past five years, significantly increased the amount of quota in the inshore pool managed by the Marine Management Organisation to give increased fishing opportunities to the under-10 metre fleet, but we want to go further. Indeed, the White Paper sets out our approach to doing that. In the short-term, we will not depart from the fixed-quota-allocation sharing mechanism that we have with vessels, but any new quota that comes as we depart from relative stability will be allocated in a different way. We have said that it is our intention to use some of that increased inward quota to increase opportunities for the inshore fleet.

The fisheries management plans in clauses 6 to 9 will provide a comprehensive framework to manage stocks in a way that respects the devolution settlements and improves accountability. The Bill also sets out, in clause 45, the extension of competence for Senedd Cymru in relation to fisheries to the Welsh offshore zone. That will allow Welsh Ministers to manage the full extent of Welsh waters in future.

My officials have been working closely with all the devolved Administrations. Their collaboration on the Bill has improved it. In fact, on fisheries, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has always worked closely with the devolved Administrations. Each December, the UK delegation, in annual fisheries

negotiations, is supported by Ministers from all the devolved Administrations. Ministers may come from different political parties, but we all work together to secure the best outcome for the UK fleet. I welcome the fact that the Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have all indicated that they are happy with the Bill.

I turn now to some of the issues debated in the other place and the amendments that were made there. Our view is that we must avoid the pitfalls of the cumbersome common fisheries policy. That is why, in Committee, the Government will be seeking to remove overly prescriptive amendments to the Bill made in the other place. Although they were well intentioned, they risk becoming counterproductive in practice. We must maintain the flexibility required to develop domestic policy tailored to the needs of the United Kingdom without creating complexity or uncertainty. We owe it to our fishermen and coastal communities to help them to benefit further from the fish caught and landed in UK waters as we take back control. We will therefore seek to overturn clause 18, which is unnecessary in the light of the national benefit objective already set out in clause 1 and which reduces the flexibility we currently have in using licence conditions to implement an economic link. The fisheries White Paper made clear that we will be reviewing the economic link conditions in England. The Government are committed to doing so.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): On that particular point, the Minister is quite right in that what has motivated local communities so much for Brexit is the need for them to gain benefit from that. The economic link is vital for that. Can he perhaps set out when the Government will complete their review of the economic link?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes a good point. As with all the work we are doing, this work is under way and we will be consulting the industry on it. I am not in a position today to give him an actual date for the completion of that work, but I can assure him—I know he has been a long-time campaigner on this issue—that we take this issue very seriously. We do want to strengthen the economic link. That is likely to include requirements on vessels to land more of their catch in UK ports. However, we have to proceed with some caution because the right economic link will vary depending on the species of fish. It is important that we do not inadvertently deny fishermen the ability to sell their fish at the best possible price by requiring them to land everything in the UK. That is why some balance has to be struck.

We will seek to remove clause 27 because a proportion of quotas is already guaranteed to the under-10 metre fleet and neither will the drafting of the clause address the need to attract new entrants. We will also be seeking to overturn clause 48, which is unnecessary and too prescriptive. We already have powers to increase the use of remote electronic monitoring, which we will be able to do once we have a greater understanding of how it would be deployed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister referred to the viability of the under-10 metre fleet, which is very important to us in Northern Ireland. Just last week, the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation gifted an extra quota to the under-10 metre fleet to enable it,

with the help of Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland, to continue to be viable. As the Minister rightly says, it takes all the devolved Administrations, across the whole United Kingdom, to work together on behalf of those fleets, which is why the way in which this is managed locally is so important.

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I know that fishing in Northern Ireland is particularly important to some communities, particularly when it comes to nephrops, and he is right that it has been a long-standing practice that producer organisations with unutilised quota will often gift some of it to the under-10s so that they have access to more fishing opportunities. In the longer term, it is important that we have a better framework to ensure that inshore vessels do not necessarily have to wait for a gift of quota, but have access to a fairer share of the quota in the first place.

We will also be seeking to overturn an amendment made to clause 1 that would seek to create a hierarchy in the objectives. We think this is unnecessary and unhelpful. Environmental objectives have already been given a degree of priority through the requirement for fisheries management plans, which is how we have addressed that issue.

In conclusion, I have always been clear that the UK will continue to be a world leader in promoting sustainable fisheries, so that we stop hammering vulnerable stocks and think about the longer-term future of our marine environment. We must follow the science, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our fisheries science agency, CEFAS—the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science—which is home to some of the world's most talented marine scientists. There are wonders swimming around our shores—some 8,500 different species. As an island nation, the UK can show the world that a better approach can deliver more balance, profitable fisheries and an enhanced marine environment. This Bill sets in stone our commitment to improve the health of our seas and gives fishermen the better future they deserve. This Fisheries Bill gives us the powers we need to do all these things as an independent coastal state for the first time in decades, and I commend it to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Before I call Luke Pollard, I want to indicate that a six-minute limit will be put on all non-Front-Bench contributions from the very beginning, and it is likely to be reduced further.

6.27 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It gives me great pleasure to respond to the Bill on behalf of the Opposition on its second outing in the Commons. Our fishers risk their lives every day to bring home food for us all. It is not a profession that comes without risk, and I join the Secretary of State in taking a moment to remember the six fishers who did not come back after their trips to sea last year.

Fishing matters to me. It matters to the people of Plymouth who I represent, with 1,000 jobs in the city, and to coastal communities across our four nations. Fishing is knitted into our national identities and our culture, our local flavours and, of course, our coastal economies. Recreational fishing—now larger than commercial fishing in GDP terms—matters to even

[*Luke Pollard*]

more people. Labour will be supporting the Bill, defending the enhancements made in the Lords and proposing further necessary provisions.

Peter Aldous: The hon. Gentleman touches on a good point when he mentions recreational fishing. I think we have all received representations from the Angling Trust, but does he agree that, with the pandemic and more staycations, the opportunity for sea angling to bring real benefits to our coastal communities is crystal clear?

Luke Pollard: I do agree. There is a real opportunity in the waters around the south-west for a catch and release bluefin tuna fishery, for instance—it is a shame that DEFRA did not quite agree with me on that one—and there is certainly a real case for more support for the charter boat sector, which has been denied much of the support that it should have had throughout the coronavirus.

Fishing is a policy area where up to now soundbites have often triumphed over substance and where dogma has often won out over detail. That must end now, because fishers in our coastal communities cannot feed their families on soundbites and vague Government promises. Fishing needs to be more sustainable, both economically and environmentally. We need not only a fishing net zero approach and better management of lost fishing gear to stem the plastic pollution that it causes; we also need a replacement plan for dirty diesel engines, and better science to inform better quota decisions to protect fish stocks and jobs. Fishing needs a strategy to widen employment, to make fishing a career of choice for more young people in our coastal communities. It needs new methods and quota allocation to encourage new entrants, and a firm focus on viability and sustainability.

We know that coronavirus has hit fishers hard. The closure and disruption of export markets, the throttling of imports, the closure of restaurants and cafés and the huge drop in prices have made going to sea unprofitable for many of our fishers. The help for fishers that Labour argued for eventually came, but it took too long to come, and sadly it excludes some of the most innovative projects, such as the brilliant Call4Fish initiative that I have spoken to the Secretary of State about. DEFRA needs to learn the lessons here. It needs to look again at how it raided fishery support funding pots to pay for those schemes and at what the long-term cost to the industry will be of those pots having been raided.

Just as fish do not respect national boundaries, so our fishing sector is cross-border, too. I support the move to zonal attachment from relative stability, which is an outdated method. There is a real case for that change. We import two thirds of the fish we eat and we export two thirds of the fish we catch. We do not eat enough locally caught fish, and our diets have been calibrated over decades to eat more of what is caught around Iceland and Norway than the wondrous ocean harvest of our own waters. We need to change that. That is why there can be no new delays at the border, no new burdensome customs checks and no new expensive Government red tape in implementing these and any future trade deals. We need to ensure that we can import and export as well as celebrating the fish in our own waters.

Mrs Murray: The hon. Gentleman seems to be promoting a link between a trade deal and the share and access to our waters. Is that what he is actually saying?

Luke Pollard: I thank my neighbour for that question. I know this is a point that she raises frequently, but it is probably one that she needs to raise with the Government rather than with the Opposition. We want to see our fishers supported, and I want to ensure that they get a greater and fairer share of quota.

Compared with the previous version, this Bill has thankfully been much improved, in part by Ministers adopting many of the amendments that Labour proposed in Committee during the Government's first attempt at this legislation. I am glad that Ministers have taken the time to reflect on their decision to vote down those Labour amendments, and I am glad that this time round the Bill includes as much Pollard as it does pollock. I am sure we can agree that it is a good demonstration of constructive opposition.

I also want to note the improvements to the Bill that were passed by the Lords and in particular to thank Baroness Jones of Whitchurch for her efforts in the other place. The question now, which the Secretary of State has answered, is whether he will see fit to accept those amendments that improve the Bill. It is especially sad that he is choosing to reject the sustainability amendments and those that would generate more jobs in our coastal communities.

Jim Shannon: I respect the hon. Gentleman greatly, and he knows that, but does he not accept that the fishing sector wants a sustainable industry for the future and that, to achieve that, we need the co-operation of the sector? Does he acknowledge that the sector does not want the amendments that have come from the House of Lords?

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that mention. I think he is choosing to call the fishing sector one single sector, but he knows as well as I do that the fishing sector has multiple sectors with different catches, different gears and different fishing approaches in different parts of our coastal waters. I know that not all fishers share the view that he has just put forward, because they have told me so.

This is a framework Bill, so it is necessarily light on detail, but it does offer a centralisation of powers with the Secretary of State and does not deliver the coastal renaissance that it should have done. Ten years of austerity have hit our coastal communities hard, and now covid-19 means that we are standing on the precipice of a new jobs crisis, the likes of which we have not seen since the 1980s. The decline of fishing ports is a story told the nation over, but it does not have to be this way. Even before we see whether the promise of more fish from the Government will be delivered, more jobs could be created if Ministers were to use the powers they already have. I believe in British fishing. Growing the fleet, making fishing more sustainable and creating more jobs can all happen with improvements to this Bill.

Let me turn to the jobs in coastal communities amendment—clause 18—which the Secretary of State says he wishes to remove. I believe that if we catch fish under a British quota, Britain should benefit from that

fish in terms of jobs and trade. I want to back our British ports to create more jobs and land more fish in Britain. Labour's jobs in coastal communities amendment, which passed with cross-party support in the Lords, would establish a new national landing requirement, whereby two thirds of fish caught under a UK quota must be landed in UK ports. That would mean more jobs created in Grimsby, Plymouth, Newlyn, Portavogie, Brixham and Fleetwood, to name but a few. There are 10 jobs on land for every one job at sea, so landing more fish in Britain is a jobs multiplier.

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): Does the hon. Member agree that making it essential that people have to land their fish in the UK is actually detrimental to the industry, because UK fishers in the industry need to be able to land where they will get the better price?

Luke Pollard: I hear that argument, but I also hear that it is not in support of British ports when landing more fish could create more jobs, and I think we need to think about what benefit will be gained from leaving the common fisheries policy. If there is an argument for only supporting those with fish caught under a UK quota and landed in foreign ports, creating jobs in foreign ports, that is an argument the hon Member is free to make, but it is not one that will be made by the Opposition.

Labour's jobs in coastal communities amendment is designed to ensure that whether the boat is Dutch, Spanish, French, actually British or just flagged that way, boats fishing under a UK quota would be required to land the majority of their fish in British ports. This would create a jobs boom for fish markets, processors, fuel sellers, boat repairers and distributors. With the virus, the recession and the consequences of austerity, could our coastal communities not do with more jobs? I hope the Government will agree with that, not continue to support fish being landed in foreign ports and not creating jobs in our communities.

Mr Goodwill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Luke Pollard: No. I am going to make some progress, because I have gone on for some time.

The backbone of British fishing is our small boat fleet. These boats and businesses are the ones the British public want to see benefit most from our exit from the common fisheries policy. While industrial fishing has its place, I make no apology for wanting a fairer share for our small fishers. With just 6% of the quota, the small boat fleet has two thirds of the jobs, and I think it could have more quota. Reallocating quota along social, economic and environmental grounds, even if just 1% or 2% of the total catch were to be reallocated, could increase what small boats can catch by 25%. This is the second jobs multiplier that Labour has proposed in this Bill. It would be huge for our small boat fleet, helping to give them a platform to invest in new gear and boats and to hire more crew.

Such rebalancing could easily be absorbed by the big foreign-owned boat operators within the current range of variation of total allowable catch, yet this is a policy yet again opposed by the Conservative party. I know the largest fishing companies, mostly foreign-owned, are strong supporters of the Conservative party, but, to borrow a phrase, Labour's policy is for the many fishers,

not the few. I hope Tory MPs will not be looking at their feet as the Whips demand total loyalty to Downing Street and require them to vote this amendment down when the time comes, because our fishing communities need a strong voice in Westminster, not just more Whips' instructions at the expense of coastal towns.

Labour will be tabling an amendment to ban supertrawlers pillaging Britain's marine protected areas. The Greenpeace campaign on this issue has attracted the signatures of a number of Ministers, but, sadly, of not a single DEFRA Minister. Labour will table an amendment to ban supertrawlers of over 100 metres fishing in marine protected areas. Britain has not one supertrawler of over 100 metres, so Ministers and Conservative Members have an easy choice to make: whether they are on the side of British fishers or foreign-owned industrial supertrawlers, harvesting huge quantities of fish and plundering the very habitats that Britain regards as special. I hope that would be an easy decision, but we will have to see.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): My understanding was that the Secretary of State has already said that the whole purpose of this Bill is to ban supertrawlers, because supertrawlers are actually allowed under EU law, not laws that we want to introduce.

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Member for that. I am not sure it is the main purpose of the Bill, but it is certainly a power that the Secretary already has. One of the key things about the amendments that Labour has tabled is that they are about using powers that the Minister already has. Whether or not there is more fish from any negotiations with the EU in the future, these are powers that the UK Government—the Conservative Government—could use today if they chose to do so. They do not need to wait until after 31 December or for the passing of this Bill. It is in requiring them to use the powers that they have chosen not to use that we are making our case for this provision. There is a good case for banning supertrawlers of over 100 metres from fishing in marine-protected areas; Ministers should have acted already, and there is an opportunity to put this in law here.

Peter Aldous *rose*—

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con) *rose*—

Luke Pollard: I am going to make some progress, because I only have limited time and I do not want to take time away from people at the end of the call list; apologies.

On safety, progress is being made towards making fishing safer, but much work still needs to be done. I want to see fishers wearing lifejackets all the time that come as standard with personal locator beacons, which take the search out of search and rescue when boats go down or fishers are washed overboard. I want more work on stability, especially for smaller boats when they change gear. Remote vessel monitoring and CCTV on board—another amendment won in the Lords—will help to ensure that fishing stays within the law, but will also incentivise fishers to wear a lifejacket and come home safely to their families after each trip. I know that this is a cross-party concern, and I commit Labour to working constructively to help to save more lives, as we have in recent years.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I endorse what the hon. Gentleman says with regard to safety at sea, but there is another aspect to this issue that has become apparent to me recently, through the activities of the *Persora Dos*—a Spanish gillnetter that was quite reckless in its conduct off the shores of Shetland recently, endangering the lives of the crew of the *Alison Kay*. The UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency was powerless to investigate that incident because it happened outside the 12-mile limit. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me, and will he support in Committee moves to extend the jurisdiction of the MCA to a 200-mile limit?

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Member. I recall during the last Fisheries Bill Committee making the case that foreign boats in UK waters should be adhering to the same safety standards as UK boats. That is an argument that we can pick up in Committee this time around.

I want briefly to look at the quota allocations. In support of zonal attachment rather than relative stability, we need to recognise that this is a complex case. There are fishers with complex historical catch records; that needs to be looked at. That is why we need to make a clear case about how the fishing quota will change over time. Labour has proposed a phased draw-down period, not a rush to reallocate quota. That would give British fishers the chance to invest in new gear and recruitment, as well as giving time—if there is transfer from our EU friends—for those boats to be decommissioned and the workers retrained. Allocating quota in contested waters where there are complex fishing records is difficult, and it is an issue that will require careful negotiation with our EU friends. I want to flag to the Minister that British fishing needs continued access to distant waters to preserve current activities, because it is worth nothing that not all British fishers fish in British waters.

I realise that my time is running out, so let me briefly say that to achieve any of these grand promises made to fishing—not just the ones that have already been broken by Ministers, such as the solemn pledge that fishing would not be in the transition period—we need Ministers to keep to their word and stick to their timetables. Today the Government are a whole two months late on the new fisheries agreement. It was meant to be concluded by 1 July, according to the boasts of their so-called oven-ready deal. We know that the Government think that there are serious concerns about

“illegal fishing, border violations...violent disputes or blockading of ports”

in the event of no deal. What additional resources has the Minister discussed with the Ministry of Defence for allocating to the Royal Navy to protect our fishers, and why is there nothing in the Bill to express the concerns around enforcement?

I want to see more fish landed in British ports, more of it processed here and more of it eaten here. I encourage Members to set an example by buying, eating and promoting local fish. Will the Minister tell the House whether zero tariffs will continue to apply to fish imported from Iceland, Norway and the Faroes? If so, what additional support will be given to our domestic industry?

What are the Government's plans to incentivise processors to process more UK-caught fish? How will they encourage the biggest players—the supermarkets—to put more

British fish on their shelves? I would like to see Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, M&S, Waitrose, Asda, Lidl, Aldi and the Co-op selling more British fish. I read out their names deliberately because I would like them to write to MPs to set out how they will sell more British fish, because that is a decision that they can take. We do not need Ministers to take it for them; that can be done by supermarkets and there is a case for their doing that.

Labour will support the Bill while proposing and defending the necessary improvements. It is a shame that the SNP is, with its amendment, playing politics with the Bill. Mock constitutional outrage will not feed the families of fishers in Peterhead or Fraserburgh, and nor would blocking the Bill at this stage help to put in place the legal certainty necessary after 31 December. I say to the SNP that the Government are quite capable of messing this up all by themselves; they do not need the help of the SNP's amendment. For that reason, Labour MPs will not back the SNP amendment this evening.

On behalf of the fishers I represent in Plymouth and those for whom I speak in my shadow Cabinet role—the fish processors, distributors, merchants, chefs and scientists—I say that we need a Fisheries Bill that is focused on sustainability, viability and a better future for our coastal communities than we have seen for the past decade. We will not oppose the Bill, but we will argue strongly to defend the improvements made to the Bill in the Lords, to insert a new focus on creating jobs in fishing and to ensure that fishing is truly sustainable.

6.46 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate and to very much welcome the Bill. In 2017, the previous Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ran an inquiry on fisheries, focusing on the fisheries White Paper and the Fisheries Bill of 2018. The new Bill is largely the same and I welcome it because it takes back control of our fishing policy from the EU, which is something we have been trying to do for years. It will give Ministers and our devolved Administrations the power to decide fishing policy as an independent coastal state for the first time in more than 45 years.

If we implement the Bill and negotiate well with the EU and our other trade partners, fishing can be one of the great benefits of Brexit. In coastal communities such as mine in Devon, people write to me about the sell-out of our fishing communities in 1972, because it hurt their businesses and our towns and coastal communities. The Government are therefore right to drive a hard bargain on fisheries, because people really care about it. It is of social and economic importance to see the regeneration of our coastal communities after Brexit, and there is a huge benefit to catching more fish and then processing and eating it here.

Our fishing sector employs more than 25,000 people and around 18,000 work in the fish-processing industry. Most of our fisheries businesses are small family businesses, with more than 80% employing fewer than five people. These businesses are expecting a great boom from Brexit, so I hope Ministers are mindful; otherwise, perhaps they might be on the hook, too. There is great scope for growth under new fishing arrangements and I hope that UK negotiators will hold firm.

The UK has a very large fishing zone compared with many of our continental neighbours. Under the common fisheries policy, EU fishermen benefit hugely from reciprocal access to UK waters. In 2015, for example, EU vessels caught some 683,000 tonnes in UK waters, raising some £484 million in revenue, but UK vessels caught only 111,000 tonnes in EU member states' waters, raising £114 million in revenue. That means that EU vessels benefit by a ratio of 6:1 under the common fisheries policy. It is time to put that right. We need to rebalance things and reduce EU vessels' access to a more sustainable level. Of course, EU vessels will need to have fair access, but not at the same level as they have under the CFP. We need to get British fishing rights back.

If we grant access to EU vessels, we need to make sure that our fishing businesses can still sell into Europe as part of the deal. About 70% of fish and 85% of shellfish caught in the UK is exported to EU countries, but although we export most of the fish we catch, we import the same amount; between 70% and 80% of the seafood consumed in the UK is imported, with only about 30% of that coming from the EU. The fish we eat most comes from distant waters, not from UK waters. Cod, haddock, salmon, prawns and others are abundant in the northern waters between Norway and Greenland, and more than 80% of the cod and haddock we eat comes from those waters, so I hope that Ministers are also looking carefully at that. While negotiations with the EU are taking all the headlines, we need also to make sure that we have new deals in place with Norway, the Faroes and Greenland so that our businesses can access those waters.

On sustainability, we must remember that many fish stocks move between national waters and, because there is common access to them, they are at risk of being over-exploited. The Government are therefore right to put sustainability at the heart of the Bill. When we leave the common fisheries policy at the end of this year, we will have more control over our waters. That will be good for our environment but also for our local fishing industries and coastal communities, which will benefit from a greater cap, particularly for the under-10 metre fleet.

The Government are also wise to look at the Norway model for fishing. Norway has far greater control over its waters and acts quickly to shut down areas of overfishing and to open up others. The Bill is a great opportunity to ensure that we can operate a more dynamic fisheries management system that can respond rapidly to changing circumstances and science.

The Bill is a significant opportunity to deliver a much needed revival for coastal communities and small-scale fishers, and I greatly welcome the direction of travel that DEFRA Ministers have set. It is also a great opportunity to put right the fact that we have discarded, over so many years, so many millions of tons of healthy fish. We have an opportunity now to make sure that we catch what we land, so that fishermen will target the fish that they can catch and sell, and we do not have that huge waste of resource in the future. The Bill is a great opportunity to realise a huge benefit from Brexit and to ensure not only that we catch more fish but that we and our coastal communities prosper from this extremely good legislation.

6.52 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Fisheries Bill [Lords] before it is clear what kind of deal will be made with the EU after the end of the implementation period and because the present approach of the Bill fails to secure a long-term sustainable future for the industry balancing the interests of the environment, the consumer and the producers of this industry which is so vital to the prosperity of fishing ports in Scotland, Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom.

It is always interesting to debate a Bill that comes from the unelected part of this Parliament, which is an unusual concept in a state that likes to imagine it is a democracy, but this Brexit Bill—one of many—will not, in actuality, offer the much heralded control of our waters that the Brexiters claimed it would.

As Lord Hain said during a debate on amendments to the Bill, failure to reach an agreement with the EU by the end of this year will mean that control of the waters around these islands is governed by

“the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—UNCLOS—which requires co-operation and efforts to agree rules on access to waters, as well as setting catch limits and standards on conservation and management of marine resources.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 June 2020; Vol. 804, c. 26.]

That of course means that historical access to fishing grounds enjoyed by fleets from other nations will become part of the new framework, just as it became part of the common fisheries policy.

The sensible solution, of course, is to ensure that there is a deal in place before the end of this year, but the EU will seek to protect the fishing interests of its member states, so that will mean that those foreign fleets have access to our waters. Round and round it goes.

If there is no deal, the very important seafood fisheries will be denied access to their most important market: the EU. Given that those fisheries represent a substantial part of the employment in some smaller coastal communities, that is a very worrying prospect. It is not only bad news for them, though. Boats sailing from ports here will be denied access to waters that they currently access as part of the EU, including, as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) mentioned, waters outwith the EU that we currently have agreements to fish in as a result of EU membership. It is a bourach, so it is, and it threatens jobs, income and the very survival of some communities.

Of course foreign boats will still have access to our waters, as the current Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made clear when he was at DEFRA. Three years ago, Danish newspapers were reporting him telling representatives of the Danish fleet that they would have access, and, at about the same time, diplomats were telling the Iberian fleets that they would have access. I acknowledge that clause 17 appears to give the Scottish Government the right to control fishing in Scottish waters and the same rights to the Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments, but that is completely undermined by clause 12, which says that a

“foreign fishing boat must not enter British fishery limits”

unless it has a licence, except if there is

“a purpose recognised by international law or by any international agreement or arrangement to which the United Kingdom is a party.”

[Deidre Brock]

So the devolved Administrations can work however they want to protect and enhance the marine environment and fish stocks. They can plan to protect coastal communities. They can look at ways of protecting jobs in the fishing industry and associated industries. They can put conditions on licences. They can limit fishing opportunities and they can limit catch and species. That means nothing—absolutely nothing—if the UK Government then sign a deal with another trading bloc or other states, which allow them access to our waters. It means nothing if those other fleets insist on their historical rights either, if UNCLOS is invoked and the UK is forced into the accommodation of other fleets, as referred to by Lord Hain. It does not matter how much the devolved Administrations want to do, they will not be able to prevent foreign fleets fishing in our waters, as they always have, licence or no licence.

Mr Carmichael: Fergus Ewing told the Scottish Parliament Committee on 19 August—I shall quote his words exactly—

“I’m confident this Bill gives Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament the necessary powers and tools to do that”—

the preparation for the end of the transition period—

“in a way that respects devolution.”

Is the hon. Lady telling the House that she thinks Fergus Ewing was wrong in his assessment of the Bill?

Deidre Brock: As the right hon. Gentleman knows of course, with legislative consent motions, which is what the Cabinet Secretary was speaking about, a consent is needed, sought and approved only for the devolved areas. I will be speaking about other areas that are still reserved to this Parliament—for the moment anyway.

Let me return now to my speech. This also has a particular resonance here, because, as the reasoned amendment alludes to, we still have no idea what the agreement with the EU will look like and we still have no idea what the seascape will be in which the fishing businesses have to operate. There is still no clarity. That deal will not be good for fishing communities. They remember that a previous Tory Government sold them out in negotiations over Europe and now they fear that the new generation of Tories will do exactly the same. No deal would not be good for them either. It would remove their market at a stroke and open up our fishing grounds to foreign fleets without our actually having any agreed limitations in place.

There is no word on how the UK Government intend to police fishing. There is some talk of borrowing some vessels from the Navy, or of having the Navy undertake patrols, forgetting, of course, that the Navy’s surface fleet is completely overstretched and out of resources and that, frankly, nuclear submarines are not exactly the right approach to fishing infringements.

Mr Carmichael: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. She is being very, very generous. Whether that is wise is another matter. Regardless of the terms of the deal, or even if there is no deal, we will have to have a UK-wide framework Bill, which is what this is. She has heard the words of Fergus Ewing. Why, in view of what he says about the nature of this Bill and the co-operation of Scottish and UK Ministers, does she

therefore now invite the House to decline to give it a Second Reading? Where is the sense of that for the fishermen in my constituency?

Deidre Brock: I have made it very clear that there are elements in this Bill that relate to issues that are still reserved, unfortunately, to this Parliament. I will address that later in my speech.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): On the exact same point made by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), Fergus Ewing, on that same day, in that same meeting, said:

“You will have noted that I have recommended that we consent to the bill as introduced in full.”

So if what the hon. Lady is saying is correct, why does she disagree with the rural affairs Minister in the Scottish Parliament, who is a Minister in her own Government and is in her own party?

Deidre Brock: It is very interesting to hear the Scottish Tories being so protective of fishing communities. I only wish their current leader would go to make his apologies to Scotland’s farmers for the insults he offered them yesterday and the giant stooshie he created, which he will be some time recovering from. It does not matter how much the devolved Administrations want to do, they will not be able to prevent foreign fleets from fishing in our waters, as they always have, licence or no licence.

Liz Saville Roberts: As we are talking about devolved powers, I wonder whether the hon. Lady shares my concern that we do not know the mechanism by which the quotas will be divvied up among the four nations, nor what the arbitration arrangements will be, but we also have the anomalous situation whereby the Government here will act as poacher and gamekeeper for the UK-wide consideration of fisheries and also for the English interests.

Deidre Brock: I absolutely agree. I think there are major concerns on this and the Bill does not provide any sort of genuine framework. It is full of unknowns. It is built on the shifting sands of a Trade Bill where we have no idea what the outcome will be. Should we just shrug our shoulders and crack on? The fact that this Government have had more than four years to come up with this Bill and this is what they have arrived at is a disgrace. [Interruption.] I am sorry, but the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) is interrupting from a sedentary position.

We may be no longer contributing to the discussion on the common fisheries policy at the EU, but we will still, in effect, be subject to it or, even worse, getting the even less savoury end of the stick. Scotland’s fishing community is being sold out by the Tories once again: they were sold out as they went in and they are being sold out again as we leave the EU. Control of who can fish in Scotland’s waters will not be exercised by the Scottish Government, control over fishing in Wales will not belong to the Welsh and control over Northern Ireland’s fishing will not be decided in Stormont. Despite the bluff and bluster, that back door is wedged open.

There is a similar situation on the landing requirement, which was a creation of the amendment in the Lords—that only goes to show that it is not just the Government

who do not get devolution. The landing requirement would be decided in Whitehall, after a brief consultation with the devolved Administrations—not an agreement with them, but a consultation. There is no scrutiny role for the legislators of the devolved Administrations, which are, after all, supposed to have a devolved competence in this area. The Scottish Parliament is being sidelined, as are the Senedd and Stormont.

Jack McConnell is the UK Government's latest great champion in their futile campaign against Scottish independence, so it might be advisable for them to listen to him when he says, as he did in discussing this amendment, that he had

“some concerns about the constitutional principles relating to this amendment...I am concerned that the amendment simply talks about “consulting” the devolved Governments—particularly the Scottish Government, who have clear legislative authority—rather than “agreeing” with them a national landing requirement. I am interested in knowing the thinking on having a UK-wide national landing requirement imposed from the centre rather than agreed by consensus across the four nations”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 24 June 2020; Vol. 804, c. 270-71.]

I think that is code, from a former First Minister of Scotland, for, “It will never work.” So fishing devolved is fishing retained, and it does not end there. The right of foreign fleets to fish in Scottish waters will be determined more by the actions of the UK Government in entering into international agreements than it will be by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, as will be quotas and days at sea—or “fishing opportunities”, to use the jargon of the Bill. There is, in black and white, the preparation for the UK Government rendering our fishing communities subject to the CFP even after we have left the EU. Clause 24 allows the Secretary of State to determine the maximum quantity of seafood that may be caught by British fishing boats and the maximum number of days that they may spend at sea. That is qualified in subsection (2) as being exercisable in relation to satisfying

“an international obligation of the United Kingdom to determine the fishing opportunities of the United Kingdom.”

That is the CFP in a bilateral agreement. Again, the Secretary of State must consult but does not have to reach agreement with the devolved Administrations. But those Administrations will be responsible for ensuring that the rules laid down by Whitehall are enforced—hardly a partnership of equals, is it?

In clause 38, more powers are reserved to Whitehall that would be more useful in the hands of the devolved Administrations, including provision about fisheries, aquaculture and other things, again sheltering under the umbrella of international obligations. There are powers to impose quotas, limit time at sea, mandate processing procedures, determine what gear can be used and how, decide how fisheries products can be marketed, impose regulations over landings, setting targets on marine stock and to monitor and enforce compliance with all those powers. That takes enforcement away from the devolved Administrations. Again, the requirement is only to consult, not to agree with the devolved Administrations.

Mr Goodwill: I am confused. If the hon. Lady had her way, she would give control back to Brussels, including Ministers from many countries that do not even have a fishing industry and have other fish to fry.

Deidre Brock: The right hon. Gentleman will of course be aware that the Scottish National party Government are keen on rejoining the EU at some stage but of course reforming the CFP. The fact that we have decried the CFP for many years now is surely well known to the right hon. Gentleman, given his background. I am surprised that he is not aware of it.

Schedule 8 gives the Scottish Government the power to do the same thing in Scottish waters, but that does not allow the Scottish Government to dictate to England, Wales or Northern Ireland in the way that the English Government can dictate to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Likewise, clause 41 would in theory prevent the Secretary of State from making those regulations for the waters governed by the devolved Administrations—I am pleased to see the Secretary of State checking his Bill to confirm my point—if they relate to an area of devolved responsibility. We already know, though, that the argument will be that this is an international obligation, which is therefore reserved, and we know that this Government, frankly, have scant regard for the dividing line between their powers and the powers of the devolved Administrations.

So we will leave the EU; we will no longer have access to the markets that are so important to our seafood and fishing industries. Our fisheries producers organisations will no longer be recognised in the EU. We will not have control of our waters. Whitehall will be taking over some of the responsibilities and powers of the devolved Administrations. Landing requirements will be imposed from Whitehall, and the whole mess will be impossible to understand.

I have never been able to understand why anyone thought Brexit would bring benefits for fishing communities, but I now cannot comprehend how anyone thinks that there is anything other than disaster in this. I cannot support the Bill. It does not provide a framework for fisheries after Brexit. It does not protect our fishing communities. It does nothing to make things easier for those communities. It is an empty shell of a thing, and we should not be supporting it.

7.8 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): The matter of fisheries is still at the forefront of our negotiations with the EU. I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and our UK negotiators for holding firm against the unacceptable demands of the European Union for access to UK waters. All UK fishermen are looking forward to the end of the transition period with much optimism. My message is clear: do not surrender to the unacceptable demands of those in the European Union. It may be worth reminding them that they already have the mechanisms in place to adapt their collective fleet to their much-reduced resource. History has shown the impact of decommissioning on the United Kingdom fleet over the past 40 years, and it is time to redress that balance.

Turning to the Bill, it is essential that we have the management measures in place to ensure that UK waters are managed in a sustainable way for future generations. I have experience of fishing providing for my family for 25 years and can honestly say that every fisherman I know and have known throughout that time sees themselves as harvesters and not hunters. They put their lives at

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

risk every day to bring this healthy source of protein to our plates. Some, like my late husband, paid the ultimate price.

Regarding our obligations under international law, I know the Secretary of State fully understands our commitment to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea and the UK fish stocks agreement with regard to sustainability and sharing access to the surplus catch with other nations. Adopting the best scientific stock assessments and ensuring that our processing industry has adequate supplies is really important. I believe the future is bright for so many other businesses connected to fisheries. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity could mean that our boatyards see a growth in new builds of fishing vessels that we have not seen for almost half a century.

No one I have spoken to, including the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fisheries Federation, is promoting an unmanaged free-for-all after 31 December this year. Indeed, if this Bill is not passed tonight, it could mean that no management is in place, and that would go completely against conservation. So I gently point out to those who are considering voting for the amendment that they are actually voting against conservation. There are some problems with the Bill as it returns here from the other place. On the face of it, there were some well-intentioned amendments, but the amendment to clause 1(2) and (3) should be removed because it could remove the careful balance built into the original Bill by being an obstacle to potentially balancing sustainability and environment with the economic and social sustainability that our fishing communities need. It is vital that that amendment is removed from the Bill.

Turning to clause 18 on the national landing requirement, again, I fully understand the thinking behind that clause inserted in the other place. I can remember the effect of the famous *Factortame* case, which resulted in overturning the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. Introducing a national landing requirement would also remove the option for UK vessels to land their catch on to the most profitable nearby market in another nation and therefore deny the industry vital economic benefits. Clause 18 must be removed.

I now turn to clause 48 on remote electronic monitoring. If our Minister is able to introduce a management regime in a sensible way—a world-beating management regime—we could reduce discards without having remote electronic monitoring. I urge my hon. Friends to give priority to working collaboratively with all parties, including the fishing industry, to design a flexible and adaptive fisheries management plan for the future such that remote electronic monitoring is not required.

I have worked with so many south-west fishing friends over the years towards this historic moment: David and Alison Pessel; Paul Trebilcock and Jim Portus from the two producer organisations; the late Bill Hocking from Looe, who sadly passed away last year but deserves a tribute today for his decades fighting for the industry; my own brother-in-law Ian Murray and his colleagues in the Fishermen's Mission; and some of my late husband's colleagues, like Andy Giles, Jack Baker and Armand Toms and Ivor Toms, who keep me informed about what is happening both outside and inside the Eddystone.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and a good Cornishman, along with my hon. Friend the Minister, will use this Bill, which must be restored to its original well-thought-out form, so that British fishing is held up as a fine example of sustainability and conservation throughout the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I will try to get everybody in, but that does mean that after the next speaker, I will reduce the time limit to five minutes.

7.15 pm

Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): This Thursday is Merchant Navy Day, and in normal circumstances—if we can remember what they were—we would have been conducting a church service in my constituency, remembering not just the merchant fleet, but fishermen whose lives have been lost at sea. It is always a reminder, though we do not need to be reminded, of how dangerous fishing is. We particularly remember the 36 crew who went down with the *Gaul* on the night of 8 and 9 February 1974 in what was described as

“the worst ever single-trawler tragedy”.

The boat had originally been the *Ranger Castor* and sailed from North Shields, and six of the men who lost their lives came from North Tyneside, so we know that fishing was, and fishing remains, a dangerous industry.

This is a framework Bill: it will create a framework for the industry post the common fisheries policy. Some will describe it, I am sure, as a landmark Bill, and with or without a deal in the next few months, we need a framework going forward. As such, I would like to see a greater priority and a bigger mention for safety in the Bill. I can see only one fleeting reference to “health and safety” in the Bill, so I hope that as the Bill progresses, safety can be given a greater prominence and actually be in the Bill.

The Bill rightly puts sustainability at the heart of our fishing policy going forward—the notion, put simply, that we never take more than can be replaced. To be fair, even the common fisheries policy recognised the importance of sustainability, but for its critics, it always seemed overcentralised and inflexible in its approach. We need to learn the best lessons from that, including in our fisheries management plan, which needs to be flexible and I hope will be at least regional. Actually, I hope that it will be as locally focused as possible, because only in that way will we recognise the different needs of different fisheries at any time.

There is a fairness issue that we also need to address in the Bill, and we have heard different views on it already in this debate—that is, the fair distribution of quota, particularly to under-10 metre boats. Currently, they receive around 6%. If that was increased by 1% or 2%, that would increase the quota for smaller boats by around a quarter. They are the backbone of many local fleets—North Shields in my constituency included—and they should be, in my view, at the heart of a sustainable approach.

A further pillar in the Bill is the desirability of landings in UK ports, which should accrue benefits to all parts of the UK. Again, I would like the Bill to go further and be more explicit. I do not think the Government would necessarily disagree with this as a principle: if fish are

caught in UK waters, they ought to be landed in UK ports, because the Bill is about jobs, and important though the catching sector is, for every single job in the catching sector there are around nine jobs on land. The reality is that too many of our fishing ports struggle to survive. Ports such as North Shields require constant investment, and currently, for example, the protection jetty is being repaired using European fisheries fund money. It is unrealistic that the money needed for repair and regeneration will come from the industry or even from the ports, which are often struggling in these difficult times. If fishing is a national asset, fishing ports should be seen as part of the national infrastructure.

The Bill allows for the expansion of financial assistance schemes, but it is not clear from the Bill, or even from what the Minister has said today, what that will actually mean. The former Secretary of State told the House that fishing communities would be able to access the coastal communities fund, which was originally set up to regenerate resorts such as Whitley Bay in my constituency. I do not want to see competition between resorts and coastal fishing communities, both of which have needs and are highly deserving. I want the Minister who sums up the debate to confirm that the coastal communities fund idea has gone, particularly since the Minister in charge of it said that there is no guarantee that the fund will continue and it has not even been signed off by the Treasury for the next few years. Where will the investment that fishing communities need come from?

Let me finish on this point. North Shields is the biggest prawn port in England, with 95% of prawns landed sold in Europe. Those fishermen need a deal without tariffs and without delay. I have raised the prospect before of access to European markets closing even temporarily and fleets having to tie up. It has happened. It happened during the pandemic when the markets were closed, and I do not want to see that. We need a deal for fishermen. We also need a deal for the wider economy, and that will be very difficult. What we do not need is a deal bought by selling out the fishing industry in the way the Conservative Government did in the 1970s. There is not much time to get one, Minister.

7.21 pm

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): The waters around the UK are some of the richest fishing grounds in the world. I am sure the right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Sir Alan Campbell) will be pleased when I quote Nye Bevan, who famously said:

“This island is made mainly of coal and surrounded by fish.”

It is not so well known that he went on to say:

“Only an organising genius”—

I think he used those words ironically—

“could produce a shortage of coal and fish at the same time.”

Of course, Nye Bevan never knew about the common fisheries policy and the destructive effect that it could have.

The coal industry is being consigned to the history books, but our departure from the EU will open a whole ocean of opportunities for UK fishermen. While one could, during the European referendum debate, debate the pros and cons of EU membership for many sectors, such as agriculture, no sane person could argue that the common fisheries policy has not been an unmitigated disaster. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and

Leith (Deidre Brock) said that no one could see the benefits of Brexit for fishermen—well, no one apart from every single fisherman I have ever spoken to. It is amazing that the SNP, while talking of independence, wants to consign the control of our fish stocks to the European Union once again.

It is often said that Ted Heath sold out the British fishing industry. It is not quite as simple as that, because at the point that we joined the European Union, the interest of most of the fishing industry, including boats from Hull and Grimsby, was in Icelandic waters. It was only after the seventh cod war—I think the first one was in 1898, when the steam trawler was introduced—that the Icelandics increased their limit from 3 miles, ultimately to 200 miles. The relative stability calculations were based on a British fishing industry that was in those distant waters around Iceland and the Faroes, which is why we got a bad deal at the start.

The problem is that at the same time that we were catching cod and haddock—the two most commonly eaten fish here; you can have them in either breadcrumbs or batter, and that is basically what the British people eat in terms of fish—foreign vessels were catching all those other species that are often on menus abroad but rarely on menus in the UK, such as the John Dory, the megrim, the saithe and the ling. We have tried time and again to get British people to eat those species, but no British person seems to want to eat a fish that looks you in the eye while you are eating it. That is one of the problems. We lost a vital source of that fish from Iceland, and we still import most of the fish we eat and export most of the fish we catch. We now have the opportunity to increase our share of quota over time. Just as importantly, as the right hon. Member for Tynemouth said, we need to secure a trade deal, so that lobsters caught off Scarborough and Whitby can be exported free of tariffs or impediments to France, Spain and so on.

Many wish that we could impose a strict 200-mile limit from day one, like Iceland did, and exclude foreign vessels at the beginning. That is not realistic for a number of reasons. The need for agreement on trade is one. Some of the foreign skippers bought quota fair and square from British skippers, and we need to treat them fairly. Most important, fish stocks do not respect our 200-mile exclusive economic zone. Relative stability has been replaced by zonal attachment, so the UK will, like Norway already does, have to agree the sustainable catch for each quota species and then divvy up between the EU and the independent coastal states such as the UK. Our share needs to increase progressively, by negotiation. We have a great Minister to do that, and great officials, such as Nigel Gooding CBE, who understand the complexity of the zones and species very well.

The Bill also underpins the sustainability of our seas. I mentioned the advent of the steam trawler. As vessels become more powerful and technically more advanced, it has never been more important to limit fishing to sustainable levels. If, as a farmer, I sent all my sheep to market, I would not be surprised if there were no newborn lambs the following year. We must make sure that we get the export markets, as several Members have said. On that point, I hope the Minister will say something about the nomadic scallop fleet. It is an internal issue, but every year we get nomadic scallopers off the coast of Yorkshire, destroying our crab and lobster beds,

[Mr Robert Goodwill]

smashing up the fish and, more important, often towing away whole fleets of pots, which cost thousands of pounds.

The Bill is an important element of taking back control. I hope it reaches the statute book quickly, unsullied by any Lords amendments.

7.27 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. Members may be wondering why someone representing lovely but landlocked Luton North wants to talk about the Fisheries Bill, but the subject matters to us all, and many of my constituents have personally got in touch to share their valid and heartfelt concerns about the health of our oceans, the sustainability of our fishing industries and the quality of our supply chains. Whether they live by the sea or in an urban area, people care where their food comes from and they care about the people who provide it. As the transition period ends, concerns are rightly being raised about threats to our currently high welfare and safety standards in our food chains.

If we are to have a fishing industry in the future, the Bill should have environmental protections at its very heart. Smaller fishing fleets have been promised the earth by various Ministers, but still they are left wanting. The Bill offers a prime opportunity for the Government to rectify that, and I hope it will not be missed. The problem is not new. Over seven years ago, I joined campaigners and fishermen on Greenpeace's Arctic Sunrise; back then, we were calling on the Government to redistribute the UK's fishing quota to give a greater share to smaller, more sustainable UK under-10 metre fishing fleets. Seven years later, the Government have failed to take any action to distribute quotas more fairly.

On the Arctic Sunrise, one fisherman broke down in tears as he talked about how his livelihood, which had supported generations of his family, was no longer viable. He knew that when he hung up his nets for the last time, there would be no one to replace him. He described the quota system as being run by a cartel, and when the largest five quota holders control more than a third of the total UK fishing quota, with four owned by families on *The Sunday Times* rich list, we can understand why he and other fishers on under-10 metre fishing vessels feel that way.

Seven years after that campaign and that conversation with the fisherman, 50% of the English fishing quota is still held by foreign-owned companies. That is because the Government choose to give the lion's share of the fishing quota to big foreign-owned companies, including the foreign-owned super-trawlers. That has a devastating impact on economies and the environment, and results in the loss of many historical fishing industries.

For many, fishing is not a hobby; it is a livelihood, and as we have heard, it is a dangerous one. Workers in the fishing industry risk their lives every day, and those on under-10 metre fishing vessels do so for very little reward. Last year alone, sadly, six fishers lost their lives. This Bill needs to recognise that fact and give adequate protections to those working in what has been described as one of the most dangerous occupations in this country.

With all that we know and all that we have heard, it is clear that there is a serious need to redraw fishing rights to give smaller vessels a bigger share of the quota, enabling them to spend more days at sea and catch more fish. The Government should not be waiting for this Bill or for Brexit. They could act now, if they chose to do so, and support environmentally friendly fishing methods, so that we have a UK fishing industry and enough fish in the seas to support a sustainable industry for generations to come.

7.30 pm

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) for her comments. She is very passionate, and it is fantastic to know that landlocked Luton is as passionate about fishing as we are in Great Grimsby.

I am very happy to be contributing to today's debate because, as most hon. Members will know, Grimsby has a long and important historic and current link to fishing. It is a real pleasure to be able to speak here on behalf of the people of Grimsby. I believe that it is because of fishing that over 70% of people in Grimsby voted to leave the EU and, importantly, that historic numbers felt able to support this Government at the last election, to make sure that we leave the EU and get back our fishing waters. When I am out and about in Grimsby, the most commonly asked question I get is, "When are we going to get our fishing waters back, and are we going to get them back?" I say to my constituents, "Yes, absolutely."

Grimsby's association with the fishing industry goes back centuries, but the modern industry started in the 1800s. By 1900, 10% of all the fish eaten in the UK was landed in Grimsby. In the 1950s, Great Grimsby was the UK's and the world's premier port. What fishing brought to Grimsby was wealth, investment into the docks and a direct train link to London. That was the power of the fishing industry to us. Unfortunately, that industry has been taken away from us, first because of the cod wars with Iceland, which rendered us unable to fish in Icelandic waters, because Iceland wanted to be a sovereign fishing state, and secondly because of the impact of the common fisheries policy, which gave foreign trawlers more and more power to plunder our fishing waters.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): My hon. Friend and I have met our local fishing representatives on a number of occasions. The point that comes over time and again is the lack of fairness in the present arrangements. The other point that I think needs emphasising is that the EU's attempts during the current negotiations to link trade to fishing quotas is totally unacceptable. Would she acknowledge that?

Lia Nici: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. What the industry has been telling us for the last few years, and for the last few months that I have been working with him to ensure that we are listening to it, is that although we hear the EU talk about reciprocal arrangements, there is nothing reciprocal about the current arrangements. The fish that the EU catches in our waters is eight times the value of what we can catch in EU waters. We talk about the common fisheries policy following sustainability, but it does not. It does not do what we need it to do it all. To take a particular cod species, under the common

fisheries policy we can currently catch 20% of the North sea saithe. If we had zonal attachment where the fish are actually in our waters, we could catch 75%, but at the moment our fishers have to steam away from our own fish. It is therefore absolutely vital that we are able to build on that.

The common fisheries policy, as we all know, is not fit for purpose. We need to make sure that we change it so that we are in control of what we want. The common fisheries policy is what really tore the heart out of Great Grimsby. For 40 years we have struggled to recover from that. The decline in the fishing industry in Grimsby is because we are not able to catch in the way that we want to or do what we want to ensure future sustainability. The reason for a decimated fishing industry in my town is not that we were not efficient in catching or because our customers did not want to buy fish from us.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and allowing me the opportunity to mention the great British fish and chip shop. I grew up enjoying delicious fish and chips from Jimmy and Jenny's chippy in Scawby. I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that they fry a lot of British fish. Does she agree that across the House and across the country we can all help to support our fishing industry by being a part of her excellent campaign to encourage us all to eat more British fish?

Lia Nici: I thank my hon. Friend. Yes, I heartily agree with her. We would like to process and fry more British fish, but unfortunately we are not able to catch it at the moment. I had a meeting with Seafood Grimsby and Humber a few weeks' ago. It said that if every household in the UK had one extra portion of fish, it would bring in an additional £2 billion per annum for the Grimsby fish processing industry—and that is just to Grimsby. Think of the power of our being able to have more influence on how, when and where we catch our own fish in our own waters.

The decline in the fishing industry is something we really need to consider. Our constituents in Grimsby are looking for us to make a change. What happened with our fishing industry was caused by political events and decisions over which people in Grimsby had no power or say, and our industry was cut. After 40 years, there is ongoing anger and resentment about that, but we can change it. We now have the ability to become an independent coastal state.

Today's debate is the first step in this Parliament to making sure we are able to bring these decisions and accountability back home. The people of Grimsby are under no illusion that we will go back to the glory days of the 1950s, when they say you could walk from one side of the dock to the other on trawlers and not get your feet wet. What they are looking forward to is having a new modern fleet that they can welcome to the port. Our local trawler companies, with whom I have been speaking, have said that they have the men, they have the trawlers and they are ready to go from 1 January 2021. Today—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am afraid the hon. Lady has used up her time. Just a reminder that the more interventions there

are, the less time there is for others who want to get in. We are going to have to reduce the time limit fairly shortly. Interventions do prevent others from speaking.

7.38 pm

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): After a decade of austerity, coastal communities, like parts of my east Kent constituency, are in desperate need of investment, regeneration, better transport links and local jobs. Key to that regeneration, however, is our fishing industry, in particular smaller vessels such as those in Whitstable. They are often family-run firms that are the backbone of UK fishing and the heart of our coastal towns. Many, including the fishers in my community, feel all but abandoned and ignored by successive Governments as they prioritised the big commercial producers, especially when consulting on recent White Papers and during all pre-Brexit negotiations, discussions on quota and so on.

It is no secret that I fought very strongly for us to remain in the EU and that view was not entirely supported by the fishing community. I understand their concerns, in particular the problems caused by the common fisheries policy, as mentioned by the Secretary of State in his opening remarks. Our fishers simply need to be heard and listened to, as they are the absolute experts in their industry. In fact, in terms of data and knowledge, each fishing vessel is essentially a floating science laboratory in its own right.

Generations of families in Whitstable have been fishing waters in the North sea, but are increasingly worried about the future of their businesses and their livelihoods. During the covid-19 crisis, with many supermarkets shutting their fresh fish counters and it no longer being possible to export the 80% of fish that is usually exported, schemes such as "Fish Local", launched by the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority, have been launched to encourage people to buy locally-caught produce directly from suppliers. Our local oysters and whelks are famous, and one of the highlights of any trip to Whitstable is a visit to the harbour, and our fish sellers and restaurants. But we also rely heavily on our exports to Europe, and the supply to restaurants in France is essential to our local economy. Indeed, one of the many problems with Kent's beleaguered "Operation Lorry Park" is that our fresh seafood, with its obviously limited shelf life, may be under serious threat when forced to sit in a giant tailback of heavy goods vehicles. The shambles of that scheme could have very damaging effects on our local fishing industry.

A passionate concern for so many in my constituency is our environment and the real climate crisis that is the responsibility of us all. Today—on our first day back in Parliament—activists are outside, reminding us that there really is no planet B. Our oceans, which cover 70% of the earth's surface, are being overfished, and our very survival is dependent on the survival of our marine ecosystems. Sustainability has got to be at the heart of all the legislation passed by this House.

Groups such as the Marine Conservation Society support Labour's sustainability amendments, and there are detailed recommendations from Greener UK on how to tackle the climate emergency through ocean recovery that specifically relate to this Fisheries Bill, meaning that this is an important opportunity not only to cover the protection of our industry and future trade arrangements, but to bring about real environmental protections.

[Rosie Duffield]

In particular, Greener UK says that it supports the amendments that make environmental sustainability the prime objective of the Bill, as we currently fail 11 out of 15 indicators under the UK marine strategy. That just is not good enough. We need to make urgent changes now. It also points out that cod stocks have declined to critical levels and that there is woefully inadequate monitoring of the thousands of marine wildlife caught up in fishing gear in the UK each year.

The expert advice is there; the science is staring us all in the face; and people—especially young people—are rising up to protest about our lack of action on the climate emergency and the destruction of our planet. I urge the Government to listen, to heed the warnings, to support the Labour party's calls to produce a net zero plan for the fishing sector and implement regional fishing rights to give smaller vessels a bigger share of the quota and to use this Bill to stop further destruction of our planet before it is too late.

7.43 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): We are an island nation and our seas are integral to our history. Some individuals have told me time and again that fishing is a tiny part of UK GDP. What they failed, and continue to fail, to understand is that fishing and the fishing fleet are the beating heart of communities like mine.

As we move away from the disastrous common fisheries policy and embrace our first Fisheries Bill in 45 years, we can support ambitious new fisheries management plans that put the environment, data-led fish stock management and economic benefits for coastal communities at the centre of the legislation. In fact, it is rather ironic—on today of all days—when Parliament's roads have been closed by Extinction Rebellion activists, that it is this Government who are delivering and creating the most environmentally friendly and sustainable Fisheries Bill that this country has ever seen. A healthy, managed fishery is the basis of a profitable fishing sector, which is particularly important in a mixed fishery like the one off the north Cornwall coast. Real-time data recording and a science-led approach not only mean that fish are given the space to grow, from juvenile fish to adult fish, and are then able to breed and support sustainable stocks; a real-time data-driven approach has many much wider benefits for communities such as mine. Restaurants and pubs can take advantage of knowing what will be landed on any specific day and use that to adjust their menus.

I am pleased to see the introduction of fisheries management plans. No two fisheries are identical, and stocks on the North Cornwall coast are not identical to those caught on the south coast. A local approach is often required, and we can deliver that outside the common fisheries policy and the European Union. The Bill facilitates a move away from the European Union and respects our rights under the UN convention on the law of the sea to be an independent coastal state and decide who fishes our waters—a commitment made to the British people, and a commitment delivered.

I welcome the broadening of the grant-making scheme to support the industry, which will have to be helped to get back on its feet from after we entered the EU. Being able to tender quota locally will help ensure fishermen's

economic security at a time of much change. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape our industry, which has been left out in the cold under the common fisheries policy, and I want to see that happen from day one.

Under the common fisheries policy, we saw the repulsive practice of electronic pulse fishing encouraged. That method of running an electric current through a pole on a seabed has single-handedly destroyed fragile marine environments and ecosystems. There are fisheries that are deserts because of that practice, and it needs to stop under this British Fisheries Bill. Furthermore, the introduction of marine protected areas will see a much wider array of seagrasses, which will help with our carbon reduction ambitions as a Government and meet our climate commitments.

There are, however, some points that I would like to raise with the Fisheries Minister. It is my belief that gill nets should be standardised to include pockets to let juvenile fish escape. Fish stocks have collapsed, and that has come about because juvenile fish have been caught up in these nets, and that practice should stop. While I am delighted to see angling recognised in the Bill, I call on the Department to allow recreational fishing in marine protected areas and to rethink this. Angling is not and has never been the reason for stock decline. I agree with the shadow Secretary of State on bluefin tuna fishing catch and release, which DEFRA should be considering. Such changes could create large economic benefits in coastal communities, and I ask DEFRA to look at that closely. I also plead with the Minister that, if there is a redistribution of quota or a distribution of extra quota, it is to the inshore fishing fleet.

In conclusion, a sustainable harvest is our objective outside the European Union's disastrous common fisheries policy. This Bill goes above and beyond what I considered possible under our own fisheries Bill, and I am happy to give it my full support today on behalf of the residents of North Cornwall.

7.47 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Moray is a constituency that has strong fishing links. Just last week, I was down at Buckie harbour speaking with fishermen from Moray and Banff and Buchan, the constituency represented by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who is here to listen to the debate. The sense of ambition and enthusiasm from those fishermen about the opportunities ahead for their industry was palpable. I hate to think what those fishermen must have thought tonight as they listened to the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock)—a speech that was, sadly, insulting and condescending to an industry that means so much to Scotland. It is an industry that means so much to my constituency, the north-east of Scotland, the highlands and islands and every part.

That speech was not only insulting and condescending; it was also very confusing. Apparently, we are supposed to believe that the SNP's position is to separate Scotland from the rest of the UK, to take us back into the European Union to be governed by Brussels and then to reform the common fisheries policy—a policy that has not been reformed for decades and that has been to the detriment of Scottish and UK fishermen for the last 40 years. That is fanciful and is simply not a credible argument.

Despite my 10 or 12 attempts to intervene on the hon. Lady, she would not take an intervention, but if she had, I would have asked the SNP spokesperson on fishing why, if Fergus Ewing, the SNP Minister, is recommending legislative consent in the Scottish Parliament, SNP Members are opposing the Bill tonight. The hon. Lady said that it is because there are elements that the Scottish Government support that require an LCM, but the way the SNP plans to vote tonight, against the Bill's Second Reading, would knock out all those—the reserved areas and the areas where there is a requirement for an LCM, which the SNP wants to provide in the Scottish Parliament. The SNP Ministers are saying, “Accept this,” yet SNP representatives here do not agree with that. It is completely confusing.

The SNP often likes to quote representatives, policy advisers and debate briefings; I thought it would be useful to quote the briefing for this debate from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, because it says: “The Fisheries Bill presents a once in a generation opportunity for the UK fishing industry to learn from the mistakes of the past.”

Why is the Scottish Fishermen's Federation wrong but the SNP is right? Why are SNP Members going to troop through the Lobby tonight, against the advice of representative bodies and against the wishes of fishermen in Moray, in Banff and Buchan and in Angus? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) is laughing—he thinks this is funny. The SNP Front-Bench team are laughing. If they ever get their way, the future of Scottish fishermen will be back in Brussels rather than with the UK Government, who will deliver on our pledge. The Scottish Conservatives support Scottish fishermen. I do not think it is a laughing matter. If SNP Members really stood up for Scotland, they would not be voting the way they plan to tonight.

Only the SNP could take a sea of opportunity and turn it into an ocean of division. That is exactly what SNP Members plan tonight, because for the Scottish nationalists it is always Britain bad and Brussels good. That is not a message that I support; it is not a message that Scottish fishermen support; and it is not something that the Scottish National party should be putting forward tonight or at any point.

In this legislation, there is an opportunity for the Scottish fishing fleet, for Scottish fishermen and for fishing communities. Many people I represent in Moray may no longer be active fishermen, but they have been in the past and are so passionate about their industry; or they may live in a coastal community that once thrived because of the fishing industry and want to see it returned. That can return with this legislation: we can revive our coastal communities because of this legislation, taking powers back from Brussels to here in the UK and devolving them to Scotland to ensure that our fishing industry can thrive once more. I want to see more young people in Moray choosing a career in going out to sea and in supporting the fishing industry. There has been an increase in boat building at Macduff Shipyards in Buckie because there is now renewed optimism. Because we are leaving the European Union, there is now an opportunity to take the industry forward, but not if we follow the path of the SNP.

SNP Members do not listen to this debate and speak among themselves, but I simply say to them that they have an opportunity tonight: they can vote en bloc as a

Scottish National party—as Lobby fodder for Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP—or they can decide to stand up for fishing communities the length and breadth of the country. I hope that the whole party will reconsider its position, but just a few, or even just one SNP Member, should stand up for fishermen and vote with the Scottish Conservatives and the UK Government for this fishing Bill.

7.52 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Well, here we are again. This is the sixth Parliament to which I have been elected: for the first four we had no fisheries Bill; for the fifth and sixth we have had one. The Bill is in essence the same as the one in my fifth Parliament. I agree with the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, that the changes that have been made to this iteration of the Bill are welcome and should be supported. The Bill is welcome and I am delighted that across the House we now have this degree of interest in fisheries matters. It has not always been thus—it has often been the case that at the end of a year we have struggled to get 90 minutes for an annual fisheries debate—so I welcome the opportunity to give the issue the oxygen and scrutiny that it deserves.

As a consequence of the way in which fisheries has been dealt with over the years, we have been able to establish a fairly good, broad, consensual approach to the issue in the House. That has always been appreciated by the industry and worked to its benefit. In that regard, it is regrettable that the Scottish nationalists have tabled a reasoned amendment. I do not understand their reasoning. Given what their own Fisheries Minister, Fergus Ewing, has said—to which I referred earlier—it defies reason as to why they would want the House to decline a Second Reading when he says that the Bill does what is necessary and respects the devolution settlement. Of course, this is a framework Bill, so it will be light on detail and we will always have to look to the later stages and to the secondary legislation to come. I hope that the same degree of interest will be taken in relation to that.

It is worth saying in parenthesis that the uncertainty that surrounds the fishing settlement would not be there if the Government had kept their original promise and put the fishing industry in the withdrawal agreement and not kept it in the political declaration. That was a significant strategic error for which we are now having to play catch-up. My plea on behalf of the industry tonight would be that we should all look to the best interests of the fishing industry and our fishing communities, rather than seeking to bring narrow party politics into it.

A lot has been said about the position of the under-10-metre fleet and the opportunities that will come as a consequence of the changes that are coming. There is some truth in that, of course, but we can give the inshore fleets across the United Kingdom all the quota they could possibly ask for and it will be of no use to them if they do not have the crew to put their boats to sea. In that regard, the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) made a telling intervention on the Secretary of State asking for the issue of visas for non-EEA nationals to be taken care of. This is long overdue, and the Government really need to look at it. They do not need to wait for a deal at

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

the end of the year; we have the powers to deal with this now, and the absence of any proper action in relation to it is becoming an ever greater problem for our inshore fleets.

I intervened on the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport who was speaking from the Opposition Front Bench on the question of safety and drew his attention to an incident that happened recently off Shetland, when a Spanish gill-netter that was actually registered in Germany—that tells a story in itself—behaved in such a way that it threatened the safety of the crew of the *Alison Kay*, a Shetland boat that was fishing in the same area. That is by no means unusual. It is the sort of thing that fishermen in my constituency have become accustomed to, and it has to be stopped. If this is a moment when the Maritime and Coastguard Agency can be given the powers to stop incidents of that sort and to investigate and punish them, it is surely an opportunity that requires to be taken. I am afraid I do not see much in the Bill that would allow that sort of change to be made, however, and I hope that the Minister will hear this and look kindly on any amendments when the Bill reaches its Committee stage.

The other thing about gill-netters is that they are one of the industry's major contributors to plastic pollution. Leaving gill-nets lying on massive areas of seabed to be caught in the propellers of other fishing boats or merchant vessels and eventually to be washed up is an act of simple environmental folly. It is something that we have lived with for too long and we should live with it no longer.

7.57 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): Having seen the difficulties, unfairness and harm caused by the common fisheries policy, I believe that this opportunity to debate fisheries policy is welcome indeed. The fishermen and women I represent are looking for a tailor-made, world-leading system for fisheries management: a system that champions and protects our fishing heritage, creates a sustainable fleet and fishing industry and preserves fish stocks for generations to come. It is a complex task to transition from the common fisheries policy to our own policy, and I give credit to the Secretary of State, his team, his officials and the industry itself for the progress made so far. My fishermen and women say to me that a modern fisheries management model must be flexible and adaptable. Science, hand in hand with stakeholder-driven approaches, can deliver a healthy, vibrant, sustainable fishing sector for the ports I represent and across the UK as a whole and lead to the coastal community revival to which the shadow Secretary of State referred.

The Lords amendment to clause 1 seeks to give precedent to environmental sustainability among the various elements of sustainability, but this could lead to the very opposite becoming the case. A better approach is to follow the findings of the DEFRA-supported UK-wide Future of our Inshore Fisheries initiative, which concluded that the future of inshore fisheries, and fishing more broadly, should be determined through and delivered by co-management. The fishermen and women I know are not preoccupied with greater access to fish, prioritising economic gain and damage to the environment to maintain their fleet.

The fishing industry in the south-west has no interest in bankrupting the resources on which the next generation will depend. South-west fishermen have a track record of supporting restraint and caution to support the recovery of fish stocks over many years. South-west fishermen look for a policy that strikes a balance between the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. As the Bill progresses, I cannot overstate the need to maintain a close working relationship with our fishing industry. The prize here is to include them in the management, design and decision-making process and to trust in the knowledge that they hold of the industry. If the Bill can enable a UK-owned UK fishing future, determined in harmony between the Government, devolved Administrations and the fishermen and fisherwomen themselves then we really can create a sustainable and vibrant fishing sector for the UK that will help to revive our coastal communities and provide a future for fishing and also good nutritional food for all our tables.

8 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Our oceans and seas are facing a devastating and diverse range of threats: overfishing, climate change, ocean acidification, dredging, plastic pollution and deep-sea mining. Modern slavery and human rights abuses are also all too prevalent in the industry. The Thai seafood sector is one such example. We need concerted global action on all those fronts, but I appreciate that it is not the purpose of this Bill to address them all. I was pleased, however, to see amendments passed in the other place, making sustainability a primary objective of the Bill and requiring remote electronic monitoring on all UK fishing vessels to ensure that they are adhering to standards and quotas. It was really disappointing earlier to hear the Secretary of State confirm that the Government will seek to overturn those changes in Committee.

I could say a lot about Brexit and the common fisheries policy and ignorance of how 55% of our quota is allocated to foreign vessels by the UK Government if I only had the time, but I will content myself with saying that theoretical legal freedoms over fishing rights are meaningless if we do not ensure that our fisheries are sustainable and that the fish stocks are actually there to fish. Fish stocks are a finite resource, yet fishing quotas are being set above scientifically recommended sustainable levels year on year. Estimates suggest that restoring fish populations would not only safeguard our marine life, but lead to £244 million a year for the industry and create more than 5,000 jobs. I support the Marine Conservation Society's call for a legal requirement for all fish stocks to be fished at sustainable levels. The Minister will no doubt point to the fisheries management plans, but there is no requirement for a plan to be put in place even where the stocks are overfished.

As I have said, it was disappointing to hear the Secretary of State say that the remote electronic monitoring amendment will be overturned in Committee. Seabirds, porpoises, dolphins and whales are caught in fishing gear in UK waters in their thousands each year, but the true scale remains unknown because less than 1% of journeys conducted by UK fishing fleets are monitored. Just as we now have CCTV monitoring in all UK abattoirs, we need remote electronic monitoring of all UK fishing vessels to ensure that species are not mislabelled and that records of catches are legitimate.

Monitoring and enforcement are, of course, particularly important in our marine protected areas. The UK has called for the protection of at least 30% of the world's oceans through the 30by30 initiative and there have been some flagship measures such as the Ascension Island marine reserve, which of course I welcome. However, those of us who have been in this place for quite a while will remember pledges to introduce an ecologically coherent network of 127 marine conservation zones and marine protected areas around the UK—work that was started by the previous Labour Government more than a decade ago and is still not complete. Indeed, there is every sign that the Government have no intention of completing it. As the Environmental Audit Committee, of which I was then a member as was the current DEFRA Minister in the Lords, said in its January 2019 report on sustainable seas, there is a risk of the existing MPAs becoming merely paper parks unless they are effectively managed and monitored, and that is simply not happening now.

The issue of supertrawlers has already been raised. Greenpeace estimates that, in 2019, supertrawlers spent nearly 3,000 hours fishing in UK marine protected areas. Shockingly, in the first six months of this year, the number of hours had already reached 5,590. After being contacted by more than 150 constituents about this, I wrote to the Secretary of State and I received a reply from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), on 19 August. That letter does not, to me, back up what the Secretary of State has said today in response to calls to ban supertrawlers. He hinted that the powers are already there and that that would happen, but that is not what the letter says. In fact, the letter barely mentions them. There was no concern shown about the sheer scale of their operations, the damage caused to marine life, the bycatch of endangered protected species and the impact on smaller independent fisheries, so I am afraid that I remain highly sceptical of the Government's intentions.

To conclude, I want to re-emphasise the need to embed sustainability as a core tenet of the Bill. Sustainable fisheries management is vital both for the long-term economic future of our fisheries and for maintaining biodiversity. However, as it stands, as both the Marine Conservation Society and Greenpeace have said, the Bill is full of legal loopholes and lacking in environmental safeguards. This is a real opportunity to make sure that we protect our marine environment and protect our fish stocks. I would urge the Government not to waste that opportunity.

8.5 pm

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to support this Bill, which will allow us to manage fisheries outside the common fisheries policy as an independent coastal state. For many people living in coastal communities in North West Norfolk, taking back control of our waters was an overarching reason for supporting Brexit. Now, as a country, for the first time in over 40 years, we will control who can fish in our waters and the terms on which they do so.

I want to see us seizing the opportunities this freedom will bring, and getting the regulatory framework right is key to having a successful fishing industry in my constituency, across East Anglia and across the country,

but I believe that the amendments passed in the other place to change the fisheries objectives in clause 1 remove the balanced approach that gave equal weight to environmental, social and economic considerations. Indeed, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations has warned that these additions mean the Bill will create a more rigid system and one that is ultimately worse than the CFP. We in this House should heed those words and revert to the original proposals in the Bill that would help to deliver a sustainable and thriving fishing industry.

Taking the opportunities from leaving the CFP will require new investment, and that means regulatory certainty is needed for the industry. Last month, I met local firms Lynn Shellfish and John Lake Shellfish to talk about this Bill and the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. With a fishing fleet of about 70 vessels in King's Lynn, Brancaster and along the coast, these businesses make an important contribution to the local economy, where we have one of the most productive fisheries in the country. However, they raised concerns about regulatory plans by the Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority for a new shrimp permit by-law. Under these proposals, there would be no limit to the number of permits that could be issued, nor any recognition of the historical track record. I have corresponded with my hon. Friend the Minister on these issues, and I ask that she scrutinise these issues seriously when they come to her formally, so we can deliver on our commitment to sustainable fisheries.

My fishermen are also concerned about the future of the Wash fishery order, which expires in 2022. Instead of seeking an extension, the regulator is proposing to make a new order, stating that, as a matter of policy, DEFRA is not considering any extensions to such orders. Again, I would be grateful to have a conversation with my hon. Friend the Minister to confirm the Government's approach and for her to encourage the regulator to take a more open approach with the industry and have a better dialogue than currently exists.

Like many hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, I have had constituents contact me about supertrawlers. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirmed earlier that this Bill does provide the powers to license foreign vessels in UK waters and to tackle and ban supertrawlers as part of a sustainable approach.

Finally, on the theme of sustainability, one issue we must focus on as an independent coastal state is skills and bringing younger people into our industry. The Renaissance of East Anglian Fisheries group, on which my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) has done so much brilliant work, has called for an apprenticeship scheme to replenish the high proportion of fishers who will be retiring over the next five to 10 years. This is a very welcome proposal, and one that I hope DEFRA will support and take forward.

In conclusion, this Bill provides us with the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the CFP and adopt a more flexible approach to managing our fisheries for the benefit of UK fishers.

8.9 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Plaid Cymru has approached this Bill with three key criteria, the first of which is that any successor to the CFP must

[Liz Saville Roberts]

clearly deliver real benefits to Welsh fishing and to the sustainability of our marine habitats and coastal communities. Equally, the Bill should represent a vote of confidence in the future of our fishing industry, detailing practical regulation and ensuring accountable oversight. Also equally, it should place the UK's four representative nations on a fair and mutual footing, with transparent mechanisms to arrive at quota allocations and a fair arbitration system. Those are not currently clear in this legislation. It is clear, despite some welcome efforts to empower Welsh devolution, which I hope will set a broader precedent, that this Bill currently falls short on those counts.

One key concern is that the Bill creates a leviathan of a loophole by failing to distinguish, in terms of fishery access, between British-registered vessels with British owners and those with foreign-based owners. For Wales, that is to continue the problems experienced at present; I understand that at best only 9% of the 83,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish caught in Welsh waters per annum are actually landed by Welsh vessels. Simply put, this Bill fails to ensure that the coastal communities of Wales would benefit from the harvest of our own waters in future. There is also very little substance here for the under-10 metre fleet, which comprises the greatest part, at some 95%, of the Welsh fishing fleet. That is why we would support an increase to the quota reserve available for fishing vessels of under-10 metres. That would improve the viability of small-scale fishing, be more sustainable and would drive economic returns by incentivising investment in smaller fishing ports. We have talked much about the need to ensure we have the crew, but we must ensure that it is worth investing in these ports, in order for us to be able to grow in the future.

Finally, the Bill ignores any discussion of successor funding to EU investment in our fishing and coastal communities and how this would be handled by the Welsh Government. Without such changes, the Bill, in its current form, is a regulatory and economic lost opportunity, which fails to support Welsh fishing or our coastal communities in the way that, I am sure we would all agree, they deserve to aspire to. Furthermore, the Bill fails on the detail. Fishing is a dangerous industrial activity, yet measures to ensure safety on vessels are noticeably absent, and, despite outlining laudable objectives, there remains no duty on the fisheries authorities to deliver them. Coming from the village of Morfa Nefyn, whose port, Porth Dinllaen, has lost members of the fishing community in the past, this is something very close to my heart. I hope that with this legislation we will find the means of remedying this.

Finally, the Bill fails to account for the increasing variability of catches and, therefore, of income of fishing communities due to the migration of fish caused by factors including climate change. We run a risk of setting targets for ourselves if those targets will need to change to reflect difference in behaviours resulting from climate change in the future. Underpinning these flaws is this Government's inability to resolve the UK's constitutional question, which makes this place both the Parliament of England and of the UK. That has very real consequences for Welsh fishing, as this Bill would enshrine regulatory conflicts of interest in this place, against which Wales would have scant resources to defend the livelihoods of

fishermen the length and breadth of the Welsh coast. That is why, although we support efforts to replace the CFP and of course welcome the further empowerment of the Welsh Government, we will be voting against the Bill, to encourage the Government to return with a better, more honest, more co-operative and more equitable framework for the future of Welsh fishing.

8.13 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Before I begin, I wish to commend my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) on an excellent speech, taking apart the SNP's arguments for supporting its amendment. I also congratulate him on his recent election as the leader of the Scottish Conservative party. We saw tonight the determination and fight he will bring in taking our arguments to the Scottish people next May, when we intend to put him in Bute House as the First Minister of Scotland, replacing the current one, who has been long in that job.

What feels like a very long time ago, I was a junior staffer in the European Parliament. Part of my job was to attend the European Parliament Fisheries Council, where I saw time and again the views of our own MEPs, both SNP and Conservatives, representing our own fishermen overridden, outvoted and ignored by the combined votes of the Spanish and French. I worked on the deep seas fishing Bill through dialogue, a masterclass in European Union transparency and democracy: a closed meeting between representatives of the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament—no cameras, no public—where the finer points of EU law are thrashed out. Of course, the democratically elected arm of the EU is represented, but even then it can be represented by any MP, from any party, from any country and with any interest, and can be outvoted by the Commission and the Council. Even when the European Parliament did have a final say over fishing law, those fighting for the interests of the fishing industry routinely had the rug pulled out from under their feet, such as on the day in December 2015 when MEPs threw the industry into turmoil by voting to introduce immediately the demersal landing obligation, or discards, thanks in part to votes from the Green group, in which of course SNP parliamentarians sat.

At the annual Fisheries Council in Brussels, agreements on the total allowable catches and quotas are agreed. Our Fisheries Ministers fought hard for British interests, but under the EU's mantra of equal access to common resource—a concept only invented in 1970—on Britain joining the EEC, and bound by the common fisheries policy, their hands were tied.

This, for the past 40 years, is how fishing has been managed by the European Union. This is the system that the Scottish National party would have us sign back up to. European management of British fisheries has been undemocratic, untransparent and an unmitigated disaster for Scottish fishermen and our marine environment. In the north-east of Scotland, we cannot overstate the damage that the common fisheries policy and European management have done. The size of the Scottish fishing fleet has declined considerably since the 1970s, steadily falling year on year, particularly after British waters, which account for 14% of overall EU fisheries, became exploitable for Spanish and Portuguese vessels. Between 1992 and 2004, the Scottish demersal fishing fleet halved, from 800 to 400 boats.

Today, EU vessels fish six times as much in UK waters as UK vessels fish in EU waters, yet this is the system that the Scottish National party would have us sign back up to. Our fishing communities deserve better than to be traded away in European negotiations to secure concessions elsewhere, but this is the system that the Scottish National party would have us sign back up to. Tonight, this House has the chance to right these historic wrongs and deliver the Fisheries Bill that our communities and our fishing industry deserve.

The fishing industry, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and even the Scottish Government welcome this Bill. It is a step forward, not only because it provides the framework for managing our fisheries as an independent coastal state, enabling the UK to control who comes into our waters through a new foreign vessel licensing regime, but because it establishes our UK-wide fisheries objectives, with a joint fisheries statement setting out policies to achieve these objectives. That will provide more transparency for our fisheries management policies than was ever seen under the common fisheries policy, with clarity and assurance for our industry.

But what do we see today from the Scottish National party, a party that is usually consistent in calling for clarity and assurance over Brexit? We see a shameful amendment that if passed would leave our fishing industry rudderless, without guidance or assurance about what post-Brexit fisheries management will look like. I think we owe it to our fishermen, who have suffered so much under the CFP, to give them that certainty and guidance on what a post-CFP world would look like.

The people of the north-east of Scotland are used to being let down by the Scottish National party, which is focused solely on central belt votes, but this Conservative Government will not let down the people of the north-east. We will not let down our fishing industry. We promised that we would give Great Britain and Northern Ireland its seat back at the table as an independent coastal state and we will. This Bill will deliver that, and I will be very proud to vote for it this evening.

8.18 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): There are high hopes riding on the Fisheries Bill. When communities such as Fleetwood voted to leave the European Union under the banner of "Take back control", many were thinking about the fishing industry. However, "Take back control" was also shorthand for the regeneration of coastal communities, because for too long our coastal communities have suffered. Towns such as Fleetwood, which I am proud to represent, have lacked decent transport infrastructure and economic opportunities.

I want to see this Bill used as a launchpad for a coastal renaissance, with fishing playing a central part, because with 10 fishing industry jobs on land for every one at sea, that would directly lead to more jobs created in fish markets, processing and distribution. I was therefore pleased to see Labour's "jobs in coastal communities" clause passed in the Lords, which would mean that two thirds of fish caught in UK waters would need to be landed in our ports. That would protect jobs at sea and create so many more on land, giving our coastal communities a real boost after they have been hit so hard by the covid-19 lockdown on top of years of austerity. Every extra £1 million of fish landed in UK

ports creates up to 76 jobs in the wider economy. I hope that the Minister agrees that it makes common sense for fish caught in UK waters to be landed in UK ports and that he will reconsider the Government's position that clause 18 should be removed from the Bill.

The Bill establishes the legal framework for managing UK fisheries when we leave the EU's common fisheries policy on 31 December, which is why the reasoned amendment in the name of the SNP is a reckless act that puts party politics before the livelihoods of people working in the fishing industry and coastal communities up and down these islands. Once again, the SNP is playing party politics ahead of protecting livelihoods.

It is a source of deep frustration that, under this Government, we have seen UK fishing quota dominated by huge, often foreign-owned vessels that land their catch abroad. We need a real shift in favour of smaller vessels, which are the real backbone of the British fishing industry. In Britain, supertrawlers, big boats and larger fishing interests are pushing out smaller, more environmentally friendly vessels on which local communities and economies rely.

The Greenpeace investigation revealed that in the first six months of this year, supertrawlers spent 5,500 hours fishing in protected areas. Those areas are meant to safeguard vulnerable marine habitats; instead, those habitats are threatened by highly destructive industrial methods, including electronic pulse trawlers and trawlers that drag nets along the seabed. I hope that the Minister agrees that the Government really must act if they are to live up to their title of global ocean champion.

Fishers in under-10 metre boats represent 79% of the UK fishing fleet but still hold only 2% of the quota. The Government have always had the power to redistribute that quota, but so far they have failed. I hope that the Minister will rethink and keep clause 27 to require a minimum quota for new entrants to the sector whose boats are 10 metres or less.

Small boats are the backbone of the British fishing fleet, and they deserve the lion's share of fish caught under a UK quota. I hope that as the Bill progresses, colleagues will work to seek opportunities to increase fishing and marine safety and invest in good new skilled jobs onshore and at sea. If, as I hope, we see a revival of fishing in the UK, it has to be one in which the Government take safety seriously and support the people who fish our seas and put food on the plates of our nation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. To make sure that we get everybody in, after the next speaker I shall reduce the time limit to four minutes.

8.22 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in support of the Bill as a representative of Brixham, Salcombe and Dartmouth, Brixham being the most valuable fishing port in England and, of course, far superior to any Cornish port out there. Over the last nine months, I have had the privilege of engaging with representatives across the fishing sector, from Jim Portus to Beshlie Pool, the team of the Brixham Trawler Agents, and the harbourmasters of the three towns that I mentioned. Each of them has expressed their opinion on the Bill, each of them has been universally supportive of the

[Anthony Mangnall]

Government's proposals, and each of them has given me some suggestions for the development of this important sector that I would like to put to the Government for them to consider in the future.

I welcome the Bill; I welcome what the DEFRA Secretary has done; and I welcome the work that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), has done with Members across the House in listening to our concerns both before and during covid. She has been a huge support to the fishing sector, and I know that I speak for many in my constituency when I say how grateful they are to her and her team.

Members have already been drenched in facts and figures about the fishing sector and its relative decline, but the 29% decline in the fleet since 1996 and the 60% decline in fish landed in the United Kingdom since 1973 shows the adverse impact of our membership of the common fisheries policy. The Bill recognises the potential to rebuild those fleets, to increase the amount that we land across the United Kingdom and to create new industry, whether through processing, boat building or other methods, to help our local and coastal communities.

I take some issue with what the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) said about the Government not offering support for the fishing sector. When I look at the seafood innovation fund, the maritime and fisheries fund, the covid fisheries fund, the fisheries response fund and the domestic seafood supply scheme, I see a Government who are supporting fishermen and helping them to grow in the years to come.

Over the covid crisis, we have seen markets withdraw from our fishing sector, unable to export to the far east or closer to home, but we have also seen the resilience and determination of our fishing sector to respond in new and innovative ways to supply its produce across the United Kingdom. The Government must learn from this and support those mechanisms. Some supermarkets closed down their wet counters, and fishermen and shellfishermen went to open up their own local delivery slots; we must look at how we can support those structures in the future. We must engage people with the fine British seafood on our coastline in the coming years. I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) said about supporting fine British seafood, and I hope that we might start with every Department serving only British seafood.

I am sorry to return to the shadow Secretary of State, but I consider him to be wrong about clause 18. He talks about market access and ensuring that fishermen are only selling into British ports, but what we need to do is provide infrastructure spend on those ports so that they are the most attractive ports to European vessels as well as our own. My own constituency includes Brixham, which is, as I said, the most valuable fishing port in England, but with further investment, as the Prime Minister saw last year, it could double its revenue and put that money back into the local economy in an effective way that will secure the UK's future fishing sector.

There is also the value and benefit of fleet improvements. Where we spend on infrastructure in our ports, we can help to grow our own fleet and rebuild our coastal

communities—in places where we can retrofit our own vessels and create processing plants. All these things can come with such infrastructure; let us build our own vessels here. I am very pleased that the company Waterdance in my constituency has just taken possession of its brand new vessel, the Georgina of Ladram. With more vessels on the way, it has the potential to grow, and we should be supporting that.

My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) so aptly made the point about fishing charities. We are extraordinarily lucky to have Seafarers UK and the Fishermen's Mission here. The work that they have done throughout covid has been extraordinary, and we must ensure that we are listening to their recommendations about supplying and selling local produce in the United Kingdom. Finally, I have been very sad to hear that so many Opposition Members have not even opened the Bill and read the first page, which is completely directed towards sustainability. This is a good Bill and I look forward to voting for it.

8.27 pm

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): Today is another important step as we take back control of UK fisheries. The Secretary of State has developed a unique understanding of the fishing industry, including that in Northern Ireland. I am confident that we can deliver a practical Bill, providing the flexibility needed to build and maintain sustainable fish stocks as well as an economically viable industry. This will provide a radical and welcome departure from the common fisheries policy.

We cannot allow ourselves to repeat the same mistakes of the past. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get it right. Sustainability objectives are central to the Bill, and that is right. Nevertheless, we must avoid a fisheries policy that prioritises one objective over every other objective and that ties the Secretary of State's hands in setting future total allowable catches or other policy decisions.

The Secretary of State is well aware of the dependence of the Northern Ireland fleet on nephrops. One challenge for the fishing industry in the Irish sea is dealing with unwanted catches of whiting. Much progress has been made, and I am delighted to say that an industry-led project designed to secure ways of minimising unwanted catches has received funding to continue. If progress was not being made, that funding would not have been approved. We cannot afford to have the hands of our industry mangled by rules that prescribe the closure of the sustainable and critical nephrop fishery and artificial targets for whiting catches that are not met. Northern Ireland has proportionally the smallest sea area of any part of the United Kingdom. The resilience of the fishing industry there has been built on its ability to be nomadic, and I am glad that the Bill protects the rights of all UK fishermen to maintain equal access within all UK waters.

Marine protected areas and their designation are another important responsibility of the Secretary of State. Uniquely in the devolved context, the Secretary of State's remit extends to the offshore waters of Northern Ireland. I would welcome devolution of that responsibility to bring us into line with the other devolved Administrations.

In the context of Brexit, a phrase I am continually reminded of by the local fishing industry representatives is, “Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” Progress has been made in negotiations about a future fisheries framework agreement. Therefore, this does have a bearing on how seafood is traded within the Northern Ireland protocol. I recognise that DEFRA officials are putting this issue under scrutiny to ensure that Northern Ireland’s fishermen are not penalised by the protocol.

Management of the UK fisheries is changing. Every part of the United Kingdom’s fishing industry has unique characteristics, none more so than Northern Ireland, so I would welcome confirmation from the Secretary of State and the Minister that the voice of Northern Ireland’s fishermen will have an equal place in any national discussions. Their voice must be heard. We will be supporting the Bill tonight and voting against the reckless amendment.

8.31 pm

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Leaving the EU is an opportunity not just to rewrite the rulebook but to create a totally new one. This is the first time in British history that we will have full control of our waters. The Fisheries Bill is a new venture into a more sustainable future full of opportunity, and in my constituency of Ynys Môn fishing and our oceans are central to our unique island community. Local archaeological evidence shows that our history with fishing goes back to prehistoric times. In current times, fishing vessels sail from many ports on the island, including Holyhead, Amlwch, Beaumaris and Cemaes Bay. Alongside long-established operations, I am thrilled to see a new generation of fishermen making a living from small independent boats such as the *Boy James*, which runs out of Amlwch. Local aquacultural businesses such as Menai Mussels use the island’s clean coastal waters to breed top-quality shellfish for global exports, and businesses such as Holyhead Shellfish supply local crab and lobster.

Our maritime heritage is still very much a way of life on Ynys Môn, and it is a way of life that we love to share with others. Sea fishing forms a major part of our tourist industry, and we have many charter fishing boats operating around the island, as well as bait shops supplying those fishing off the rocks in places such as Trearddur Bay and the Holyhead breakwater. However, the smaller vessels that are typical of Welsh fishing have been held back by the common fisheries policy that allowed larger vessels to control the waters further out from shore. EU vessels spend six hours in UK waters for every one hour a UK vessel spends in EU waters. It is clear that now we are leaving we will be able to take advantage of the huge opportunities that lie just off our coastline.

The Fisheries Bill is about creating a legal structure to facilitate opportunities for generations to come. The Bill carries many benefits for Wales. Equal access will be granted for all UK vessels to fish throughout UK waters. New powers will be granted to the devolved Administrations, and the fisheries administrations will publish a joint fisheries statement setting out how common objectives will be met. Importantly, this Government have learnt from the mistakes of the common fisheries policy, the chronically overcentralised and strict guidelines of which have diminished the ability of local institutions to manage fisheries in the way that they know best. Our new Bill allows flexibility with guidance to ensure effective and localised management.

It is important to remember that sustainability is not just an environmental concern. Although the environment is an important part of the term, there are two additional pillars: economic and social considerations. We must make sure that the management of fisheries provides a future for the economy of coastal communities, so many of which rely on this industry. Fishing can also be an important part of the social and cultural livelihood of those communities, where generation after generation have taken to the oceans. By prioritising sustainability and ensuring that our agreements with the devolved Governments are protected, we ensure that in instances where a local economy could be significantly harmed, we and they are able to take that into consideration and act in a way that balances the different components of sustainability, maximising the opportunities that this Bill can provide for coastal communities. This flexibility is crucial.

In conclusion, we must make sure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the common fisheries policies. We must learn and develop a better future for our fishing community and the next generation of fishers to come.

8.35 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): As the proud Member for a landlocked constituency in east Berkshire, I could perhaps be forgiven for sitting this one out were it not for the fact that the Bill is a key stepping stone on our emergence from the EU and takes back control of what is rightly and territorially British. By re-establishing the UK as an independent, autonomous and sovereign coastal state, it puts the pride back into our fishing fleet, reinvigorates our coastal communities and puts sustainable fish stocks back on to our table.

Given that this is the first Bill of its kind since 1973, it is important that we get it right. There is a golden opportunity to put the interests of our fishermen first and to consider properly how we manage UK waters across all devolved nations. The Bill will protect our waters for future generations by preventing overfishing, by relinquishing the nonsense of the EU common fisheries policy and by determining who can fish in our waters. Although it may vex some, taking back control will come as no surprise to those who read our 2019 manifesto, or to our hard-working fishermen, who have been ignored for far too long. By grasping new opportunities outside the EU but offering licences to foreign boats, this landmark legislation will allow us to decide who, when, where and how, thereby safeguarding UK jobs; and it will further cement the Union by offering equal opportunities to UK fishermen across all four zones of the UK.

There is a handful of issues that may require further consideration, and I urge the Minister to take note of them. One implied task is to prevent unlicensed vessels from plundering UK waters. Although the imposition of fines or impounding of assets will be a deterrent, enforcement action may also be needed. Back in the day, as a young Army captain, I was privileged to be involved with several fishery protection flights in the Falklands that used radar to excellent effect. Having identified unlicensed foreign vessels within territorial waters, our friends in the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were then called upon to politely escort them off the premises. This may yet be a persuasive tactic in the northern hemisphere, too. Clarity will also be welcome

[James Sunderland]

about any new arrangement for managing British waters beyond the UK—around Gibraltar, Cyprus and the other overseas territories—and about the national landing requirement.

This important Bill fulfils another of the promises made to the British people at the last election. It will shape how our fisheries evolve in the next decade and beyond. Autonomy, self-determination and taking back control of our waters are sacrosanct. It is now time to reinvigorate our coastal communities, our jobs and our export markets after years of EU domination and inflexibility.

8.38 pm

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): I am thankful for the opportunity to speak in this debate on an issue that is vital to many of my constituents. This is a Bill born of Brexit, and I, like many, am deeply concerned about Brexit. Even the best deal, which is largely unachievable by this Government, is still a bad deal. To be clear, there is no good deal on the horizon, and I have to tell anyone who thinks they can see one that it is a mirage. There shall be no Brexit bonus and there is little unity within this now isolated Union. Soon enough, there will be no Union at all, only its death rattle ringing in our ears. If I listen carefully, I can already hear it.

While we are still here, the Scottish National party's MPs will continue to offer as much protection for our industries from shameful Tory ideology as we possibly can. That is why we tabled the reasoned amendment this evening. The fact is that we cannot ignore the threat of Brexit to trade, to labour and to the funding for our fisheries. We in the SNP will always put Scotland's interests first. We will continue to ensure that we stand up for our fisheries and maintain having the finest produce not only to export but to consume. While we are in this place, we will continue to stand up for Scotland's fishing industry. For 50 years now the people of Scotland have seen Westminster Governments undercut, undervalue and talk down our fisheries: decades and decades of sell-outs. The ramifications of Brexit and the impact of such a ludicrous act of self-sabotage will be felt for a long time throughout these islands, no more so than in the fishing waters of Scotland and by none so severely as our fishermen. I can see that my friends from the north of Ireland may take issue with that statement, but I am just as confident that they will be in total agreement that Brexit will see this Union choke.

I am of course concerned about how the Bill may be felt in my constituency. Great towns such as Coatbridge and Bellshill may not be the first to come to mind when we are discussing fishing matters in Scotland or indeed the United Kingdom, but my constituency is home to many manufacturing, processing, packaging and distribution employers within the sector, and I am determined that they will not be left rudderless by the ineffectiveness of this Government. For example, the Scottish Shellfish Marketing Group in Bellshill has previously benefited from over £580,000 of assistance from the European maritime and fisheries fund, which allowed for monumental upgrades to factories and the development and purchase of revolutionary equipment. It cannot be denied that EU funding for my constituency has been a lifeline for

the fishing sector in terms of sustaining local employment as well as increasing efficiency and productivity. This is not an industry that the UK Government can simply forget and hope it will be all right on the night. Fishermen across Scotland need certainty and reassurance, and they need to know that their renowned produce will continue to be premium in world markets. They need certainty and reassurance that their futures will be in safe administration, and it is apparent that that administration should lie, and will lie, with the Government in Scotland in an independent Scotland.

We saw recently with the Agriculture Bill that this Government and their Ministers are pretty ready, and it seems sometimes eager, to misinterpret their own Bills as they ram-raid them through this House. The monumentally catastrophic impacts that that will have on the people I represent and the people of Scotland as a whole are very clear. Poor-quality products will be allowed into our supply chain, putting our people's health at risk. Ultimately, this Government passed up the chance to vote against that. I was worried then for our farmers and I am worried today for our fishermen. This Tory Government have failed, unsurprisingly so, to give any detail on what will happen to our fishing industries when this doomed Brexit day does arrive. There is no deal, let alone any good deal. I, for one, will not stand idle when the economic consequences of this shameful Government—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order.

8.42 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a real joy and a privilege to be able to speak in this debate, because this is a historic moment that many people have been waiting a very long time to see. This is the moment when we take a very important step towards the UK once again having control over our own waters and the fish that are caught within them. Brexit gives us this opportunity to leave the EU common fisheries policy and to begin to undo the damage that it has caused to our fishing industry. I say "begin" because it is important that we manage expectations. Forty years of damage under the common fisheries policy is not going to be reversed overnight. We can take an important step in passing this Bill, but it will take many years to rebuild our fishing industry back to what it used to be.

For generations, fishermen in my constituency have often felt abandoned and left behind by politicians both here in Westminster and especially in Brussels. Many fishermen today are the sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters of those fishermen who felt let down and disregarded 40 years ago when the fishing industry, in their view, was sacrificed as a bargaining chip in the UK's joining the Common Market. Across the board, the fishing industry has suffered heavily under the common fisheries policy, and the sense of betrayal by government runs very deep, but we have an opportunity, in passing this Bill and going forward, not only to rebuild our fishing industry but to rebuild their trust—and it is absolutely essential that we do that. For many people who voted in the referendum for us to leave the EU, how we deal with our fishing industry is the litmus test of how we deliver on Brexit. That is particularly true in many communities in Cornwall. I am pleased that the Government have stood firm in their negotiations with

the EU. It is vital that we continue to do so. We cannot let our fishing industry down again. We must keep our word and we must build faith with it.

I know that the Secretary of State, as a fellow proud Cornishman, knows many of the fishing communities in Cornwall. Fishing is very much at the heart of so many of our communities right across our county. It is great to see that we have many young people coming into the industry again in Cornwall. It is so important, in passing the Bill, that we give them a clear message that they can have a good and prosperous future in the industry. That is why I welcome the Bill.

I would just like to briefly say to the Minister that it is welcome that recreational fishing is mentioned in the Bill. It is really important that we understand that fishing is not just about its commercial aspects and that, particularly in many small coastal communities that rely on tourism, recreational fishing, whether sea angling or charter boats, plays a very important part in that. I just ask that he makes sure that that is considered going forward.

I absolutely welcome the Bill. I believe it strikes the right balance of sustainability between the environmental, economic and social aspects that need to be in place going forward. I will finish by paying tribute to our fishing communities across our country. Fishing is still one of the most dangerous professions in our country and we should never underestimate the price they pay to deliver fish to our table.

8.47 pm

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Ahead of today's debate, like my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), I received hundreds of emails from my constituents in Jarrow asking me to support a ban on supertrawlers and other destructive fishing vessels from UK marine protected areas—MPAs. These areas are designated to protect our precious biodiversity, and we should do all we can to safeguard them.

As environmental campaigners such as Greenpeace have noted, the Bill in its current format misses the opportunity to ban industrial supertrawlers from UK MPAs. MPAs exist to protect vulnerable ecosystems and marine life. They also benefit our local fishing communities as fish stocks are rejuvenated throughout our waters. It is therefore extremely concerning to read that an investigation by Greenpeace shows that fishing ships over 100 metres in length spent almost 3,000 hours fishing in UK MPAs in 2019. It has also been reported that supertrawlers vastly increased their fishing in the UK's MPAs during the covid-19 lockdown, while most of the UK's smaller vessels were confined to port.

The Bill in its current format does not only contain a lack of detail regarding supertrawlers and MPAs; it fails to include anything on how fishers will be assisted in cutting down on the use of harmful plastics or adopting the use of greener technologies, both at sea and during processing. There is also no statutory commitment for the sector to meet net-zero emissions. The Bill also fails to cover how the Government will stop foreign vessels undercutting UK boats on safety or employment standards. It is the case that most supertrawlers land their fish in Denmark or other European countries. We need to ensure that the UK fishing quota is redistributed

to smaller vessels away from supertrawlers. That would mean more jobs in UK fishing communities and would make fishing more sustainable.

Alongside Greenpeace, many of my Jarrow constituents have called on me to do all I can to ensure that destructive supertrawlers are banned from fishing in the UK's MPAs. The ban would pave the way for a network of fully or highly protected MPAs to be off limits to all destructive industrial activities, covering at least 30% of the UK's waters by 2030, bringing the UK in line with the international 30by30 target.

In conclusion, the Government have in fact called for the global community to increase protection of the world's oceans to 30% by 2030. I hope that they will follow through on that commitment by supporting a ban on supertrawlers fishing in marine protected areas.

8.50 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I rise to speak in firm support of the Bill, which I was proud to sign off on during my time as Secretary of State. In these islands of ours, we have a proud history as a seafaring nation. Our relationship with the sea has shaped our history and culture and helped to make us the people we are today. Those who took to the seas in the past played a crucial role in making this country into one of the most powerful nations on earth, defending our shores for centuries, whether from the Armada in 1588 or from the Nazis during the grim struggles of the north Atlantic convoys.

As many have said today, our fishing fleet still does a difficult and dangerous job, putting their lives in peril on our stormy oceans. For nearly half a century, those fishermen have had a raw deal from the common fisheries policy. In so many respects, the CFP has been a disaster—economically, socially and environmentally. I see clauses 12 and 13 as a historic step forward in disapplying article 5 of the CFP and ending the automatic right of EU vessels to fish in our waters. For the first time in decades, those we elect in this country will determine who has access to UK fisheries and on what terms. Of course, as many have said, that does not mean a blanket exclusion of non-UK boats, but I think the Prime Minister was right to say that our target should be that “British fishing grounds” should “first and foremost” be “for British boats”. The new regulatory framework that we can now set up can achieve far better outcomes on the environment and sustainable fishing than the system it will replace.

Clause 1, unamended by the House of Lords, will ensure that environmental concerns and sustainable fisheries are at the heart of the Government's approach. An ecosystem approach will help us to protect the seabed, conserve cetaceans and sea birds, and minimise impact on non-commercial fish species. Fisheries management plans have been added to the Bill in line with the Conservative manifesto commitment to a legal requirement for a plan to reach maximum sustainable yield for each stock.

Our fishing communities were betrayed when we entered the European Union, and for 47 years, we have been powerless in this House to remedy that injustice. The Bill before us this evening will enable us to begin to right that wrong. The vote to leave the European Union means that we can finally take back control of our

[Theresa Villiers]

fishing waters and become an independent coastal state once again. This Bill, made possible by that brave Brexit vote, will allow us to give a far better deal to our coastal communities, and it will greatly strengthen our efforts to conserve our precious marine environment. I urge the House to back it this evening.

8.53 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): This Bill is exceptionally important for Scotland, and yet, not for the first time, a Scottish industry and its people find themselves subject to the rule of this place and the will of a Tory majority of MPs, which Scotland again rejected. We do still have some Tory MPs in Scotland, but as we saw with the Agriculture Bill and the Trade Bill, they vote with the Tory Whips rather than the people of Scotland, even if they find that impossible to defend afterwards, as the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross)—who I see is no longer in his place—the latest in a line of new Scottish Tory leaders, found out to his cost yesterday.

While I am on that, I will be taking no lessons from the new leader of the Scottish Tories, the hon. Member for Moray, or his chief cheerleader, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), when it comes to representing my constituents. They should remember that their constituents, like mine and those in every other constituency in Scotland, voted to remain in the EU.

I look forward to the scrutiny to which the Bill will be subject in Committee, but let me be very clear on one point: this is profoundly more important for Scotland than anywhere else on these islands, with 62% of UK waters in Scotland's hands and 64% of the UK's catch being landed in Scotland. In making that point, I pay tribute to the six Cornish MPs, four of whom have made contributions this evening, and in particular my colleagues on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) and the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray)—very few in this Chamber speak with such passion and knowledge about fishing. I know that we have the same interest for our constituents; we just have a different ambition about how to get there. The same can be said of great ports such as Grimsby and Whitby, which have also been represented.

Let me be really clear on one thing. My colleagues in the SNP are being accused, despite never having said it, of being defenders of the common fisheries policy. We are no such thing. The SNP is no defender of the common fisheries policy, largely because it is indefensible in many respects. When Scotland re-enters the EU as an independent sovereign coastal state, we will be seeking to do so on our terms, as an independent country.

I read through the Bill, and I found myself asking, "What's in it for the fleets operating out of Scotland, and in particular constituents in Angus?" I was challenged to represent the people of Angus—well, here it is. The catch in Angus, where, like the whole of Scotland, we voted to remain in the EU, is harvested by inshore fleets, predominantly fishing creels for crab and lobster. My constituents are unencumbered by foreign boats and need contend with neither quota nor tariff, as they access lucrative and very well-established markets in the

EU for almost their entire customer base. I would like to thank the Minister for meeting me to discuss that priority for Angus fishermen.

The Brexit prospectus was very clear: foreign fleets are to be excluded from UK waters—simple. The Bill refers to that with details of the actions to be taken against infringement by errant skippers and owners and the nature of those penalties—all seemingly straightforward, except it is not straightforward, as complex international negotiations never are. They defy soundbite, which is problematic for a Government and Prime Minister whose stock-in-trade is soundbite.

In concluding, may I invite the Minister to advise my constituents what statecraft she and her ministerial colleagues will deploy to ensure that where EU boats are excluded in whole or in part, they do not take access to their markets with them when they are banished from UK waters? Can she also expand on the European maritime and fisheries fund? Scotland receives €108 million of the total UK quantum, and Ministers have been totally unclear about what will replace that.

8.57 pm

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): This Bill is not only important for the UK fishing industry. It is also a statement of the repatriation of sovereign powers to the UK. We regain total control over our territorial waters. I speak for Hastings and Rye fishermen and many others around the UK when I say that the area within the UK's 12-mile limit should be an exclusive zone in which fishing and access rights should be limited to UK fishing vessels only. That will ensure a better basis for future management of inshore fisheries, which is fundamental for Hastings and Rye fishing communities, who will benefit from thousands of tonnes of fish worth millions of pounds that are currently fished by other EU nations.

Although we have withdrawn from the London fisheries convention, clause 12 of the Bill does not make clear the 12-mile exclusive fishing zone within the British fisheries limit, and I stand up for Hastings and Rye fishermen who want clarity on that issue. They state that to issue licences to foreign vessels within the 12 miles of our shore would be a sell-out. The 12-mile limit is sacrosanct, and I would be grateful for clarity on that point.

The sustainable practices of small-scale fisheries of mainly under-10 metre boats cannot be marginalised or undervalued. Small boats, by their very nature, have less impact on the marine ecosystem than large boats, which often wreak considerable damage. Fishing must be about sustainability, but we cannot ignore the social and economic welfare that our local fisheries bring to local communities, fostering a sense of pride and encouraging tourism and hospitality businesses, for example. We must have a system that retains youth and supports family-based fishing enterprises in our coastal communities, and that is especially important when considering quotas.

Quota fairness is fundamental in fisheries management, with equitable opportunity for people who actually fish. Systems such as remote electronic monitoring that help conserve and monitor fish stocks and catches are arguably essential. Global trials of electronic monitoring show there is no doubt that this would incentivise better compliance and reduce discarding activity, but it is

unpopular among fishermen, who have concerns about privacy, liability and cost. The costs to small-scale boats would be disproportionate, and fishing boats are living spaces as well as workplaces. Participation in electronic monitoring should be encouraged in large boats as a way of increasing public trust, more sustainable fishing and monitoring stock, rather than just compliance.

Fisheries management is challenging—needing to balance fishing capacity with sustainable fishing. This Bill promotes co-management of fisheries, and any electronic monitoring should be a constructive process based on the management of fisheries and addressing existing complexities. The British fishing industry has made clear its commitment to sustainable fishing post Brexit. It is our duty to ensure that it has our support.

9.1 pm

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Although my constituency includes the waterfront of the River Mersey, we are not a fishing constituency, but the largest number of petitions from my constituents was against supertrawlers being allowed to fish in our marine protected areas. In Britain, supertrawlers, big boats and larger fishing interests are pushing out the smaller and more environmentally friendly vessels on which local communities and economies rely. A Greenpeace investigation has revealed that, in the first six months of 2020, supertrawlers spent over 5,000 hours fishing in protected areas. These areas are meant to safeguard vulnerable marine habitats. Instead, these habitats were threatened by highly destructive industrial fishing methods, including electric pulse trawlers and trawlers that drag nets along the seabed. If this Government are going to live up to their title of global ocean champion, they must act and act fast.

Under the common fisheries policy, EU fishing vessels landed more fish from UK waters than UK vessels landed from EU waters. Between 2012 and 2016, EU state vessels annually landed fish worth £575 million caught in UK waters compared with UK vessels landing only £96 million-worth of fish caught in the waters of other member states. As we prepare to leave the EU common fisheries policy, the UK has the opportunity to regulate our coastal waters, ban destructive industrial fishing from our MPAs and strengthen marine protection. These areas are not designated protection areas for nothing.

If we are to end overfishing and to create a sustainable fishing policy, we need to move away from the supertrawlers and large-scale fleets to smaller boats, because small boats are the backbone of the British fishing fleet and they deserve the lion's share of fish caught under the UK quota. For every fish caught, the small-scale fleet creates more jobs than larger boats. Smaller boat owners have suffered huge financial uncertainty during covid-19. For many, the biggest part of their business is their boat, which still needs to be maintained, even if the business cannot operate. The Government need to commit resources to this industry, alongside coastal communities, to ensure not just their survival, but their growth.

Small fishers were unable to adapt to the upheavals caused by the covid-19 crisis as, throughout the lockdown period, their quota allocations for the fish they catch remained unchanged. If we are to develop a sustainable and environmentally beneficial fishing policy, we need to turn to the smaller fleets, which create local jobs, are

less harmful to the marine environment and can ensure more fish are landed in the UK. That is why I am supporting clause 27, requiring a minimum quota for new entrants to the sector whose boats are 10 metres or under, plus clause 1(3) on the sustainability objective and clause 18 on the establishment of a national landing requirement to support small fishers and the coastal communities they serve by ensuring that a minimum percentage of fish caught by both domestic and foreign fishing vessels in UK waters are then landed at a UK port.

9.4 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I want to stress how pleased I am that the Bill has been brought to the House for its Second Reading today. It will not only allow the United Kingdom again to become an independent coastal state but enable us to set a gold standard for protecting our seafood stocks. I am sure that, like me, many other Members will have had plenty of emails over the summer recess from concerned constituents regarding supertrawlers. I therefore hope that they will reassure their constituents, as I have done, with the fact that this Bill will provide the Government with the powers to protect British fish stocks while allowing our long-beleaguered fishing industry to thrive following the transition period. With climate change and conservation rightly becoming an increasing concern for the British public, I welcome the fact that the Bill will ensure that some of the richest seas in the world are not at risk of becoming empty and that their biodiversity will be protected and strengthened.

The Bill is also of national importance because it will restore our position as an independent coastal state by replacing the outdated and highly damaging common fisheries policy. I do not represent a coastal constituency, but over the years many of my constituents have been dismayed at the way in which British fishermen have been disadvantaged by that policy. The Bill's objective to end the automatic access of EU vessels to British waters is therefore most welcome. It will ensure that the previous injustices that saw our seas overfished by foreign trawlers are not repeated. As a result, the Bill will restore confidence in the British public that the British Government are once again in complete control of our maritime future. This will be hugely beneficial to the 12,000 fishermen who play such a vital role in our food supply chains.

As we embrace our new future outside the European Union, the United Kingdom must reassert its historic position as an outward-looking maritime nation once again. The Bill will inevitably allow this spirit to be recognised, and it will also ensure that in our waters, we will truly rule the waves once again.

9.7 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to all the fishermen who fish our waters, particularly those who fish off the beautiful coast of South Dorset. They are an integral part of our community, and a very valuable one, and we must fight to do all we can to retain them. I agree with the excellent point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) that fishing within the 12-mile nautical limit should be for British boats. I, too, would be most grateful if the

[Richard Drax]

Minister could give some indication of whether that will be the case, when she or he sums up at the end of the debate—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): It's definitely a she!

Richard Drax: I see a she there, but we do not know who is going to sum up the debate. That is why I added that disclaimer.

We all know that the fishing industry is totemic. Like all fishermen, those in South Dorset feel let down and neglected, as do many others in this country. Before I came here today, I spoke to Andy Alcock, a fisherman in Weymouth who runs three boats. He is secretary of the local Association of Weymouth and Portland Fishermen and Boat Owners. I asked him what his views were, and what he wanted me to say today. His views mirror mine. He says, "We want our waters back. That's what you told us when we argued about leaving the EU, and that's what we expect to get." He says that 18% of all fish sold on the continent comes from within our 25-mile limit. He would rather that we caught that fish and sold it to them. Both he and I hope that Ministers will stand their ground during the negotiations with the EU and not allow fishing to become a bargaining chip.

At the beginning of this year, I reminded the Prime Minister of a question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), who sadly is not with us at the moment. In December 2019, my right hon. Friend asked the Prime Minister:

"Will he guarantee that we will not make the mistake of the 1970s and allow the allocation of fishing resources to be a bargaining chip in the treaty negotiations? Will he guarantee that we will become a normal independent maritime nation and conduct negotiations on an annual basis for reciprocal deals to mutual advantage?"

The Prime Minister replied that we need

"to restore to this country the advantages of its spectacular marine wealth, and that is exactly what we will do, once we become an independent coastal state."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 2019; Vol. 444, c. 148.]

Nothing less than that will do.

The Bill provides for that and I welcome it. Of course I will support it tonight, but fears remain in the fishing industry that fishermen might still, at this late stage, be betrayed as negotiations reach a critical stage at the end of this year. I urge the Government to stand firm, whatever they do, and not to betray our fishermen or our country. We have fought so hard, and it would be a tragedy if we betrayed them on this issue.

I have a message for Mr Barnier: "Hands off our fish!" My wife, who speaks fluent French, texted me a short time ago, so if he is listening, I say, "Monsieur Barnier, laissez nos poissons!"

9.11 pm

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), in this debate. I rise to speak in support of this Bill, because we can now look forward to becoming an independent coastal state. This Fisheries Bill gets us out of the EU common fisheries policy. A policy that has constrained and betrayed the

fishermen of the United Kingdom for 40 years will finally be no more. The same, I am afraid, is true of the Fishery Limits Act 1976, which was passed by a Labour Government and which put the anchors down on our fleet of British boats in favour of EU-registered fishing vessels.

Our fishermen have looked on in despair for decades at this gross injustice, resulting in the number of working fishermen in the UK falling by 40% since the mid-1990s. It is the same despair that I and my hon. Friends from along the south coast experienced in October when the second largest trawler in the world, the Margiris, was trawling our coastline. This 465-foot floating fish factory dwarfs our own fishing vessels. It is capable of catching 250 tonnes of fish a day, in stark contrast to West Bay, in my constituency, which lands 250 tonnes a year.

This Bill removes the automatic fishing rights of foreign vessels and supertrawlers to our waters and it is this Conservative Government who will be able to return to our fishermen their fair quotas, which they rightly deserve, and should never allow these supertrawlers into UK waters again let alone into marine protected areas.

I should like to say in response to the SNP's contribution a little earlier—forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it all smelled a little bit fishy to me—that its reasoned amendment is a damp squid! Why? It is quite simple and straightforward. Not only do more than 92% of the fishermen in Scotland believe that we should leave the EU and want to be out of the common fisheries policy, but where is that second largest trawler in the world right now? It is off the coast of Scotland, due east of Aberdeen, trawling thousands of tonnes of fish from Scottish seas and from its fishermen. I regret to say that the SNP is out of touch with the fishing community and I am afraid that, on this point, it is like a fish out of water when it comes to this Bill.

In recent months, the coronavirus has demonstrated the strength of local producers to step up and feed local communities when it was needed the most, and no more so than in West Dorset, but people are demanding more. They want to know where their food and their fish are coming from. Leaving the common fisheries policy will enable our island nation to put more fish on British tables. It is good for our health, good for our economy and good for coastal fishing towns.

In coastal constituencies such as mine in West Dorset and that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), the small fishing communities of Lyme Regis and West Bay, home to just 24 fishing vessels, will greatly benefit from this Bill. It will restore to them and to our fishing communities around the country not only the prosperity of times past but even more in the future: hook, line and sinker.

9.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). I thank him for the fishy puns that he threw in. There were three of them altogether, and he probably had a few more that he did not get a chance to say.

As the representative of a fishing village who takes his place in this House, I am happy to say that I have liaised with the fishing representatives of both Portavogie in my constituency and Kilkeel in South Down. I am content that I am speaking for them both and subsequently

for fishing in Northern Ireland—for the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation and the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation.

With this Bill, we will free ourselves of EU bureaucracy. We will have a chance to fish in our waters, catch the fish that belong to us in our waters, land them at our ports and create the jobs. So if people want to know what the Bill is going to do for us, that is it. It is all plus, and we should look on the plus side.

It is clear that the Bill may not have all the perfections that it should have. We all know that a Bill will never be able to satisfy everybody, but I am content that the Bill contains all the principles that are needed, and while it is not everything that the fishermen would desire, it is acceptable. The Bill is workable, fair and fit for purpose. The purpose of the amendments to any Bill is to correct or improve it or to add value to what it offers. It is my opinion after careful consideration that the Bill is not improved by the Lords amendments, which will be discussed in Committee of course. Indeed, the argument has been well put to me that they detract from the purpose of the Bill to bring sustainable fishing back home. The House will have to decide whether it prioritises virtue signalling over truly effective sustainable fisheries management. I believe that the Bill retains the power within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the fishing sector must be core, as was said earlier, to delivering truly effective sustainable fisheries management.

Of the eight objectives included in the Fisheries Bill, five relate to fishing sustainably. That is fine. Without a functioning ecosystem and policies that limit fishing to safe levels, there will be no fishing industry. That is why I believe that the Lords amendments detract from what the Bill should do. I also believe that the evidence that some of those in the other place referred to in proposing their amendments, which will be discussed in Committee, used cherry-picked evidence. The risk that that presents cannot be overstated.

There has been chronic concern in the industry surrounding UK flagged vessels with non-UK beneficial owners catching fish in UK waters and landing them abroad. This provides little economic benefit for the UK and makes it more difficult for the UK authorities to verify that illegal, unregulated or unreported fishing is not taking place, as they cannot conduct physical landing checks.

There has been a call for remote electronic monitoring. Yet again, this appears to be another instance of an attempt to turn the Bill from a fisheries management tool into an enabler of environmental agendas. I am a proud environmentalist; I believe that we must be good stewards of the land and sea that we have been granted and that we can be environmentalists and realists at the same time. It is not a contradiction. It can be done. A study suggested that a remote electronic monitoring regime would cost £5 million. That would pale into insignificance; the real cost would be about £60 million.

I want to make a quick plea to the Minister in the last few seconds in relation to non-EEC crews. It is so important that we have them in place. I ask the Minister again to give that consideration in Committee. He should also look at how seafood transits from Northern Ireland through Great Britain on its way to continental Europe.

We are happy that the Bill is coming through the House. My party will be fully supporting the Bill, and we hope that in Committee we will have a chance to have an input and make some further changes that could help us.

9.19 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I was on the Bill Committee for the last Fisheries Bill, which left Committee in December 2018, went off into orbit and was never seen again. This Bill, which is a variation of its predecessor, is in a better shape, but there are issues that need to be addressed if the Bill and the policies that it spawns are to revive the Lowestoft and East Anglian fishing industry, a blueprint for which was provided in the report by REAF—Renaissance of East Anglian Fisheries—of October 2019.

It is good news that the Government have commissioned both a project on the future of inshore fisheries and a study on low-impact vessels, which the New Economics Foundation is carrying out. However, it is concerning and disappointing that no East Anglian representative is on the project board for the former and that a workshop for the latter has not yet taken place in the region.

It is important that the benefits of the new UK fishing policy accrue to local communities. As I mentioned earlier, it is concerning that the economic link remains under review after three years. I accept that this is a complex subject, but the issue cannot remain in the long grass. Powerful companies may well be resistant to change, but with our departure from the EU, the status quo will become even more unacceptable. This criterion must be reviewed.

If we are to make the most of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reset our fishing policy, we must recognise the need to invest in infrastructure right along the supply chain, from the net to the plate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) articulated so well. Eventually, we will have the answer the question of who owns UK fisheries. The Blue Marine Foundation takes the view that ownership has been squatted, not by those in need but by a combination of high-net-worth individuals and non-UK interests. It is good news that the Government are consulting on the distribution of additional quota, but time is running out for decisions before 1 January, and the indications are that any changes will be phased in over a number of years. I accept that this is not an easy task, but I would highlight the Blue Marine Foundation's call for a commitment from the Government to reform the current fixed-quota allocation system and ultimately to replace it with a more socially and environmentally equitable distribution mechanism.

My final point is about the need for the new UK fishing policy to be truly sustainable. Very simply, we will have failed if supertrawlers continue to fish in UK waters and if practices such as electric pulse fishing are allowed to continue.

In conclusion, I believe we are moving in the right direction, though we are not there yet. Post Brexit, fishing must be different. Benefits must accrue to local people and local communities, and we must ensure that we do not just carry on with the same old system in a new set of clothes.

9.23 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I am another of those who hesitated before rising, because I represent a landlocked constituency. However, I wish to make two brief points, both environmental in nature, which is something that matters a great deal to us all—I know it matters to my constituents. I am a member of the Marine Conservation Society and I am a diver. The health of the ocean matters a great deal to me, and I would like to focus on a couple of those points today.

A moment ago, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) made a remark about the Margiris, the highly controversial supertrawler. He made a good point because he graphically illustrated how the UK Government have been unable to take the steps that other Governments around the world have to exclude that vessel and vessels like it. This Bill will enable us to do so, because it will end the automatic right of access and require any vessel coming in not only to have a licence but to comply with British standards, including environmental and sustainability standards.

That is critical, because over the years the CFP has presided over an ecological calamity, as well as the destruction of fishing villages and communities all around the coast. That is because it has allowed chronic overfishing, putting pressure on cod stocks in particular, despite all the scientific evidence that has been present throughout most of this period. For example, last year the total quota for North sea cod was set 25% higher than the scientific advice, despite the stock being put back on a critical warning that it is on the brink of collapse. The CFP was intended to rule that out, but it has not done so—in fact, it has exacerbated the problem by allowing more fishing fleets to exploit the fish stocks in British waters.

Something that has not been raised much in this debate, although I am sure the Minister will touch on it in closing—I will be grateful if she does—is the other elements of the Bill that are helpful from an environmental perspective. In enabling us to control our own waters, it goes much further than simply banning unlicensed vessels, vital though that is. There is a climate change objective that introduces the concept of fisheries management plans to fish at sustainable limits for all stocks. There are improvements to the ecosystem-based approach, so that, as I understand it, fisheries management will recognise the full array of interactions within an ecosystem. It will enable marine conservation powers to regulate fishing for the purpose of protecting the marine environment, and powers to provide financial assistance for schemes in the fish and aquaculture industries for the purpose, among others, of improving the marine and aquatic environment. This is the third great reforming Bill produced by DEFRA—the other two are the Environment Bill and the Agriculture Bill—that includes the worthwhile and welcome policy of providing public money for public goods.

My second point is that all the arguments we have been making about increasing opportunities for our domestic fishing industries do not count for as much as they would if we could persuade people in Britain to eat more of the fish that are found around our coast. We have 8,500 species around our coast; 150 species of British fish are caught, but only about five are regularly

eaten in the UK. We could do a great deal more to diversify what is put on our plates, and that would help not only our industries but the environment as well.

9.27 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): This is the moment that Leigh-on-Sea fishermen have been waiting for. This is the moment that their Member of Parliament has been waiting for—a real, tangible benefit from leaving the European Union: taking back control of our own waters. I particularly praise the Secretary of State—I am flattered that he has come into the Chamber to listen to my speech—for the parts of the Bill that deal with sustainability and protecting the marine environment. It is well known that Leigh fishermen catch the finest fish in the world—it is another reason why Southend should become a city—and they feel very sore that, for too long, small under-10 metre fishing vessels have been so badly treated. I am glad that the Bill will address that.

I want to raise a few local points with the Secretary of State and the excellent Minister who will wind up the debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis). Councillor Paul Gilson, who happens to be the chairman of Leigh town council, believes that a management team for each fishery area would be valuable, as the industry and fish in many locations are area-specific. Leigh-on-Sea fishermen have recently had to cope with illegal harvesting of shellfish—Southend's coastline has suffered nightmarishly from this—and local feeling is that a taskforce to tackle illegal fish and shellfish harvesting, with powers to cross-warrant, would control the problem more carefully and effectively, combined with an active fishery protection force.

We also believe that, to improve the sustainability and continue the economic growth of the industry for future generations, more independent scientific surveys are needed. If surveys are undertaken by multinational logistics companies that have a personal interest in the ports and fishing industry, such as DP World, which is silting up the River Thames and causing some distress in the area I represent, they may not be as reliable or accurate as other ways of collecting data.

As many hon. Members throughout the debate have said, there really does need to be a change in the quota system. It is disgraceful the way that boats under 10 metres have been treated. We need to rectify these previous inequalities by changing the quota system and the category vessels that fall into that section.

The coronavirus pandemic has been a nightmare for everyone, but I am delighted that Southend fishermen have been promoting local fish for local people. It has been a great success, with local fishermen landing their catches at their local ports and selling to local communities directly through social media and general advertising. They have done extremely well.

In conclusion, this really is an excellent Bill. It will still allow foreign vessels in UK waters, subject to UK law and licences. We must ensure that we do not reduce our opportunities on a global scale. Leaving the European Union will of course give us more freedom in many aspects of life and business, an important one being the control of our fisheries and water, but if we allow

foreign vessels to fish in our waters, we need access to theirs, with equal opportunities. European Union customers are dependent on fish caught in British waters. We need to maintain the competitiveness of our waters, as our fishing is worth between £6 billion and £8 billion.

9.31 pm

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on the Bill tonight. As we return to being an independent coastal state, I hope that the Bill will encourage more fishermen to take to the beautiful waters off the North Devon coast. Our small fishing fleet know our North Devon waters like no one else. For generations, the fishing families of Ilfracombe, Combe Martin and Lynmouth have acted as the stewards of our seas. It is vital that we manage our waters. The coast of my constituency is different from other parts of the UK. The Bill hands back the control we need, which can help all our fishermen.

The Bill gives the UK back control of our waters and enshrines our manifesto commitment to sustainable fishing. North Devon is home to the first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the commitment to sustainability is paramount to its future, as well as protecting the marine environment. I, and the fishing community of North Devon, want to keep our seas healthy and teeming with life. The Bill, without its amendments, provides us with the legal framework to keep it that way.

As I support the Bill tonight, I would like to take the opportunity to thank our fishermen, who risk their lives to keep fish on our plates. As the Bill progresses and EU negotiations proceed, I hope all involved will hear us when we

“cry to Thee for those in peril on the sea.”

9.33 pm

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): It is always a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby). I do not have the same local points as she does with her fishing community—North West Durham is sadly landlocked, despite my attempts at expansion in the future—but I do have some local concerns. We have the Golden Fish Inn down at Delves Lane in Consett, Dave’s Fish and Chip Shop in Moorside and Craven’s in Wolsingham, among many others, who all sell our fine local produce from across the UK.

I am very glad to see, finally, that the Opposition Front-Bench team seem to have abandoned their leader’s previous policy of a second referendum, although I must agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray). I was quite worried about some of the suggestions made by the Opposition Front Bench spokesman: perhaps if they were in charge, there would be some form of negotiations on our fishing going on at this time.

I would just like to make two very brief points. First, my constituents voted for control of our borders. That includes our maritime borders as well. I am very glad to see that the Bill will do exactly that. Secondly, they voted for more control of our economy, including the environmental and regulatory parts of it. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House raised the issue of supertrawlers, about which there is widespread concern. I am glad the regulations will be for the UK Government

to decide. I would like to see a little bit more leg from the Secretary of State and the Minister, if at all possible, on that.

Finally, the Bill also speaks to jobs in the UK, which is exactly what we want to see. This is about not only getting control, but being able to focus on what Britain does best. This is one of the proudest moments. I welcome this aspect of the Bill, which is focusing back on the UK what we do best. We have been a seafaring power for many years, and over some decades our fishing industry has been in decline. I hope that this Bill marks a turning point in that.

9.35 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to close the debate for the Opposition tonight. From 2021, the UK will become an independent coastal state, and for the first time in 45 years we will have control over who fishes in our waters and how much they can catch. We can use this historic moment to our advantage to combat the decline in wages and job opportunities faced by coastal communities and to create a sustainable UK fishing regime where the marine environment is protected and every effort is made to replenish our declining fish stocks. The Bill will impact not only the health of our seas, but our seaside towns, fishers and industry.

In today’s debate, three issues have come up time and again: the impact of covid-19 on our coastal communities, ports and smaller boats; the need to support our struggling fishers and those who live in seaside towns and villages by giving them a fairer share of fishing opportunities and landing catches in UK ports; and the importance of putting sustainability at the heart of future fisheries management. We have heard many passionate speeches from across the House this evening. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) referred to the jobs and coastal communities amendment. She rightly highlighted that, in the fishing industry, 10 jobs are created on land for every one at sea. If the Government are serious about levelling up parts of the UK that have been left behind, they should support Labour’s call to land more UK fish caught in UK waters in UK ports.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) said that people care where their food comes from and they care about the people who provide it. She is right and she rightly spoke passionately about support for smaller fishers and outlined the simple fact that the Government have always been able to have the power to redistribute UK fishing quotas. As has been discussed in the debate, one of the Bill’s main aims is to ensure a level playing field between UK and foreign boats. Surely that principle of fairness should extend to our own fleet. Small fishers are the backbone of local communities. They deserve the lion’s share of any additional quota that comes out of negotiations with the EU, as the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) touched on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) spoke of the sustainability objective that was passed in the Lords, and I share her disappointment that the Government intend to remove that amendment, along with the three other amendments won in the other place. Labour Members believe that this objective

[Stephanie Peacock]

is a big step forward to creating a more sustainable fishing regime and that fisheries management plans must be legally binding if they are to be effective.

The Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State rightly paid tribute to the six fishers who lost their lives in 2019. Commercial fishing remains the most dangerous peacetime occupation in the UK. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Sir Alan Campbell) spoke about that and he highlighted that this Thursday will see Merchant Navy Day take place. The hon. Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and for Waveney (Peter Aldous) pointed out that recreational fishing deserves recognition for its contribution not only to our national economy, but to smaller ports and communities. The covid-19 pandemic hit this sector hard, as lockdown regulations and social distancing measures made trips economically unviable, and it is so important that the industry gets the support it needs to get back on its feet.

Independently produced, peer-reviewed science must form the basis of all fisheries management decisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) referred to each boat as a floating laboratory and she is absolutely right to describe how a lack of data on the state of fish stocks cripples our ability to make informed decisions and set fishing quotas at sustainable levels. Overfishing directly impacts the future viability of our fishing industry, and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), along with other Members, was right to call for an end to electronic pulse fishing.

The right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), a former Fisheries Minister, spoke with great expertise on this subject. Fish stocks do not respect the 200 nautical mile zone, so, as has been stated, Labour welcomes zonal attachment. In what I thought was a thoughtful speech, the right hon. Gentleman quoted the great Nye Bevan, acknowledging:

“Only an organising genius could produce a shortage of coal and fish at the same time.”

What an irony that the last majority Conservative Government destroyed our coal industry. We believe that we must ensure that our fishing industry does not suffer the same fate.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) spoke passionately about the importance of fishing to her local economy. I was pleased to visit the Grimsby docks earlier this year, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to her predecessor, who fought hard for the Grimsby fishers during her time in this place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) made important arguments about the need to reduce plastic waste and for a commitment to reach net zero, which is clearly an oversight in the Bill and something that we hope to address in Committee. She, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson) and many others, spoke about the operation of supertrawlers in marine protected areas, and a ban was called for by Members across the House.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) that not enough time has been given in this or other Parliaments to discuss our

fishing industry. I share his concerns that the delay in bringing forward the Bill caused huge uncertainty for our fishing fleets.

The hon. Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) spoke about the need to encourage young people to enter the UK fishing industry as a career. Labour believes in investment in skills, along with apprenticeships, and we will table an amendment in Committee that we hope the Government will support.

Like the hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable work of Seafarers UK and the Fishermen’s Mission, two charities that my grandma used to collect for.

Labour calls on the Government to support smaller fishers and coastal communities, who have struggled to make a living, especially in the last 10 years, and have been some of the worst hit economically during the covid-19 pandemic. We want to right the wrong faced by small boats, which represent 79% of the UK fishing fleet but hold only 2% of the quota. That is clearly unjust. We want a commitment to land more fish in UK ports, bringing more jobs and growth opportunities to seaside towns. We will continue to push for coastal communities to get a greater share of economic growth, for jobs at sea to be protected and jobs on land to be realised and for the Government to fulfil their promise of a legal commitment to sustainability.

As Members across the House have made clear, this Bill, together with the Agriculture and Environment Bills, represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to leave our environment in a better way than we found it. Healthy fish stocks have been proven to create a more resilient and productive marine environment and ecosystem. That leads to increased long-term catches and greater industry profits. For the sake of our coastal communities, which rely on our UK fishing industry and the thousands of jobs it creates, not just on boats but in processing, logistics and food services, we must put sustainability at the heart of our fishing policy. This Bill presents a chance to begin the process of making sure that UK fishers get a fair deal. We must do right by them and by our coastal communities.

9.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): It is a real privilege to close the debate on this important Bill. I will try to address what I can in the moments I have, but where I do not, I undertake to follow up specific issues with hon. Members directly; this has been a very wide-ranging debate.

There has clearly been a lot of interest in the status of the negotiations with the EU. Indeed, the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), also raised the important negotiations that are going on with Norway and the Faroes. I understand the level of interest, and of course I share it, but this is not the place to discuss the current position of those negotiations. The task before us tonight is to make progress with this important Bill. It is a framework Bill that gives us the power to implement whatever we obtain in the negotiations. The measures in the Bill are required regardless of the outcome of the negotiations, and we must press on with our legislative programme.

The Bill has been developed in collaboration with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Administrations, and with their help it has been improved. As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said, Minister Ewing recognised this last month when he confirmed the Scottish Government's recommendation of consent for the Bill, saying:

“Unlike for other UK bills, the co-operative working between officials and indeed ministers in the Scottish Government, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the other devolved Administrations has demonstrated what can be achieved”.

At their request, this Bill gives the devolved Administrations more powers than ever to manage their fisheries. This is an opportunity to create tailored approaches to fisheries management across the UK.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross). It is clear, on tonight's showing, that he will be an outstanding leader of the Scottish Conservatives, and we have seen tonight—if we ever doubted—that he is very firmly on the side of the Scottish fishing fleet. My hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) made an excellent speech, and I would also like to mention the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), who, because of his ministerial responsibilities, was unable to speak in the debate. I think it is fair to say that the Scottish industry is well represented in this House, as those Members take a great interest in every decision that is taken.

In a perceptive speech, the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said that there is a great deal of consensus for what the Bill is trying to achieve, and many Members from across the House spoke about getting the balance right—namely, the complexities of managing a diverse ecosystem with the interests of an equally diverse fishing fleet.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) made a stand-out speech. Of course, she helped to craft the Bill, and spoke passionately about its aims and objectives.

We heard some superb and wide-ranging Back-Bench speeches from across the House. The issue of safety was rightly raised on both Front Benches, and most passionately by my hon. Friends the Members for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) and for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), the right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Sir Alan Campbell), the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen), who I welcome back from maternity leave, and many more Members across the House. Much work is being done on the issue. As Members have said, there is absolutely no need to wait for the outcome of the Bill to do this important work, and it is right to say that the Department for Transport, the Marine and Coastguard Agency, and Seafish are working hard on this issue. Unusual though it may be, I pay tribute to the shadow Secretary of State for the work that he has done to raise this issue again and again in this place. It is not a matter particularly for tonight's debate, but definitely a matter of concern to all of us in this House—and that should have been heard loud and clear.

Other speeches that stood out for me included that of the former Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), who gave us an important historical round-up of why we are here.

On the specific point that he raised, I will ask the Scallop Industry Consultation Group to raise the issue of gear conflict. I undertake to report back to him on that.

Many Members encouraged us to eat more local fish and to promote British seafood, and many noted what had been done during the pandemic to support that and said how much more direct selling was being undertaken at the moment. I refer specifically to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici), who represents the proud port of Grimsby, my hon. Friends the Members for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), for West Dorset (Chris Loder), for North West Durham (Mr Holden) and for Witney (Robert Courts)—all of them proud eaters of seafood who were encouraging their constituents to be the same—and, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). I am not sure that it is Government policy yet that Southend should become a city, but there can be no doubt that he sticks up for the rights of his fishing industry and the rights of his people to eat what they produce.

We also heard some passionate speeches about the marine environment from the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts). The strong voice of Cornwall was heard around the Chamber and, indeed, acknowledged by the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan), who accepted that many of the issues raised mirror those of his own fishermen. It is great to have so many Cornish colleagues who, in their own words, would say that they had done a proper job at standing up for the industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory), who is married to a fisherman, cannot be here tonight, but we heard strongly about the worries that Cornish colleagues have about the inshore fleet. I would like to reassure them that we are working with a number of recently formed groups—again, supported by Seafish—to collaborate on more sustainable management for specific stocks such as whelks and crabs. We have noted that parts of the industry have had louder voices than others in the past, and these new groups are an attempt to address that.

I should also mention the work of REAF, the Renaissance of East Anglian Fisheries, which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) and my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who mentions it frequently in this place. Its report contains some excellent ideas, which the Government will continue to look into.

Fisheries management plans will revolutionise how we manage our precious fisheries. They will allow us to take a holistic approach to management, managing fisheries at an appropriate level, not fettered by lines on maps or differences between inshore and offshore, between Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities districts or even between Administrations. We will continue to work with industry and interested parties in a much closer way, developing plans together and ensuring that we use the best possible evidence and local knowledge, so that we can create a management for fisheries that is truly appropriate.

A number of Members mentioned funding. Of course, with a fairer share of fish and more opportunities, we expect that profitability and investment in the sector will increase. However, we recognise that this will take time, so I would like to restate that the Government will

[Victoria Prentis]

maintain funding for fisheries across the UK's nations throughout the Parliament, as we said in our manifesto commitment. The Bill provides new, expanded funding powers, which will allow us to fund infrastructure such as port development and training—I see the right hon. Member for Tynemouth nodding; I know that that has long been a concern of his. These new domestic funding schemes will support our priorities, and as a devolved matter, each Administration will lead on their own programme.

We all recognise the importance of the inshore sector, not just our Cornish colleagues. I am really pleased that, over the summer, tourists have been able to travel to our coastal communities and enjoy the very best of what our seas have to offer. As a family, we enjoyed some wonderful weather in Tenby over the weekend. It has been rather a shock to come back, straight into this important Bill. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate those seafood businesses that have adapted and innovated as a result of the pandemic and are encouraging more and more people to eat locally caught and directly sourced fish. We are determined to continue to work on this as a Government; it is a real priority for us.

Fishing is a key part of our heritage as an island nation. The injustices felt by so many concerning the common fisheries policy loomed large in the debate over our decision to leave the EU. This Bill gives us the opportunity to put that right and reclaim our position as an independent coastal state. It is a framework Bill, and I look forward to working across the House to put meat on the bones of the Bill, but it does what it needs to do, which is give us the powers we need to act in a flexible and responsive way, providing sustainable fisheries for future generations. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put. That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 49, Noes 326.

Division No. 84]

[9.54 pm

AYES

Bardell, Hannah	Hosie, Stewart
Black, Mhairi	Lake, Ben
Blackford, rh Ian	Law, Chris
Blackman, Kirsty	Linden, David
Bonnar, Steven	MacAskill, Kenny
Brock, Deidre	Mc Nally, John
Brown, Alan	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Cameron, Dr Lisa	McDonald, Stuart C.
Chapman, Douglas	McLaughlin, Anne
Cherry, Joanna	Monaghan, Carol
Cowan, Ronnie	Newlands, Gavin
Crawley, Angela	Nicolson, John
Day, Martyn	O'Hara, Brendan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Oswald, Kirsten
Doogan, Dave	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Dorans, Allan	Sheppard, Tommy
Edwards, Jonathan	Smith, Alyn
Fellows, Marion	Stephens, Chris
Ferrier, Margaret	Thewliss, Alison
Flynn, Stephen	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Gibson, Patricia	Williams, Hywel
Grady, Patrick	Wishart, Pete
Grant, Peter	
Gray, Neil	
Hanvey, Neale	
Hendry, Drew	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Owen Thompson and
Richard Thomson

NOES

Adams, Nigel	Collins, Damian
Afolami, Bim	Costa, Alberto
Afriyie, Adam	Courts, Robert
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Coutinho, Claire
Aiken, Nickie	Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Aldous, Peter	Crabb, rh Stephen
Allan, Lucy	Crosbie, Virginia
Amess, Sir David	Crouch, Tracey
Anderson, Lee	Daly, James
Anderson, Stuart	Davies, David T. C.
Andrew, Stuart	Davies, Gareth
Argar, Edward	Davies, Dr James
Atkins, Victoria	Davies, Mims
Bacon, Gareth	Davies, Philip
Bacon, Mr Richard	Davis, rh Mr David
Badenoch, Kemi	Davison, Dehenna
Bailey, Shaun	Dines, Miss Sarah
Baillie, Siobhan	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Baker, Duncan	Docherty, Leo
Baker, Mr Steve	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Baldwin, Harriett	Donelan, Michelle
Barclay, rh Steve	Double, Steve
Baron, Mr John	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Baynes, Simon	Drax, Richard
Bell, Aaron	Duddridge, James
Benton, Scott	Duguid, David
Beresford, Sir Paul	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Berry, rh Jake	Dunne, rh Philip
Bhatti, Saqib	Eastwood, Mark
Blackman, Bob	Edwards, Ruth
Blunt, Crispin	Ellis, rh Michael
Bone, Mr Peter	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Eustice, rh George
Bowie, Andrew	Evans, Dr Luke
Bradley, Ben	Evennett, rh Sir David
Bradley, rh Karen	Everitt, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham	Fabricant, Michael
Braverman, rh Suella	Farris, Laura
Brereton, Jack	Fell, Simon
Bridgen, Andrew	Fletcher, Katherine
Brine, Steve	Fletcher, Mark
Bristow, Paul	Fletcher, Nick
Britcliffe, Sara	Ford, Vicky
Brokenshire, rh James	Foster, Kevin
Browne, Anthony	Frazer, Lucy
Bruce, Fiona	Freeman, George
Buchan, Felicity	Freer, Mike
Buckland, rh Robert	Fuller, Richard
Burghart, Alex	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Burns, rh Conor	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Butler, Rob	Garnier, Mark
Cairns, rh Alun	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Gibb, rh Nick
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Gibson, Peter
Carter, Andy	Gideon, Jo
Cartlidge, James	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Cash, Sir William	Girvan, Paul
Caulfield, Maria	Glen, John
Chalk, Alex	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Chamberlain, Wendy	Graham, Richard
Chishti, Rehman	Grant, Mrs Helen
Churchill, Jo	Green, Chris
Clark, rh Greg	Griffith, Andrew
Clarke, Mr Simon	Griffiths, Kate
Clarke, Theo	Grundy, James
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Gullis, Jonathan
Clarkson, Chris	Halfon, rh Robert
Cleverly, rh James	Hall, Luke
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hands, rh Greg
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Colburn, Elliot	Harris, Rebecca

Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny

Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob

Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stuart, Graham
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin

Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

**Eddie Hughes and
 Michael Tomlinson**

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

FISHERIES BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Fisheries Bill [Lords]:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

2. Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 17 September 2020.

3. The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

4. Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

6. Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(Tom Pursglove.)

Question agreed to.

FISHERIES BILL [LORDS] (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Fisheries Bill [*Lords*], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

- (1) any expenditure incurred by the Marine Management Organisation in connection with the regulation of foreign fishing boats;
- (2) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State in giving, or in connection with giving, financial assistance to any person for purposes relating to—
 - (a) the improvement of the marine and aquatic environment;
 - (b) commercial fish or aquaculture activities;
 - (c) the use of quotas; or
 - (d) the promotion or development of recreational fishing;
- (3) any other expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State or the Marine Management Organisation.—
(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

FISHERIES BILL [*LORDS*] (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Fisheries Bill [*Lords*], it is expedient to authorise the charging of fees, or other charges, under or by virtue of—

- (a) the Act,
- (b) the Fisheries Act 1981, or
- (c) the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CONSUMER PROTECTION)

That the draft Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Extension of Time Limits for Legal Proceedings) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020, which were laid before this House on 29 June, be approved.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

HOUSING

That the Insolvency Act 1986 Part A1 Moratorium (Eligibility of Private Registered Providers) Regulations 2020 (S.I., 2020, No. 652), dated 29 June 2020, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29 June, be approved.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

Radlett Airfield Site

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Tom Pursglove.)

10.11 pm

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the Speaker's Office for helping me to secure this debate on the first day back. This debate is of vital importance to my constituents in St Albans and indeed in the neighbouring and nearby constituencies.

In 2014, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government decided that a hugely damaging strategic rail freight interchange should be built on the site of the former Radlett Aerodrome, next to the small close-knit community of Park Street in my constituency. What it means if it goes ahead is that 3.5 million square metres of green belt—the size of 490 football pitches—will be converted into a massive rail and lorry park with warehouses, lorries, container storage, HGV parking and so on. It will bring thousands of heavy goods vehicles per day, and huge disruption to the surrounding roads and commuter rail links.

Although that decision was made in 2014, it has suddenly been thrown back into the limelight because our local council is now being held hostage by this Government's planning system. In effect, the council has been told by planning inspectors to drop its opposition to the monstrosity of a freight terminal or Whitehall will take away its powers to decide where to build homes. That is no choice at all.

A freight terminal in this location has always been a bad idea, but there are also new and compelling reasons why it should be reviewed and why the plans for the freight terminal should be scrapped. Let us start with what the Government have told the people of St Albans so far. First, the Government say that they want to protect the green belt. That is great, but almost all of St Albans district is designated green belt. Secondly, the Government also say that St Albans District Council needs to build more than 14,000 additional homes in the next 16 years—that is more than 900 homes per year. Thirdly, as well as accommodating almost 15,000 homes on the green belt, the Government also want to build this massive interchange, the size of 490 football pitches, on the green belt. So here is the rub: it is simply not possible to meet the Government's housing targets, accept a freight interchange and protect the green belt. It is just not possible.

Let us start with the green belt. As I have said, most of the St Albans district is green belt land. Every new strategic site identified for new development has to be evaluated to ensure that it does the least damage to the green belt. Initially, a decade ago, the Conservative Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government said that the terminals did not fit with the development plan in the area. He said that it was inappropriate to build a freight interchange on the green belt, and on behalf of the Conservative Government he said that the green belt would be "safe in our hands". He even highlighted the likely harm it would cause to the landscape and ecology. But after controversial lobbying of the Department by the developer, which was the subject of a complaint to the Cabinet Secretary by my predecessor, and despite his own objections, he went ahead, and in

2014 approved the freight terminal anyway—even while admitting the violation of the green belt in his official decision. In that decision, he said that this

“proposal would have a substantial impact on the openness of the Green Belt, that it would result in significant encroachment into the countryside, that it would contribute to urban sprawl and that it would cause some harm to the setting of St Albans.”

Just a month ago, the Government published their White Paper, “Planning for the future”, and reiterated their commitment to protecting the green belt. So my first question to the Government tonight is: in the light of their White Paper, “Planning for the future”, which commits to protecting the green belt, is it still Government policy to sacrifice 490 football pitches-worth of green belt for a monster lorry and rail park on this site? The Government changed course in 2014 and they can, and must, change course again.

Let us turn to the local plan. The local plan was approved by the council, on a cross-party basis, in 2018 under the former Conservative administration. That administration submitted a local plan that had suggested building 2,300 homes on this site instead of a rail freight terminal. The argument was that the rail freight terminal could perhaps be stopped if we tried to build some homes there instead. But the plan was suspended in January this year by Government inspectors. The inspectors have told the new Liberal Democrat administration that the site must be withdrawn for housing or the council will lose its ability to decide where to build any homes at all. If the council is prevented from keeping the site as green belt and from exploring the potential to build there, then the Government must revise the housing targets down or accept that it is on their watch that even more green belt will have to be sacrificed to meet their housing targets.

My second question to the Government is: do they accept that it is an unacceptable state of affairs that under the current planning regime the planning inspector can, and indeed may have no other choice but to, threaten to take away a local council’s powers to determine where housing should be built unless it stops fighting a Government-imposed freight terminal in one spot?

Then there is the disruption to rail commuters. Thousands of St Albans residents are Thameslink commuters. We have faced years of disruption, most acutely in 2018, when the botched introduction of a new rail timetable caused misery for thousands of daily commuters for months. Residents are rightly concerned about the capacity and the ability of the midland main line to accommodate the proposed long and heavy freightliner trains. How will they do that without adversely affecting the now mostly reliable operation of the passenger timetables of both Thameslink and East Midlands Trains services?

Then there is the rail infrastructure itself. The infrastructure work needed for this freight terminal is huge. Network Rail will need to dig deep into the ground to enlarge the height of tunnels—for example, at Elstree and near Kentish Town—and it will need to build a whole new underpass that comes off a spur from the down slow line into London, used by commuters, to access the depot. Many people just do not believe that, in engineering terms, this is even possible. There is also the risk that the rail element fails altogether, as it did in Alconbury, where the loop could not be made to work for engineering reasons. If the rail element fails, residents are worried that this site will simply become a giant

lorry depot, with the implications for the infrastructure being environmentally damaging and creating congestion on the main road transport artery of the M1.

My third question for the Government is: when will they secure and publish firm and detailed plans from Network Rail about how it will manage the build and the operation of new freight carriages without disruption to passengers? Will the Government demand those plans from Network Rail and ensure that they are published before any works on the site can progress? My fourth question is: will the Government confirm that if the rail element does fail and cannot be built, as happened in Alconbury, the site will not be able to operate as a giant lorry depot?

Let me turn to the impact on roads and local village communities. Even under the existing plans, there will be additional lorry traffic on already busy roads. These terminals work on tight collection and delivery slots. Meeting those slots, and drivers’ hours requirements, will see many lorries parked up locally so that they can meet their slot. We already have issues with the smaller London Colney Riverside distribution hub, where drivers park overnight in lay-bys, using the roadside hedges and woodland as a toilet. Local residents can only see things getting worse. What assessment have the Government made of the impact on the village communities in my constituency of drivers, for example, parking overnight in lay-bys and using the roadside hedges as a toilet? Some have argued that the local impact could be countered by having a new M25 exit for rail freight, to avoid some of the traffic impact on local roads, but that has already been vetoed by Highways England.

There is then the impact of Brexit and the Government’s new freeports policy. The Government say that they will announce the location of up to 10 post-Brexit freeports by the end of this year so that they can begin operating in 2021. My next question is: in the light of the Government’s plan for freeports, do the previous freight distribution routes still apply, or will the proposed freeports make the rail-freight interchange redundant?

We also need to explore the effect of the London Gateway container terminal that has opened on the Thames since the strategic rail freight interchange was first proposed. It will have altered freight-distribution networks in the south-east. Has it changed the need for a terminal in St Albans? Indeed, the plans for Howbury Park have been dropped because of it. The Secretary of State said that the London Gateway site, developed since the rail freight interchange in Howbury Park was first identified,

“has the potential to provide an alternative development option for the provision of a SRFI to serve the same part of London and the South East as the appeals proposal.”

In the light of the finding in relation to a rail-freight interchange at Howbury Park, can the Minister confirm what assessment has been or will be made of whether the London Gateway might now also provide alternative freight capacity for the proposed SRFI at the former Radlett aerodrome site in my constituency?

For 12 years, local residents, local campaign group STRiFE—Stop the Rail Freight Exchange—the St Albans Civic Society, Hertfordshire MPs of different political persuasions and campaigners of all political parties and none have fought to stop this monstrosity. That is even without thousands of Thameslink and East Midlands commuters getting up in arms.

[Daisy Cooper]

A Government-imposed strategic rail freight interchange in Park Street would occupy 490 football pitches of green belt. As a result, this land cannot be protected as green belt, cannot be used for housing and is unlikely to even work as a railway interchange, leaving it to just become a massive lorry park. A rail freight interchange would bring untold disruption to our village life and road and rail networks. It would require massive engineering in Thameslink tunnels to the south, permanently disrupt commuter lines and clog village roads with parked up lorries. Current Government policy holds this piece of land hostage. I am calling on the Government to stop the rail freight and let local people decide how they want to use their land.

10.23 pm

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I congratulate the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) on securing this important debate on an issue that I recognise is of concern to her, her constituents and, as she pointed out, her parliamentary neighbours. I know it is also of concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden), who has doggedly pursued it on behalf of his constituents for the last five years and indeed raised it again with me recently. I therefore recognise the concern that the hon. Lady and others have raised.

I should say at the outset that, as the House will know, because of the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, I will not be able to comment on the merits or otherwise of past planning decisions, nor will I be able to discuss detailed policies in the St Albans local plan, especially as it is currently being examined by independent inspectors. That said, I wish to set the record straight on a number of points of which the hon. Lady and the House might not be aware. I should be clear—I think no one can disagree—that the site at the former Radlett aerodrome has, let us say, a complicated planning history. I should also be clear that once a decision has been issued and the challenge period has passed, the Secretary of State has no further jurisdiction in the matter. Any subsequent requests to vary conditions would be referred back to the council, as it would to any council.

The site's future is in the hands of the site owners and the developers. Once planning permission has been granted, the decision whether to implement that permission is for the developer and any other interested parties, such as the landowner. Equally, the pace of the development is for the developer and any interested parties. Ensuring that conditions attached to any planning permission are met is a matter for the local planning authority—in this case, St Albans.

It remains Government policy to support the development of an expanded network of rail freight interchanges. Rail freight offers substantial environmental and economic benefits—I think the hon. Lady's party will be aware of those and support them. It helps to reduce congestion on our roads and costs to industry. The 2014 national networks national policy statement—a statement made when her party was part of the coalition Government—makes it clear that a network of interchanges is needed to serve regional, sub-regional and cross-regional

markets, and that London and the south-east are particularly poorly served by such interchanges. That policy commitment was underlined by the Government's rail freight strategy in 2016. We believe it is for the market, not the Government, to determine where such interchanges should go, based on both national policy requirements and the need to ensure that capacity is provided at a wide range of locations.

Since the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, all plan-making authorities have been working towards getting plans in place, and it has been a legal requirement to have plan policies since 2014. We are clear that we want to see robust and up-to-date plans in place as soon as possible. Without such plans, communities are at risk of unplanned, speculative development. That is why in March my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set a deadline for all local authorities to have local plans in place by the end of 2023.

Unfortunately, to date, St Albans has failed to adopt a post-2004 Act plan. The current local plan for the St Albans area was adopted on 30 November 1994, some 26 years ago. To stop it expiring, a direction was made in 2007 saving specified policies until a new plan is adopted. Previously, a local plan was submitted for examination, but in November 2016 the inspector warned the council that the version submitted would not meet the relevant tests of legal compliance. It was withdrawn by the council in July 2017, but only after a failed legal challenge.

In November 2017, the then Secretary of State wrote to 15 poorly performing local planning authorities, including St Albans, to start the formal process of local plan intervention, under the criteria set out in the housing White Paper. I direct the hon. Lady to it as a point of reference for one of her questions.

In March 2018, after receiving assurances on planned timetables and collaboration with their neighbours, St Albans was notified that its progress would be monitored and any further delays might lead to a reconsideration of intervention. Before a plan can be adopted, the national planning policy framework makes it clear that it has to be legally compliant and pass tests of soundness. These tests are that the plan is positively prepared, justified and effective and consistent with national policy. For this reason, plans are examined by independent inspectors. I stress the word "independent" because in her remarks and perhaps in some of her other commentary the hon. Lady has suggested that the inspectors are Government inspectors. It might be inferred from her comments that they are somehow Government placemen and women. They are not. They are independent professionals charged with assessing plans under the law as it is constituted.

Few plans that are submitted, if any, are found sound without some form of modification, but inspectors are encouraged to be pragmatic. St Albans submitted its latest local plan for examination in March 2019, and it is currently at examination. Despite the extant planning permission for a strategic rail freight interchange, the version submitted for examination proposed allocating the Radlett aerodrome site for housing. Following hearing sessions in January and February this year, I understand that on 14 April the inspectors expressed serious concerns to St Albans about the legal compliance and soundness of the plan and a failure to discharge its duty to co-operate. I further understand that St Albans responded

to the inspectors on 2 July, and in doing so it accepted the finding that the use of the land at Radlett, whether as an interchange or a housing allocation, was a strategic matter on which the council should have engaged and co-operated with neighbouring authorities.

The council is proposing main plan modifications that acknowledge the status of the interchange and will remove the housing allocation. It proposes to remove the housing allocation while maintaining that it has met the duty to co-operate. Finally, I understand from the Planning Inspectorate that inspectors have today responded to the council to confirm the concerns they have already expressed that the plan should either be withdrawn from examination or should not be adopted because the council failed to discharge the duty to co-operate—a strategic duty that the council accepts that it has.

I appreciate that this is disappointing news for St Albans and that it may need to take a short period to digest the contents and consider its preferred way forward. I hope that it will appreciate that I cannot comment further on this matter at the present time, but the hon. Lady has raised some important points. Some of the events I have recounted today do not reflect well on our planning system. I think she accepts that. It is a reminder of why the bold planning changes we outlined last month are so very badly needed.

Our proposal for a reformed system, as published in the “Planning for the future” document on 6 August, will make it simpler, quicker and more accessible for all concerned, especially local communities, and will put the green belt and its protection at the heart of those provisions. Our new processes will give greater certainty

and speed for communities, councils and developers, because the Government are determined to do better when it comes to planning, with a better use of land and a better standard of beauty and environmental quality. In future, significant sites such as the one we have discussed today will have the principle of development agreed up front as part of the local plan. The result for the community will be greater certainty and a quicker process for getting on site.

We are also proposing a new 30-month statutory timetable for the development of local plans, so that the issues we see in some places, including St Albans, can be consigned to history. Our preferred option is for the duty to co-operate to be abolished, but it will still be vital for councils to work together, to ensure that cross-boundary issues are properly addressed, including on large strategic sites and the provision of infrastructure, which I am sure St Albans City and District Council will want to note.

The hon. Lady has made a powerful and passionate speech. There are items that I will want to address after further consultation with my colleagues in the Department for Transport. In the meantime, we look forward to working with Members across the House to deliver the much-needed planning reforms that communities are crying out for, to ensure that drawn-out scenarios such as that of the site of the former Radlett aerodrome can become a thing of the past.

Question put and agreed to.

10.37 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster)	Stuart Andrew
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green)	Mark Tami
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower)	Mark Tami
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston)	Patrick Grady
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South)	Clive Efford
Scott Benton (Blackpool South)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East)	Mark Tami
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)	Patrick Grady
Bob Blackman (Harrow East)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North)	Patrick Grady
Crispin Blunt (Reigate)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham)	Mark Tami
Richard Burgon (Leeds East)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth)	Chris Elmore
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton)	Mark Tami
Sir William Cash (Stone)	Leo Docherty
Sarah Champion (Rotherham)	Mark Tami
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife)	Patrick Grady
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire)	Mark Tami
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde)	Patrick Grady
Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon)	Alex Burghart
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark)	Mark Tami
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East)	Patrick Grady
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow)	Mark Tami
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford)	Caroline Nokes

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Janet Daby (Lewisham East)	Mark Tami
Geraint Davies (Swansea West)	Chris Evans
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd)	Mark Tami
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden)	Stuart Andrew
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Rachel Hopkins
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West)	Chris Elmore
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire)	Patrick Grady
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock)	Patrick Grady
Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock)	Gagan Mohindra
Philip Dunne (Ludlow)	Jeremy Hunt
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall)	Mark Tami
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Farry (North Down)	Alistair Carmichael
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw)	Patrick Grady
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford)	Mark Tami
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk)	Theo Clarke
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire)	Stuart Andrew
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet)	Caroline Nokes
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston)	Mark Tami
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside)	Mark Tami
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes)	Patrick Grady
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts)	Patrick Grady
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West)	Mark Tami
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North)	Mark Fletcher
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish)	Mark Tami
Robert Halfon (Harlow)	Lucy Allan
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East)	Mark Tami
Claire Hanna (Belfast South)	Liz Saville Roberts
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham)	Mark Tami
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston)	Mark Tami
Mike Hill (Hartlepool)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Simon Hoare (North Dorset)	Fay Jones	Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock)	Stuart Andrew
Wera Hobhouse (Bath)	Alistair Carmichael	Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West)	Mark Tami	Jessica Morden (Newport East)	Mark Tami
Adam Holloway (Gravesham)	Maria Caulfield	David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale)	Stuart Andrew
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley)	Mark Tami	David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border)	Stuart Andrew	James Murray (Ealing North)	Mark Tami
Imran Hussain (Bradford East)	Judith Cummins	Ian Murray (Edinburgh South)	Mark Tami
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central)	Mark Tami	Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North)	Patrick Grady
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire)	Stuart Andrew	John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire)	Patrick Grady
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon)	Rebecca Harris
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham)	Stuart Andrew	Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute)	Patrick Grady
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North)	Mark Tami	Guy Opperman (Hexham)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester)	Bim Afolami	Kate Osamor (Edmonton)	Nadia Whittome
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South)	Mark Tami	Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley)	Mark Tami
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton)	Mark Tami	Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)	Peter Aldous
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire)	Stuart Andrew	Lucy Powell (Manchester Central)	Mark Tami
Julian Knight (Solihull)	Stuart Andrew	Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East)	Mark Tami
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk)	Stuart Andrew	Christina Rees (Neath)	Mark Tami
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck)	Mary Kelly Foy	Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge)	Mark Tami
Chris Law (Dundee West)	Patrick Grady	Bob Seely (Isle of Wight)	David Rutley
Clive Lewis (Norwich South)	Rosie Duffield	Naz Shah (Bradford West)	Mark Tami
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall)	Mark Tami
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale)	Mark Tami	Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield)	Mark Tami
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster)	Lee Rowley	Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East)	Patrick Grady
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking)	Stuart Andrew	Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn)	Mark Tami
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian)	Patrick Grady	Jo Stevens (Cardiff Glasgow Central)	Mark Tami
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood)	Mark Tami	Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central)	Mark Tami	Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central)	Patrick Grady
Karl McCartney (Lincoln)	Stuart Andrew	Gareth Thomas (Harrow West)	Mark Tami
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East)	Patrick Grady	Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury)	Charlotte Nichols
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington)	Cat Smith	Jon Trickett (Hemsworth)	Olivia Blake
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East)	Patrick Grady	Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling)	Huw Merriman
John Mc Nally (Falkirk)	Patrick Grady	Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East)	Mark Tami
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire)	Patrick Grady
Ian Mearns (Gateshead)	Mark Tami	Hywel Williams (Arfon)	Ben Lake
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View)	Stuart Andrew	Mohammad Yasin (Bedford)	Mark Tami

Written Statements

Tuesday 1 September 2020

EDUCATION

School Estate

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): Today, I am confirming £560 million of capital funding to maintain and improve the condition of the school estate.

On 29 June, the Government announced a transformative, 10-year rebuilding programme for schools, supported by over £1 billion for the first 50 projects. This will replace poor-condition and ageing school buildings, with modern, energy-efficient designs, transforming education for thousands of pupils.

The Government also announced that £560 million of additional condition funding would be made available this year to maintain and improve the condition of the school estate. This is in addition to the £1.45 billion already provided for school maintenance in financial year 2020-21.

Details of how the additional funding has been allocated were published on 5 August 2020. This included:

£182 million to fund a further 580 condition improvement fund projects from the 2020-21 application round, at 548 eligible academies, sixth form colleges and voluntary-aided schools. A further £5 million will support the CIF appeals round and urgent projects later in the year.

A further £373 million allocated through school condition allocations for 2020-21 for local authorities, large multi-academy trusts and academy sponsors, and dioceses, and other large voluntary-aided school groups.

Overall, for the condition improvement fund 2020-21 bidding round we have now awarded a total of £616 million for 2,056 projects, benefiting 1,652 schools and colleges. We have now also allocated £1,176 million in school condition allocations for 2020-21.

Full details have been published on the Department for Education section on the gov.uk website. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS428]

JUSTICE

Administrative Law: Independent Review

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): On 31 July 2020, I announced, via press notice, the creation of an independent review of administrative law. I am today following up this announcement. This review extends from our manifesto commitment; an external advisory panel will provide the Government with expert advice on potential reform of judicial review. As Lord Chancellor, I am committed to defending our world-class and independent courts and judiciary that lie at the heart of British justice and the rule of law.

Specifically, this work aims to examine the effectiveness of judicial review as a mechanism for balancing the rights of the citizen and effective governance, considering the role of the Executive, Parliament and the courts.

The review is examining four key areas outlined in detail in the terms of reference which have been placed in the Library of the House. Broadly, the panel will consider the following issues:

- i) whether judicial review should be codified;
- ii) whether certain Executive decisions should be non-justiciable;
- iii) which grounds and remedies should be available in justiciable claims; and
- iv) procedural reforms to judicial review (such as timings, appeals and “standing”).

The examination of these issues will consider the balance of the legitimate interest of the citizen being able to challenge the lawfulness of Executive action through the courts with the importance of the Executive being able to govern effectively under the law. Moreover, it will consider data and evidence and relevant caselaw on the development of judicial review and consider whether reform is justified.

It is my intention that the panel shall consider these questions thoroughly. As courts and the way they operate is a key part of our constitution, any options for reform put forward by the panel will be considered by me and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office. The panel will report back later this year and its report will be published, as will the Government’s response.

The following people are members of the panel. Each was selected on the basis that they are senior legal practitioners and eminent academics. The panel members are:

Lord Faulks QC—Panel Chair
 Professor Carol Harlow QC
 Vikram Sachdeva QC
 Professor Alan Page
 Celina Colquhoun
 Nick McBride

[HCWS427]

TRANSPORT

Spaceflight Regulations: Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, made the following ministerial statement on 29 July 2020.

I am today publishing the consultation on draft regulations and guidance made under the 2018 Space Industry Act. This consultation seeks views on the operability and effectiveness of the draft space industry regulations, accident investigation regulations, appeals regulations, and the associated guidance documents and regulator’s licensing rules. As part of this consultation, a consultation stage impact assessment has also been published.

The UK’s space sector is already a unique national asset—which this Government are committed to turbo-charging. The UK’s space sector can strengthen our national capabilities, create high-skilled jobs and level up the UK. To support this, the Queen’s Speech on 19 December set out the Government’s intent to establish a new National Space Council and develop a comprehensive UK space strategy. The launch of this consultation and the introduction of a new regulatory framework form an integral part of the work we are doing to bring commercial spaceflight to the UK and create a supportive regulatory environment which fosters growth in the sector.

Government and industry have set a target to grow the UK's share of the global market to 10% by 2030. In order to support this, our spaceflight programme aims to establish commercial vertical and horizontal small satellite launch, sub-orbital spaceflight and space tourism from UK spaceports. To help expand the UK's spaceflight capabilities, the Government are funding a range of industry-led projects. Separately, we are also investing in related facilities and technology. This will provide industry with new commercial market opportunities, grow our export share and help to build new UK supply chains.

As acknowledged in the Government's research and development road map, regulation that enables the development, demonstration and deployment of new technologies is essential to championing companies on the technological frontier. Our regulatory framework for spaceflight will support safe and sustainable activities that will drive research, innovation and entrepreneurship in this vital sector, exploiting the unique environment of space, and providing a catalyst for growth across the space sector. This will feed into our emerging national space strategy as we develop further priorities for the UK and the sector in the long term and contribute this Government's agenda to level-up the whole country.

Enabling UK-based space launches

Currently the space activities of UK entities are governed by the Outer Space Act 1986. This requires any UK entities who procure the launch of a satellite and/or operate a satellite in orbit to hold a licence. The UK has a well-established and globally respected licensing regime for these activities. However, UK satellite operators currently have to rely on obtaining slots on launches

from other countries to get their satellites in orbit. Our aim now is to license launches from UK spaceports. I expect to see the first UK-based launches during the early 2020s.

While the Space Industry Act 2018 is now law, the draft secondary legislation contained in this consultation is required to create the regulatory framework necessary for commercial launch operations to be licensed in the UK. Once regulations are in force, the Space Industry Act 2018 will work alongside the Outer Space Act 1986 to regulate the spaceflight and associated activities of UK entities.

Together with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the UK Space Agency and Civil Aviation Authority we have legislated to allow for the regulation of a wide range of new commercial spaceflight technologies, including traditional vertically launched vehicles, air-launched vehicles and sub-orbital spaceplanes and balloons. We have endeavoured to produce legislation that is flexible enough to accommodate emerging technological advancements, market opportunities and changes to the international legal landscape, while keeping safety at the forefront.

To ensure that these services are carried out safely and responsibly, we are creating a new regulator for commercial spaceflight and associated activities. It is our intention that the Civil Aviation Authority will undertake all Space Industry Act 2018 regulatory functions in addition to regulating in-orbit activities under the Outer Space Act 1986.

Next steps

The deadline for responses to consultation is 21 October 2020. Following which I will update the House and publish the Government's response to consultation.

[HCWS426]

Petitions

Tuesday 1 September 2020

OBSERVATIONS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Entitlement to paid care leave

The petition of residents of Birmingham, Selly Oak Constituency,

Declares that the Employment Rights Act 1996 only provides for a ‘reasonable amount of unpaid time off’ to care for dependents for one-off appointments and emergencies; notes that latest figures show that there are an estimated 5 million people juggling paid work and unpaid care; further that Carers UK research reveals that 2.6 million have quit their job to care for a loved one who is older, disabled or seriously ill with nearly half a million (468,000) leaving their job in the last two years alone; further that the estimated costs to the economy of carers being forced to give up work to care had reached £5.3 billion in lost tax revenues, earnings and additional benefit payments.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to introduce a statutory entitlement to paid care leave of 5 to 10 days per year.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Steve McCabe, *Official Report*, 10 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 364.]

[P002576]

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):

The Government recognise the vital role that carers play within their families and communities and their contribution both to individuals they care for and to society at large is of great importance now and under normal circumstances.

The Government are committed to supporting carers in a way that supports their own health and wellbeing in the longer term.

Work is ongoing to investigate the impact of care on work, including the issue of carers relying on annual leave. For example, we run the annual Family Resources Survey which gives us an insight into the situation of informal carers and the people they care for. The most recent results of this survey are published online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-resources-survey--2#latest-release>.

Government officials regularly meet with carer representative organisations. We know that many carers experience considerable challenges, balancing employment with their caring responsibilities. That is why, as set out in our manifesto and the Queen’s Speech, the Government are considering the introduction of a new employment right to one week of additional leave for unpaid carers. The consultation on this new employment right closed on 2 August and received over 800 responses—demonstrating the importance of this issue. We are analysing those responses and will issue the Government response in due course, setting out the way forward.

The Government are also considering other steps to reform employment law, which it is hoped could make the situations of carers a little easier in future.

The ability to work flexibly can be particularly helpful to carers and other groups in the labour market. All employees who have worked for more than 26 weeks with their employer can already request flexible working under the existing statutory right. We are keen to do more to make flexible working the norm. The Government have set out that, subject to further consultation, we will look to introduce measures to make flexible working the default.

We are actively monitoring the impact of covid-19 on the labour market and will continue to monitor this moving forward, considering whether there are any disproportionate impacts occurring to individual groups, which can include carers, across the labour market.

Extension of paid maternity leave due to COVID-19

The petition of residents of the constituency of Belfast East,

Declares that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on and has led to increased cases of social isolation, and that new mothers on maternity leave have been particularly affected.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to extend paid maternity leave by three months.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Gavin Robinson, *Official Report*, 21 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 2119.]

[P002591]

Extension to maternity and paternity leave due to COVID-19

The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that pregnancy and giving birth during a global pandemic and national lockdown is extremely stressful for new and expectant parents; notes that the UK Government has categorised pregnant woman as “extremely vulnerable” and advised them to observe particularly stringent measures to protect themselves and their unborn babies; further notes that new research is actively being undertaken regarding raised levels of mental health problems for expectant and new mothers and fathers during the COVID-19 pandemic; notes that early experiences of a baby are critical for their future development and future outcomes, and that new parents need time to ‘socialise’ with their babies and introduce them to nursery or other childcare provision; declares that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a hugely adverse effect on early life experiences for new babies in that it has deprived them of their parents’ opportunities to expose their babies to wider developmental experiences outside the home, including experience with wider family such as grandparents; and further notes that the Government has made specific arrangements to protect workers with its Job Retention Scheme but has not made additional arrangements to offer further support to workers on maternity and paternity leave during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the UK Government to immediately institute extended maternity and paternity leave for new and expectant parents.

And the petitioners remain etc.—[Presented by David Linden, *Official Report*, 22 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1114.]

[P002580]

Extension to maternity and paternity leave due to COVID-19

The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that pregnancy and giving birth during a global pandemic and national lockdown is extremely stressful for new and expectant parents; notes that the UK Government has categorised pregnant woman as “extremely vulnerable” and advised them to observe particularly stringent measures to protect themselves and their unborn babies; further notes that new research is actively being undertaken regarding raised levels of mental health problems for expectant and new mothers and fathers during the COVID-19 pandemic; notes that early experiences of a baby are critical for their future development and future outcomes, and that new parents need time to ‘socialise’ with their babies and introduce them to nursery or other childcare provision; declares that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a hugely adverse effect on early life experiences for new babies in that it has deprived them of their parents’ opportunities to expose their babies to wider developmental experiences outside the home, including experience with wider family such as grandparents; and further notes that the Government has made specific arrangements to protect workers with its Job Retention Scheme but has not made additional arrangements to offer further support to workers on maternity and paternity leave during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the UK Government to immediately institute extended maternity and paternity leave for new and expectant parents.

And the petitioners remain etc.—[Presented by Patricia Gibson, *Official Report*, 15 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 610.]

[P002575]

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):

The Government understand and are sympathetic to the challenges that pregnant women and new parents faced during the covid-19 lockdown period. Parents play a hugely valuable role in society, carrying out the important and often demanding job of raising the next generation.

We recognise that the covid-19 lockdown period had a significant impact on parents’ ability to “socialise” their babies—whether through visits to family and friends or attendance at parent and baby groups—and that some parents were unable to return to work at the end of their statutory parental leave due to the close of early years provision. While we understand that some new parents have faced additional challenges due to covid-19 and lockdown, we believe that the current arrangements for parental leave and pay in the UK are, overall, already generous and flexible. We offer more than three times the EU minimum requirement for Maternity Leave which requires Member States to give pregnant women and new mothers access to 14 weeks of paid leave (the UK provides 39 weeks of paid leave). The vast majority of parents also have access to other entitlements to time off work, including paid Annual Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave. The Government believe that our current package of family-friendly entitlements, alongside these other entitlements, enables most mothers and fathers to balance work with their caring responsibilities in the first year of their child’s life—including in these unprecedented times.

The decision to lockdown was not taken lightly but this was necessary to protect our NHS and save lives, including those of parents and their babies. We are pleased that as a result of the interventions that the Government made, the incidence of covid-19 infections has come down significantly and we have been able to relax many of the social distancing measures that we had put in place. These relaxations have meant nurseries and other early years facilities have been able to open up since June and most parents are now able to meet with extended family members and friends, subject to observing the continuing advice on social distancing.

The Government have necessarily prioritised initiatives during the covid-19 crisis which had the potential to support as many people as possible. This support includes:

- the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme,
- the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, and
- the Job Retention Bonus for employers who retain staff until January 2021.

Employers have also been able to use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to furlough parents who have been unable to work as a result of the closure of schools, nurseries and childcare services. The ability to furlough individuals who are unable to work because of childcare commitments provides support to new parents who are due to return from statutory parental leave, including individuals who have not previously been furloughed as a result of them being on parental leave. The scheme closed for new entrants on 30 June, but we have made an exception for individuals on statutory parental leave.

The Petitions Select Committee has done an admirable job in looking into a range of issues that have had an impact on new parents during the pandemic, from childcare to mental health and wellbeing. We are currently considering the full suite of recommendations that they have to Government, which includes recommendations to extend Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave and Pay to support parents who have been affected by the pandemic. We are carefully considering these recommendations with a view to providing a comprehensive response as soon as possible ahead of the Committee’s September deadline.

Please note that I have written to David Linden MP and Gavin Robinson MP in the same terms.

EDUCATION

Return of children to schools in September

The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that children must be at the heart of government strategy as lockdown eases; notes that research has shown that home-schooling has been inconsistent across the country during lockdown, with disadvantaged children faring particularly poorly; and further declares that the best place for students is in the classroom, as schools provide consistency, social interaction, stimulating learning environments and promote good health and wellbeing.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to work together with head teachers, parent bodies, unions and local authorities to devise a plan by 13 July to safely resume education in September so that all children can return to school.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Munira Wilson, *Official Report*, 23 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1273.]

[P002582]

Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):

It is the Government's plan for all children to return to school in September. We want to get all children and young people back into education because it is the best place for them to learn, and because we know how important it is for their wellbeing to have social interactions with their teachers and friends. We have published guidance to support schools to prepare for full return, including the "system of controls" they should implement to significantly reduce the risk of transmission.

From 1 June, the Department was able to take the first steps towards getting all children and young people back into education. We asked primary schools to bring back nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 from this date. We subsequently gave primary schools the flexibility to welcome back more pupils, where they have capacity. From 15 June we supported secondary schools to bring back pupils in years 10 and 12. This is in addition to the education schools have continued to provide to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers throughout the coronavirus (covid-19) outbreak. Last term, 1.6 million pupils have already been welcomed back to school. Schools have also been able to bring in all pupils for face-to-face meetings during the summer term to check-up on their education and wellbeing.

It is our plan that all pupils, in all year groups, will return to school full-time from the beginning of the autumn term. On 2 July the Department published guidance to help school leaders prepare for the autumn term, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>. Returning to school is vital for children's education and for their wellbeing. Time out of school is detrimental for children's cognitive and academic development, particularly for disadvantaged children. This impact can affect both current levels of education and children's future ability to learn, and therefore we need to ensure all pupils can return to school in September.

To support schools in helping pupils make up for time spent out of the classroom, we have announced a catch-up fund worth £1 billion. Through this fund, in the next academic year, all state-funded primary and secondary schools in England will receive a share of the £650 million catch-up premium. School leaders have discretion to use this additional funding to meet the identified needs of their pupils and to help them plug gaps in curriculum knowledge resulting from extended school closures. The Education Endowment Foundation has published a guide on evidence-based interventions to support schools to make decisions about how to spend their funding. Alongside this the £350 million National Tutoring Programme will provide extra support for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, who will be among those hardest hit by the disruption to education.

We are extremely grateful for how schools have adapted so rapidly to new ways of working by moving resources online, working remotely and changing the way they support their students and each other. As we go into the autumn term, we expect all schools to plan to ensure they have the capacity to offer immediate remote education if a number of pupils need to self-isolate or there is a local lockdown requiring pupils to remain at home.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Establishment of a Food Standards Commission

The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the UK Government has not put proper safeguards in place to protect food standards post the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union; notes that the Government has rejected cross party amendments to the Agricultural Bill that aimed to protect standards of imports and ensure that any imports would not be able to undercut UK producers; further notes that leaving the European Union without a deal on 31 December 2020 will mean trading on World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms, and that the most favoured nation status will mean that the UK cannot prevent the import of hormone injected beef or chlorinated chicken from the US; further notes that the consumer group Which? has stated that a US trade deal poses the biggest risk to food standards since the BSE crisis and notes that the current deals struck by the EU provide the necessary protections; further declares that an extension to the transition period would create a short term protection against low standard imports, and that a Food Standards Commission with the remit of ensuring quality and welfare standards of food and drink imports in any trade deals could provide longer term protections for our farmers and growers in Scotland and the wider UK.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to consider the establishment of a Food Standards Commission to monitor any trade deals involving food and drink products and to protect UK welfare standards and value our farmers and growers who produce in Scotland and the wider UK.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Alan Brown, *Official Report*, 18 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1050.]

[P002581]

Petitions in the same terms were presented by the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) [P002583] and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) [P002588].

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis):

Thank you very much for these petitions and raising the issue of the protection of food standards and the establishment of a Food Standards Commission.

This Government stood on a very clear manifesto commitment that in all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards. Any trade deal the UK strikes must be fair to our farmers and we will continue to fight for the interests of our farming industry in all trade negotiations. The Government have also been clear that we will not be extending the transition period: we need to be able to design our own rules, in our best interests, without the constraints of following EU rules.

Legal protections for our standards will remain in place. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 retains our standards on environmental protections, animal welfare, animal and plant health and food safety at the end of the transition period. This provides a firm basis for maintaining the same high level of protection for both domestic and imported products. These

requirements include prohibitions on the use of growth-promoting hormone treatments, and the sale of products derived from animals treated with them and set out that no products (other than potable water) are approved to decontaminate poultry carcasses. Any changes to legislation would require these to be brought to Parliament, and in the case of devolved competence, the devolved legislatures where the usual scrutiny procedures will apply.

The UK's food standards for both domestic production and imports are overseen by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS). These agencies provide independent advice to the UK Government and the devolved Administrations. Risk impact assessments provided by the FSA and FSS use a science-driven approach and take account of animal welfare and environmental production standards, as well as other issues of consumer interest. After the end of the transition period, the FSA and FSS will continue to oversee food safety to ensure that all food imports comply with the UK's high safety standards.

Alongside this the UK will repatriate the functions of audit and inspections that are currently carried out by the European Commission to ensure that trading partners continue to meet our import conditions for food and feed safety, animal and plant health and animal welfare. This will provide a robust system that will work alongside border controls to maintain our high standards going forward. Carrying these provisions over into domestic legislation will ensure that trading partners have the necessary infrastructure and regulations in place to export safe food and animal products to the UK which either meet or exceed UK import conditions.

The Government have been clear that in our trade agreements we will not compromise on our standards. In leaving the EU, the UK regained sovereign control over decisions on standards and regulations. Any future trade agreements must respect this regulatory autonomy, so we can continue to protect the public, animal and plant life and health, reflecting our existing high standards. We want to negotiate an ambitious and comprehensive free trade deal with the US. We will not water down our standards nor put the UK's biosecurity at risk as we negotiate this or any other new trade deals.

As an independent trading nation, the UK will recognise global rules on trade alongside ensuring that trade agreements live up to the values of farmers and consumers across the UK. World Trade Organization (WTO) rules allow for the adoption of measures on public policy grounds such as protecting human, animal and plant life or health, public morals and conservation. This is subject to caveats, including that these measures do not create obstacles or arbitrarily discriminate between Members and are not disguised restrictions on international trade.

In addition to the commitments of this Government and robust legal protections outlined, we are pleased to confirm that we have recently established a Trade and Agriculture Commission, to operate under Department for International Trade auspices.

In its advisory role, the Commission brings together stakeholders across the industry, using their expertise to advise on how best the UK can seize new export opportunities, while ensuring animal welfare and environmental standards in food production are not undermined. It will provide advice to inform our approach as we negotiate free trade deals and promote our agenda

at the WTO and other international fora, and to advance and protect consumer interests and those of developing countries.

The membership covers a cross-section of representatives across agriculture, consumer, animal health, international development, hospitality, food SMEs and retail. There are representatives from all parts of the UK, including the farmers' unions. The Commission's Secretariat will also share updates from Commission meetings with the devolved Administrations on a regular basis.

At the end of its fixed six-month term, the Commission will submit an advisory report, to be presented to Parliament by the Department for International Trade, which:

- A. Considers the policies that Government should adopt in free trade agreements to secure opportunities for UK farmers, ensure the sector remains competitive and to make sure that animal welfare and environmental standards in food production are not undermined
- B. Reflects consumer interests and those of developing countries.
- C. Considers how the UK engages the WTO to build a coalition that helps advance higher animal welfare standards across the world.
- D. Develops trade policy that identifies and opens up new export opportunities for the UK agricultural industry—in particular for small and medium-sized businesses—and that benefits the UK economy as a whole.

We are pleased that stakeholders have welcomed this announcement, and further details on the Commission's membership and work can be found on the Department for International Trade's webpages.

Thank you once again for these petitions and raising this important issue.

Use of disposable barbecues

The Petition of Kate Collison and Janette Duke, residents of the New Forest District in Hampshire,

Declares that the use of disposable barbecues and their careless abandonment are a proven cause of wild fires; further declares that such wild fires not only risk human life but also cause devastation to wildlife and their habitat; notes that single use disposable barbecues comprise a tin foil tray filled with impregnated 'easy light' charcoal with a wire mesh over; further notes that they are lightweight, can easily be carried to beauty spots, wildlife reserves, and beaches, and can be purchased for as little as £1.99 per unit; further notes they have no integral frame support so can be sat directly on the ground causing damage once lit; further notes they emit dangerous carbon monoxide fumes not only during use but also during the cooling process; further notes that whilst they are easy to carry prior to use they are almost impossible to carry away for many hours after use whilst they remain hot, meaning they are often left as litter with devastating consequences; further notes reports that fire services across the country have shown that these abandoned barbecues have been found in the areas where devastating fires have occurred, for example, Wareham Forest, which in May 2020, despite the efforts of 150 firefighters, burned for more than 3 days and devastated 470 acres of heath and woodland, with 11 portable barbecues subsequently found in the burn area; further notes that Chinese sky lanterns, which can pose a similar threat to wildlife and their habitat, were once seen as acceptable but are now recognised as

irresponsible and dangerous; and further notes the related Change.org petitions on this matter from the same petitioners, which collectively have over 9,000 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider a ban on the sale of single use disposable barbecues within the United Kingdom.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Dr Julian Lewis, *Official Report*, 30 June 2020; Vol. 678, c. 291.]

[P002585]

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow):

The Government would like to thank Kate Collison and Janette Duke, residents of the New Forest, for their petition urging the Government to consider a ban on the sale of single use disposable barbecues within the United Kingdom.

The Government share the concern of the petitioners about the careless use of disposable barbecues, and the associated risk of wildfires and threat to wildlife and the natural environment.

The Countryside Code, published by Natural England, includes clear messages not to have barbecues or light fires when outdoors in the countryside. It can be found online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code/the-countryside-code>

Defra is working with rural organisations to promote a series of guidance videos to educate users about accessing the countryside safely. These reinforce messages in the Countryside Code and highlight the risks of using barbecues. These videos are disseminated over social media, including Twitter and Facebook.

In terms of legal powers, current byelaw legislation allows for local authorities to restrict and enforce the use of disposable barbecues in parks and public spaces. The Government are aware that some local authorities have already made use of byelaws to ban disposable barbecues or sky lanterns.

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 provides powers for local authorities to introduce Public Spaces Protection Orders. Orders can be introduced in a specific public place where the local authority is satisfied on reasonable grounds that certain conditions have been met. These require that:

Activities have taken place that have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or it is likely that activities will take place and that they will have a detrimental effect.

The effect or likely effect of these activities;

Is or is likely to be persistent or continuing in nature

Is, or is likely to be, unreasonable

Justifies the restrictions being imposed.

Providing these tests are met, these powers can be used to introduce orders on the use of disposable barbecues.

JUSTICE

Petition of Giovanni Di Stefano

The petition of Giovanni Di Stefano,

Declares that the petitioner is currently imprisoned at HMP Highpoint, Stradishall, Suffolk CB8 9YG and is a national of the Republic of Italy, born on the 1 July 1955; the petitioner is serving a sentence of 14 years

imprisonment from 28 March 2013 and such sentence ends on the 27 March 2020 or under the early release scheme on the 27 June 2019; the petitioner is however, also subject to a 3 year default sentence for a confiscation order imposed on the 22 April 2014; however, that order and default was solely on the basis of “hidden assets”; further the House of Commons will be alarmed to know that under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and all its subsequent amendments in the past 16 years the House of Commons never added “hidden assets” as a finding; further, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 remains wholly silent on such a term or finding; the term and imposition of imprisonment for “hidden assets” was created by the Judiciary who are not elected law making members of parliament; the term commenced in 2006 and no political challenge has ever been taken; Parliament has no legislative superior; further that the courts have no inherent powers to invalidate, strike down, supersede, disregard, add or amend the provisions of any statute duly enacted by the Queen in Parliament, and indeed extremely limited power to even enquire whether a statute has been duly enacted; the judiciary in adding/amending the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 by adding “hidden assets” have usurped the functions of Parliament and thousands of citizens are suffering imprisonment as a direct result.

The petitioners thus requests that the House of Commons urges first and foremost that the Secretary of State for Justice orders the immediate release of anyone currently imprisoned as a result of a finding of “hidden assets” and that any defendant in confiscation proceedings are not subject to future arbitrary and unlawful detention founded upon the Judiciary creating a law without the sanction of Parliament.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Sir Roger Gale, *Official Report*, 21 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 2P.]

[P002297]

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp):

Under the separation of powers doctrine, a core function of Parliament is to make legislation which will then be interpreted and applied by the judiciary.

Ministers of the Crown have a statutory obligation to uphold the independence of the judiciary. It is therefore inappropriate for the Secretary of State for Justice or me to comment on judgments made in court. If parties to proceedings wish to challenge judgments that have been made, the appropriate way to do so is through the right of appeal.

TRANSPORT

Future of the aviation and aerospace industry

The petition of residents of Glasgow North,

Declares that job losses at British Airways, Rolls-Royce and across the aviation and aerospace industry will be a devastating blow to employees of these firms and will cause major economic damage to the whole of the UK; supports the early intervention by the Scottish Government in removing the business rates liability for one year and urges the UK Government to follow suit.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to secure a sustainable future for the aviation industry, to ensure that urgent discussions take place between relevant ministers and these firms to protect the maximum number of jobs, and to ensure that workers play a full role in the decisions being taken about this industry.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patrick Grady, *Official Report*, 21 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 2119.]

[P002590]

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Kelly Tolhurst):

The Government recognise the challenging times facing the aviation sector as a result of covid-19. Aviation plays a critical role to our future as a global trading nation and for local economies such as that in the constituency of Glasgow North. Additionally, we recognise that this will be a very distressing time for employees of British Airways, Rolls-Royce and across the aviation and aerospace industry, as well as for their families and for local communities that are supported by the industry.

The aviation sector is able to draw upon the unprecedented package of measures announced by the Chancellor, including a Bank of England scheme for firms to raise capital, Time to Pay flexibilities with tax bills, financial support for employees and VAT deferrals. These measures have been designed to ensure that companies of any size receive the help they need to get through this difficult time—airports, airlines and the wider supply chain.

We have kept an open dialogue with the aviation and aerospace sectors with regular structured engagement from the start of the pandemic with unions and industry bodies such as ADS, Airport Operators Association and Airlines UK as well as with individual airlines, airports, ground handlers and manufacturers. We are also acutely aware of the impact on the aviation workforce and we are actively working with unions and industry to make sure we identify opportunities to retain key skills within the industry, or ensure they are able to find new employment or retrain and upskill as necessary.

The Department for Transport has established a Restart and Recovery unit to work directly with the sector, initially focusing on the immediate practicalities of restarting the sector and setting a clear vision and objectives looking forward to the longer-term recovery phase. This work has been guided by the International Aviation Taskforce's Expert Steering Group, a collaborative working group with representation from across industry and Government, including the devolved Administrations. Through this group we have developed safer travel guidance for operators and passengers, published on 11 June 2020. The Expert Steering Group has also recently established subgroups which bring together expert parties to consider urgently how specific measures could address the exceptional short-term sector financial challenges facing the industry in the context of latest trends and outlook.

TREASURY

Support for island communities affected by COVID-19

The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the economic fortunes and sustainability of island communities across the UK, such as the Isle of Arran and the Isle of Cumbrae, are more precarious

than mainland communities, not least because of the higher number of older people in such communities; further declares that, despite welcome support from the United Kingdom and devolved governments, lockdown has been particularly challenging for island communities; notes that the exiting of lockdown for islands has to be slower than on mainland communities as ferry capacity must be restricted to ensure social distancing, with capacity expected to be initially limited to less than 20 per cent on some routes, presenting an unprecedented economic threat for island economies and leaving them at a disadvantage to the rest of the mainland UK; further notes that island communities are heavily reliant on tourism, levels of which have been significantly reduced by lockdown measures; further notes the impact that redundancies in the tourism industry will have on islands such as Arran, where one resort, the Auchrannie resort, employs 171 people from a total island population of 4,600; and further declares that as the Government prepares to reduce support in September for furloughed workers, fragile island communities will be particularly affected by mass redundancies and unemployment.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the UK Government to bring forward special measures to support island economies, including a furlough extension specifically for island communities.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patricia Gibson, *Official Report*, 10 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 364.]

[P002577]

Observations from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):

The Government thank Patricia Gibson for submitting the petition.

The Government recognise the difficulties faced by island communities during the covid-19 pandemic, and have taken action to support these communities and the tourism industry more broadly.

In March 2020, the Government introduced social distancing and ordered the closure of certain sectors in order to save lives and protect the NHS's ability to cope with the crisis. The Government recognise the extreme disruption these necessary actions to combat covid-19 have had on businesses in the hospitality and tourism sectors. That is why the Government have announced unprecedented support for individuals and businesses, including targeted support to protect the 2.4 million jobs and over 150,000 businesses across these sectors. Government schemes include:

Grant schemes such as the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund, the Discretionary Grant Fund, the Kick-starting Tourism Package and Reopening High Streets Safely Fund.

A new reduced rate of VAT for accommodation, eligible food and non-alcoholic beverages services and tourist attractions from 20% to 5% until 12 January 2021.

A range of Government-backed and guaranteed loan schemes including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Bounce Back Loans Scheme.

In certain cases, businesses in retail, hospitality and leisure sectors may further be eligible for a business rates holiday for the 2020-21 tax year.

As part of the Government's road map to reopening the economy, the majority of sectors have been allowed to return from 4 July, if not before, on condition that they can do so safely in accordance with public guidance.

However, the Government recognise that island communities may be facing particular challenges, including the issue of ferry capacity, that make it harder for businesses to benefit fully from the reopening and from some of the support schemes. Public safety remains the top priority and it is right to take action that helps contain the virus and save lives.

To this end, the Government have taken action to alleviate pressure on ferry and freight services, for example by announcing on 24 April 2020 emergency funding of up to £10.5 million for lifeline ferry and freight services to the Isle of Wight and the Scilly Isles. The funding—agreed jointly by the Department for Transport and the Treasury—has supported the continuation of crucial passenger ferries to the Isle of Wight as well as sea and air links to the Isles of Scilly during the course of the covid-19 emergency. Government officials are now working with local stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition to restart and recovery for the lifeline services of the Isle of Wight and Isles of Scilly. Department for Transport officials continue to monitor lifeline services across the UK and liaise closely with devolved Administrations on the support the Government provide in England. However, Scottish ferries are devolved, and the larger Hebrides and Northern Isles services are supported by Public Service Obligation (PSO) subsidies which support a “road-equivalent tariff” scheme for passengers. The UK Government are applying the Barnett formula in the normal way on all funding in relation to covid-19, and to date the Scottish Government have received over £3.5 billion in Barnett consequentials. As support for the Isles of Scilly and the Isle of Wight is being funded from existing Department for Transport budgets, the devolved Administrations have already received their Barnett consequentials on this funding.

So far, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has helped 1.2 million employers across the UK furlough 9.6 million jobs, protecting people’s livelihoods (as at

midnight 9 August 2020), at a value of £34.7 billion. Accommodation and food service employers alone have furloughed over 1.6 million jobs at a claim value of £4.1 billion. As we now begin to reopen the economy, it is right that state support is slowly reduced and the focus shifts to getting furloughed employees back to work. It is the case that some firms will be affected by coronavirus for longer than others, and the Government will seek to support these firms appropriately. To provide additional support to firms to retain employees as demand returns, the Government have introduced the Job Retention Bonus, a one-off payment of £1,000 to employers for each employee who was ever furloughed, has been continuously employed until 31 January 2021 and is still employed by the same employer as of 31 January 2021.

Where firms make the decision that they cannot retain all of their staff over the longer run, the Government are ensuring that those looking for work are supported through:

A package of measures in the Plan for Jobs to help people find work by significantly increasing support offered through Jobcentres and providing individualised advice through the National Careers Service.

The Kickstart Scheme, a £2 billion fund to create hundreds of thousands of new, fully subsidised jobs for young people.

Temporary welfare measures announced in March including: £20 per week increase to the UC standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element, and a nearly £1 billion increase in support for renters through increases to the Local Housing Allowance rates for UC and Housing Benefit claimants.

During this difficult time the Treasury will continue to work closely with employers, delivery partners, industry groups and other Government Departments in order to understand and address the long-term effects of covid-19 and the challenges it poses to the wider economy.

Ministerial Correction

Tuesday 1 September 2020

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Covid-19: Support for Business

The following is an extract from Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions on Tuesday 21 July 2020.

Dr Hudson [V]: The Government's support for people and businesses during the covid crisis has been fantastic and has helped countless constituents in Penrith and The Border and across the UK. Unfortunately, many have still not been able to access support, such as the newly self-employed, limited company directors, freelancers, new starters and those who fall on the wrong side of the eligibility criteria. Will my right hon. Friend work with the Treasury to see whether those hard-working people can be helped with some emergency financial support?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend will know that we have supported over 9 million jobs through the job retention scheme, 2.7 million people have benefited from the self-employment support scheme and **around** 870,000 small businesses have benefited from grants. The Chancellor set out his plan for jobs a few days ago. The key now is to get the economy up and running, so that businesses can trade.

[Official Report, 21 July 2020, Vol. 678, c. 1979.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson).

The correct response should have been:

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend will know that we have supported over 9 million jobs through the job retention scheme, 2.7 million people have benefited from the self-employment support scheme and **over** 870,000 small businesses have benefited from grants. The Chancellor set out his plan for jobs a few days ago. The key now is to get the economy up and running, so that businesses can trade.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 1 September 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	2	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—continued	
Cancer: Alternative Therapy Regulation	10	NHS Expenditure and EU Negotiations	14
Covid-19: Support to Scottish Government	9	NHS Test and Trace.....	2
Covid-19 Testing	8	Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS	
Covid-19 Testing for GPs	15	Foundation Trust	11
Diabetes Screening: Covid-19.....	13	Nurse Recruitment.....	13
Face Coverings.....	15	Obesity Reduction	12
Medicine and Medical Device Safety	15	Public Health Protection.....	6
NHS and Social Care Resources: Winter 2020-21 ..	5	Social Care: Covid-19	10
NHS Capacity: Winter 2020-21.....	7	Topical Questions	16

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 1 September 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	1WS	TRANSPORT	2WS
School Estate	1WS	Spaceflight Regulations: Consultation	2WS
JUSTICE	1WS		
Administrative Law: Independent Review	1WS		

PETITIONS

Tuesday 1 September 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	6P
STRATEGY	1P	Establishment of a Food Standards Commission...	6P
Entitlement to paid care leave	1P	Use of disposable barbecues	8P
Extension of paid maternity leave due to		JUSTICE	9P
COVID-19	2P	Petition of Giovanni Di Stefano	9P
Extension to maternity and paternity leave due to		TRANSPORT	10P
COVID-19	2P	Future of the aviation and aerospace industry	10P
Extension to maternity and paternity leave due to		TREASURY	11P
COVID-19	3P	Support for island communities affected by	
EDUCATION	4P	COVID-19	11P
Return of children to schools in September	4P		

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Tuesday 1 September 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL	
STRATEGY	1MC
Covid-19: Support for Business.....	1MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Tuesday 8 September 2020**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 1 September 2020

List of Government and Principal Officers of the House

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 2] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Covid-19 [Col. 23]
Statement—(Matt Hancock)

Schools and Colleges: Qualification Results and Full Opening [Col. 42]
Statement—(Gavin Williamson)

Immigration (Health and Social Care Staff) [Col. 62]
*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Christine Jardine)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time*

Fisheries Bill [Lords] [Col. 65]
*Motion for Second Reading—(George Eustice)
Amendment—(Deidre Brock)—on a Division, negatived
Motion agreed to
Programme motion—(Tom Pursglove)—agreed to*

Radlett Airfield Site [Col. 132]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 1WS]

Petitions [Col. 1P]
Observations

Ministerial Correction [Col. 1MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
