

BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

SIXTY-FOURTH PLENARY SESSION

Monday 15 May 2023

The Assembly met at 10.14 am.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

The Assembly is now in public session. I remind everyone present to turn off their mobile phones and other electronic devices. I ask that Members, when invited to contribute from the floor, clearly state their name and legislature. Finally, I remind Members that the proceedings of this body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

Members, I welcome you all to Jersey and to the sixty-fourth plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA). I would have liked to have been welcoming more people to Jersey, but, as we know, the weather has got in the way of that and so, unfortunately, we are rather depleted in number. We have a good, strong presence, however, and, as we were saying in the Steering Committee upstairs, pandemics do not stop us, weather does not stop us: BIPA will prevail.

10.15 am

This is the second time that our plenary has been held in one of the Crown dependencies, having previously met on the Isle of Man in 2010, and we are delighted to be finally meeting here in St Helier. We all thank Connétable David Johnson and the States Assembly for the arrangements that have been made on our behalf.

We are hoping that John le Fondre will be joining us: there he is. Marvellous. Thank you, John, for your work. You were a great champion of the Assembly's coming to Jersey. We are all very grateful, and I am pleased that you are here to observe proceedings. *[Applause.]*

You have all been circulated with an up-to-date list of BIPA membership in your briefing

packs. I have to inform the Assembly also that, in accordance with Rule 2A, Baroness Hooper, an associate Member, has accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of a Member for the whole session.

Bear with me as I read the apologies. This could take some time. We have received apologies for the plenary session from many Members whose flights yesterday were cancelled, including: Lord Bew, Gregory Campbell, Lord Dubs, Jackie Doyle-Price MP, Lord Empey, Lord Godson, Damian Green MP, Mark Logan MP, Rebecca Long Bailey MP, Jerome Mayhew MP, Mark Menzies MP, Conor McGinn MP, Karin Smyth MP, Martin Vickers MP, Lord Wrottesley, Senator Frances Black, Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee, Patrick Costello TD, Gary Gannon TD, Senator Vincent Martin, Mattie McGrath TD, James O'Connor TD, Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile, Ross Greer MSP, Pauline McNeill MSP, Steve Aiken MLA, Maurice Bradley MLA, Colin McGrath MLA, Kate Nicholl MLA, Pat Sheehan MLA, Darren Millar MS, Sarah Murphy MS, and the Hon Juan Watterson, the Speaker of the House of Keys. I know that many of them saw Jersey from above but were unable to land. They will be missed, but we understand why they are not here.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Colleagues, it is a great pleasure to be here in St Helier. I echo the words of our Co-Chair in welcoming all Members to Jersey.

You will have received a copy of the programme of business. During this plenary meeting, we will focus some of our discussions on the challenges facing us as parliamentarians and how we can consolidate the bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland.

We will shortly hear from the Baliff of Jersey and President of the States Assembly, Timothy Le Cocq, who will give the opening address to the Assembly. We will then hear from a former BIPA Member, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD, Minister of State at the Department of Finance,

who will address the Assembly and respond to questions. Later in the morning, we will hear from the Chief Minister of Jersey, Deputy Kristina Moore, who will address the Assembly and respond to questions. The morning session will conclude with an address from Deputy Kirsten Morel, Jersey Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture, who will discuss the workstream that Jersey is leading on the British-Irish Council (BIC) on supporting the creative industries.

After lunch we will hear from Steve Baker MP, UK Minister of State for Northern Ireland, who will also address the Assembly and take questions. Karen and I will provide a progress report from recent Steering Committee discussions on the recommendations relevant to the Assembly in the October 2022 report of the Committee on sovereign matters. Monday will conclude with a debate by Members on the October 2022 Committee A report on consolidating the bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland. We expect today's business to conclude at around 4:30 pm.

On Tuesday morning, two Committees will present reports to the Assembly. The Vice-Chair of Committee B, John Hart TD, will present his Committee's interim report on UK/EU defence and security operations. Seán Crowe, Vice-Chair of Committee D, will then present his Committee's report on provision for indigenous minority languages in the BIPA jurisdictions. Then we will hear progress reports from the Chairs of Committees A and C. The Assembly will hear from Deputy Jonathan Renouf, Jersey Minister for the Environment, who will then respond to questions. If the Steering Committee agrees, Monday will conclude with a debate among Members on recent political developments. The Assembly will adjourn at 12:25 pm on Tuesday.

I now ask Nigel Mills MP to formally move that the proposed programme of business be agreed.

Mr Nigel Mills MP:

I formally move that the proposed programme of business be agreed.

Programme of business agreed.

ADDRESS BY THE BAILIFF OF JERSEY

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

I start the next session with a correction and apologies. I see that Lord Wrottesley has made it here, obviously by some great superhuman power that got him here when others were unable to attend. We assume that you are Superman because you have flown here somehow. You are very welcome. It is your first Assembly, and we are delighted that you are here. We will correct the record on that point.

The Lord Wrottesley:

Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We move to our opening address. I am delighted to invite our first guest speaker, Sir Timothy Le Cocq KC, Bailiff of Jersey and President of the States Assembly. I welcome you to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, Sir Timothy, and thank you again for hosting the dinner for Assembly Members yesterday evening. I was corrected last night and told that everyone else calls you “Sir Tim”.

Sir Timothy Le Cocq KC:

No.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

It is definitely Sir Timothy? OK, right, I was given incorrect information.

We will now hear your opening address. *[Applause.]*

Sir Timothy Le Cocq KC:

Ministers, Co-Chairs of the Assembly, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you

so much for those words of gratitude for the dinner last night. It was an enormously enjoyable experience for all of us in Jersey and, I hope, equally enjoyable for you all, or at least for those of you who were able to be there last night.

I am delighted to repeat my welcome of yesterday evening and to welcome the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, all of you — those who were not thwarted by the fog — to the sixty-fourth plenary meeting and to my island, Jersey. It is, at the moment, the island of liquid sunshine. For that I apologise, but I am not responsible for the weather.

We have never previously had the privilege of hosting this event, although that was not for want of trying. We were prevented from hosting in 2020 and 2021 by COVID and in 2022 because we were in the middle of elections. So, it is double the pleasure and, to an extent, a significant relief to welcome the Assembly to Jersey at last.

You do not need me to tell you how important personal relationships and dialogue between parliamentarians are. They break down the them-and-us mindset, prevent demonisation of people because of the views that they hold and make it much easier to find common ground. We are therefore pleased and grateful to be a part of such an Assembly.

I have the honour of welcoming you because I am, as Bailiff of the island, le bailli du roi, the Presiding Officer of the States Assembly, our unicameral legislative Assembly. I am the 90th Bailiff. My office is not quite the same as that of Speaker, although my job is to ensure orderly debate and to apply Standing Orders. Untypically, though, I do not exercise any discretion as to who may speak or when in debates, nor what debate and questions may be listed. Provided that they are in accordance with the Standing Orders approved by the Assembly from time to time, they are permitted. Any Member may speak in any debate, and they are called in the order that they indicate a desire to do so during the debate.

I am particularly pleased that Jersey has this opportunity to host you all today. Our community, though small, is made up of many different influences, including British and Irish influences.

We are of course part of the British family. We are a long-time possession of the Crown, deriving our status by being a part of the Duchy of Normandy. When William, Duke of Normandy took the Crown in 1066, we were on the winning side. Our constitutional position evolved over time as a result of a number of royal charters, including that from the time when King John lost the possessions in mainland France and Jersey elected to stay with the English rather than the French Crown. We kept our laws, language, religious affiliations and, of course, substantial rights to self-determination under the Crown since those times.

The Irish connection is, perhaps, a little less obvious. That comes from the fact that we have had a significant influx of Irish people into Jersey over the centuries. In the 19th century, a large Irish labour force came to the island to help in an ambitious plan to create a deepwater harbour in St Catherine's. The first Irish church was established here in the early 1800s, and Irish people have continued to come to Jersey over the generations since that time.

When, during the First World War, the Jersey contingent suffered significant casualties, the survivors were placed with the Royal Irish Rifles, and they fought together. The Irish people have always had a substantial influence on the island, and many families in Jersey, mine included, can point to Irish ancestry. There is a thriving Jersey Irish Society. In many ways therefore, and I hope that you agree, Jersey is an excellent meeting place for the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

It looks, from the provisional programme of business, as though you have a stimulating day and a half ahead. I hope that you will find what you learn of Jersey to be interesting. Our Assembly is perhaps not typical, because party politics, although emerging, is not fully established, and the majority of Members are still elected as independents. That presents us with challenges, but it has been the case in Jersey for many generations. Furthermore, it was only in 2005 that we moved from a Committee system of government, in which each Member might have a say in executive matters, to a ministerial system and therefore one where, in the

Council of Ministers, there is a readily identifiable Government, distinct from the Assembly. You will hear how that works in practice, I am sure, from a number of Jersey Ministers, including, later this morning, our Chief Minister, Deputy Kristina Moore, who made history last year by becoming our first woman Chief Minister.

I will not speak for any longer, because my purpose in speaking here is to welcome you. Others will talk at greater length about the way in which the system here operates, the challenges that it faces and things that may well be of interest to Members. I wish that I could stay and listen to the discussions and, indeed, the presentations from the various Committees, but I am afraid that my other duties prevent me from doing so, and I cannot stay for the rest of the proceedings. I hope that you will forgive me. Let me just say this: you are warmly welcome here, and I wish you an extremely successful sixty-fourth plenary meeting and a most enjoyable time.

[Applause.]

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Sir Timothy, thank you for your wise words. You are absolutely right that parliamentary dialogue, and dialogue of any sort, is incredibly important. We are grateful that we are here on your beautiful island. Even if it is a little bit difficult to see some of the sights, we know that they are there. Thank you for your warm welcome, for your incredibly generous hospitality last night and for being with us. You explained your diary to me, and I know that it is jam-packed with things that you are doing today, so we are grateful that you could spare any time at all to be with us. *[Applause.]*

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF STATE, DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Our next speaker is Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD, Minister of State at the Department of Finance. As Members will be aware, Minister Carroll MacNeill is a former member of BIPA, so we are very pleased to have Jennifer with us today. Hers is quite a recent Government

appointment, so I take the opportunity to congratulate Minister Carroll MacNeill and to wish her all the best in her new role. I call the Minister to address the Assembly. [Applause.]

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

Thank you so much, Brendan, Karen, Sir Tim, who has had to leave us, and BIPA colleagues. Thank you for your words of welcome. It is lovely to be here with you again so shortly after our excellent trip to Cavan. It is lovely to be in Jersey, and this is a particularly interesting and valuable opportunity for us to take another perspective, having been together in Westminster and Cavan for plenary meetings over the past number of years. It is wonderful to be here among friends.

Before I became Minister, and dropped my sheets on the floor, I greatly valued my time as a Member of the Assembly. When I started, which was during COVID, as I said to many of you, I just did not really get it, because it was taking place online. As soon as we had our first plenary meeting at Westminster and the Committee meetings, I immediately understood the value of BIPA — I got it — and the special relationships that can be created here.

10.30 am

When I became Minister of State at the Department of Finance, my first trip was to London to help to reinforce our relationships there, but our trip on St Patrick's Day was to Edinburgh, Cardiff and Liverpool. One of the things that I enjoyed most about that, and that I think was of the greatest benefit, was seeing great BIPA colleagues in each of those places and being able to cement those links and genuinely see people as friends. Although some of them have been all over the place on planes and not quite made it here, we know the value of this place and the relationships that we create here. It is very special to everyone.

In recent months, since we were together in Cavan, there have been significant changes and developments. I refer in particular to the Windsor Framework, which is a particularly welcome development since we were in Cavan. Given that, I am particularly happy that we are joined

again at this plenary by Minister Steve Baker. I take this opportunity to thank him personally for the tireless and considerable work that he put into achieving the Windsor Framework. BIPA colleagues will note that Minister Baker spent considerable time with us in Cavan and put an awful lot of energy and effort into his presence there. His commitment to BIPA and the work that was going on at that time was certainly noticed by me and many others, and I thank him for that in particular. *[Applause.]*

Critically, the Windsor Framework provides a set of joint solutions that comprehensively address the concerns raised by people and businesses in Northern Ireland about the implementation of the protocol. It also offers us the opportunity to forge even stronger relationships between the UK and the EU and the UK and Ireland. Knowing, as I do, the *raison d'être* of this Assembly, you will recognise how important that is on so many different levels.

We know that, as partners, the EU and UK are like-minded in the face of so many different challenges — climate change, *[Inaudible]*, cybersecurity, the cost-of-living crisis, the war in Ukraine — and our strength lies in being able to work together. When it comes to safeguarding peace and prosperity on all these islands, the Windsor Framework provides a fresh opportunity for the relationships across the islands. We must ensure that Northern Ireland can seize the opportunity provided by its unique access to the UK and EU markets. We have heard from stakeholders about the genuine economic benefits and the unique space that it occupies and can realise from that. There are already signs that it can lead to much-needed investment in Northern Ireland, and we want to see that continue and Northern Ireland be successful and prosperous.

Coupled with that, we need to maintain our other piece of work: the full and effective operation of all the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement across the three strands. That remains a priority. The people of Northern Ireland want functioning government; that is clear. Our focus has to be on restoring the Assembly and the Executive. Being in Jersey provides a little distance

and extra perspective [*Inaudible*] is always a good thing, and I am conscious that we gather here almost 78 years to the day since Jersey Liberation Day, 9 May 1945. Jersey and the Channel Islands were the only part of the United Kingdom to be occupied during the Second World War, and we saw signs of that on the trip from the airport. I mention it only as a reminder of how much Europe itself has changed in those nearly eight decades. It highlights the importance of remembering our history and learning from the past. Last week's coronation of King Charles is a case in point in learning from the past, moving on and being better partners in the future. The President of Ireland and the Taoiseach attended on behalf of Ireland. It was a historic first for Ireland to be represented at a British coronation. Indeed, as President Michael D Higgins remarked, when Queen Elizabeth was crowned back in 1953, people in Ireland were discouraged from even listening to the ceremony on the radio. I for one am very glad that we have moved on in such a constructive and positive way.

Perhaps of even greater symbolic significance was the presence of First Minister-designate Michelle O'Neill and the SDLP leader, Colum Eastwood, alongside other party leaders from Northern Ireland. That was really important, as their presence was living proof of how much relations on these islands have been transformed for the better since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement 25 years ago. I think that, in 1998, few of us could really have imagined the degree to which the Good Friday Agreement would transform relationships across these islands in such a short space of time. We have very much more work to do, however.

Given the successes that we have had, and particularly the opportunity that has been created by the Windsor Framework, we now need to press ahead to achieve the vision of the future that was set out in the agreement 25 years ago. There are a number of challenges to be faced, including on day-to-day issues, such as the cost of living, the health service and policing. We can find solutions with local leadership and within the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

As co-guarantors, the British and Irish Governments have a shared and solemn responsibility to uphold the core principles and to work in collaboration as we strive to fulfil the agreement's vision for peace and reconciliation, which is a true vision and one that is yet to be realised. The Good Friday Agreement committed its signatories to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences, and it placed a commitment to the rule of law at its heart. We know from almost 30 years of violence that cost 3,500 people their lives that acceptance of the rule of law in Northern Ireland has not always been universal, and it has been hard won and hard worked.

In the years following the agreement, the trust that has been built up by institutions such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Public Prosecution Service and the judiciary — all political institutions that are committed to the rule of law — has been hard won.

The agreement, which was endorsed overwhelmingly by the people of the island of Ireland, required victims and survivors of the Troubles to make some of the deepest sacrifices of all in the name of peace. We owe it to them to ensure that we address the legacy of the past in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of victims and survivors, that is grounded in the principles of the agreement and that is grounded in the rule of law. Addressing the legacy of the past is very difficult, but it is a moral imperative.

The Irish Government's approach has always been rooted in respect for international human rights obligations, with a focus on victims. Those principles, as we are aware, were enshrined in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, which was agreed by parties across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland and by the two Governments. Both Governments recommitted to that agreement in 2020. The legacy Bill that is currently before the House of Lords is a unilateral departure from that agreement and approach. It is a fundamentally flawed Bill, and it is without support from political parties on the island of Ireland. In the words of the Catholic and the Church of Ireland Archbishops of Armagh:

“it will deepen division and further demoralise all but a tiny minority of those it purports to help.”

I do not believe that the Bill will bring closure to survivors and victims and their families. Many have expressed doubts that it is compatible with the United Kingdom’s human rights obligations, including article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Serious doubts have been expressed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and a bipartisan group of 27 Members of the United States Congress. The Bill is being watched internationally.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that we stand up for the rule of law. Now is the time to reinforce our shared commitment to human rights. Now is the time for us to share our strength and support for the rule of law, not to weaken it. We can, and must, do that together. As we know, we achieve so much more when we work together. That is the very essence of the political institution that we are attending today. The progress that has been made in the past 25 years, even if incomplete, is clear evidence of that. The principles of partnership and collaboration that have underpinned every significant step forward in the peace process are testament to that.

More broadly, with the Windsor Framework in place, it is now time to reflect on the depth and strength of our British-Irish relationship and friendship and to look ahead, underpinned by our Good Friday Agreement principles and values. At the coronation of King Charles, the Taoiseach spoke of our deep political, economic, cultural and personal links with Britain, and he looked forward to further strengthening British-Irish relations and the friendship between our peoples. Indeed, we have it in all of our families and friendships and in many of our work experiences. Our people-to-people connections form the bedrock of our relationship.

During my St Patrick’s Day meetings with members of the diaspora in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Liverpool, that was abundantly evident, so much so that, in certain communities, it was hard to find the Irish. They were so completely ingrained that it was nearly everybody. In the Irish

case, however, I am conscious that it has worked so well for us for so many years across these islands, so much so that we have entrusted the management of the Irish rugby team, which I hold very dear, to an actual Englishman, and it has gone very well.

The strength of our connections is also emphasised by the fact that the Lord Mayor of the City of London is now the second of Irish descent. He is a man whom I work closely with on financial services. It is very nice and very pleasant to have that connection, not just with Ireland but with Trinity College. Indeed, Heledd Fychan, who was on a plane and did not quite make it from Cardiff, is another with a Trinity College connection. All those things are therefore interpersonal and very connected, and it shows in our commercial relationship with the UK, which continues to be of huge importance. Two-way bilateral trade in goods and services between Ireland and the UK was worth over €100 billion in 2021, and Irish companies employ 117,000 people in Britain.

Soon after becoming Minister, I made it my business that my first trip would be to the United Kingdom and to London to meet my UK counterpart, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Andrew Griffith MP. I also met representatives of Edinburgh's financial services industry just weeks later. The purpose of that was to re-enforce the well-established relationship between His Majesty's Treasury and the Department of Finance, at both political and official levels. From regular engagement between the Minister and the Chancellor, cooperation between senior officials and a staff exchange scheme between our two organisations, we are really committed to making the two organisations work as well as we can.

Finally, when it comes to framing relations across these islands, I want to mention the British-Irish Council in particular. I am delighted that the next British-Irish Council summit will be held in Jersey a little over a month from now. Like BIPA, the British-Irish Council provides a unique platform for building relations across these islands. It is also important for shining a lens on and seeking to address common challenges, including climate sustainability, building

for the future and protecting our unique cultures and individual languages. However, we have a body of work to do yet. That meeting will be extremely important, and it is good that it is in Jersey. It is important that BIPA precedes that and that the views of parliamentarians are made clear in advance of the Governments' discussions.

As we look to the future, it is clear that there is much to build on. Ultimately, we work best when we work in partnership, commit to the agreements between us, and commit to the modus operandi that has brought us this far, which is grounded in the rule of law, partnership and friendship. Go raibh míle maith agat.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Minister, for your comprehensive address, which touched on a lot of issues of common concern and interest to our islands. Can I ask for some questions to the Minister?

Rt Hon the Lord Bruce:

Jennifer, thank you very much indeed for that. First, you mentioned the legacy Bill, which is still struggling its way through the House of Lords. Paul Murphy is heavily involved in that. It has no friends — I do not think that, privately, even the Minister is a friend — and we would like it to be dropped, as you would, but, at the moment, we are trying to blunt it as much as we possibly can. It is just not needed.

Secondly, you mentioned cooperation on financial services. That interests me a great deal because, clearly, post-Brexit, there is a huge benefit to Dublin from the relocation of financial services operations there. I very much welcome what you said about cooperation because it seems to me that the success of financial services in Dublin will depend on close links with London to mutual benefit. London is losing, but, on the other hand, it is really important that the links are maintained. I very much welcome what you have said about that. Are you confident that not only will that be maintained but that, given the competition that we are

facing, especially from New York, it can be done in a way that ensures that, if you like, the European financial services sector can maintain a strong position globally against the threat of competition from elsewhere?

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

Thank you, Lord Bruce. Your comments are very important and timely. I am strongly committed to London doing well and Dublin doing well, and I see no contradiction in that. The memorandum of understanding is our next port of call. When I met Andrew Griffith MP in the Treasury, I was very clear that we were looking forward to being in a place where we could get on with that. Now that the Windsor Framework has been agreed, we are in that place where we can get on with that, and that work is progressing in the EU. It is very important that we have mechanisms where we can talk and that we can find ways for us both to do better within that, as you correctly say, juxtaposed against the United States of America. Of interest from the European side is the ever-deepening capital markets union and being able to access capital in that way. That will be a strength to both of us, frankly, and I think that we will both do well together as a consequence of the different changes that we are making now. Of particular importance is being able to do the things that we said that we were going to do. We said that we would have a memorandum of understanding and that we would do it when the Windsor Framework was agreed, and we are doing that. We are committed to doing the things that we say we will do.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Minister.

10.45 am

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

Thank you, Minister. It is good to be able to say “Minister” to you, a former BIPA colleague. Quite rightly, your presentation listed all the positive things that create very strong bonds

between all of us on these islands, but you also mentioned the discordant issue, which is the legacy Bill. I have two questions. First, from an Irish perspective, how do you see the legacy Bill panning out? Secondly, the point that you make about Civil Service inter-cooperation is very significant. There is great scope for that, and I say that as somebody who had responsibility for our public service. Is there a formal mechanism for exchange, and how can that be deepened? In the post-Brexit era, it is important for parliamentarians to have opportunities for very close cooperation, but it is equally important for our administrators to have that opportunity. Is there a scheme in mind to do that?

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

Thank you, Deputy Howlin. I will take the last question first, if I may. Thank you for your work on public expenditure and reform that enabled those sorts of initiatives to be taken. Indeed, it is my experience in the Department of Finance to have met people from the Treasury who are actively working in the Department of Finance, and I had the equivalent experience when I was there. Forgive me, I do not have the name of the programme to hand, but it is a structured programme of transfer. Candidates are identified and offered the opportunity to experience the other. To be honest with you, showing somebody your treasury or your purse is a huge measure of trust, and showing the processes and everything else is, to my mind, a good thing. It deepens relationships, friendships and cooperation, and you are quite right that that level of cooperation is just as important as political cooperation.

The Irish position on the legacy Bill has always been very clear. We are completely opposed to the approach taken: it is inconsistent with the proper administration of justice and inconsistent with the rule of law, and there is unified opposition to it from all political parties on the island of Ireland. It is not the approach to take, and we have tried to articulate that in private and in various international forums. It is very clear that the Council of Ministers and the UN share the same view and that a range of international bodies take the same view,

particularly in relation to the rule of law and the impact on amnesties internationally and what that might mean. We are aware that the Bill has continued to progress essentially unchanged without addressing our core concerns, and we ask again that an opportunity be taken to pause and reflect before progressing any further. A concurrent concern is that individuals have been recruited to the new body, although it is not yet in law. We note that, but we hope that an opportunity might be found to press pause and reflect before progressing any further.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Minister.

Ms Sarah Jones MP:

Thanks for that speech. I was going to ask about the legacy Bill, but it has already been asked about, and I —

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

You can ask again. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Sarah Jones MP:

I was going to ask about your reflections on the changing nature of the relationship between the UK Government and the Irish Government, the Windsor Framework and the relationship between Rishi Sunak and Leo Varadkar. We are in a different place, and perhaps that provides an opportunity.

Later, we will debate the role of the British-Irish Council, BIPA and how some of our established structures can maybe be strengthened to replace the lack of structures now that the UK is not in the European Union and given that the forums in which Ministers normally meet are no longer there. Do you have any reflections on the role of our structures?

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

You have highlighted a really important point, and you are quite right also to highlight the fresh

dynamic that the Windsor Framework gives us, as always happens when there is a change in politics. An election washes things through, and so, sometimes, does a change of personalities. With the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach having changed as well, that is very important. You are quite right: there is a new opportunity, and it is very positive.

You are also right to highlight the opportunities for Ministers and officials to get together in different ways. As I said to you, my priority on becoming Minister was to meet my UK counterpart. That was my first port of call, and I think that Ireland is committed to the BIC and to making sure that we are fully participating there and everywhere else. There is an opportunity to reflect on the structures more broadly. It is important to continue to look for the full implementation of the Windsor Framework, and there are clear signals that that will happen and a timeline for it to happen, but there is an opportunity to find better ways to strengthen our relationships. I referenced the memorandum of understanding between the EU and the UK in respect of financial services. There are equivalent conversations that I want to have all the time. We will do it informally on or an ad hoc basis, but there may very well be ways to, over time, provide a structure around that so that it can be dependable and regular and not dependent on personalities.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Minister.

Senator Emer Currie:

Thank you, Co-Chair. It is fantastic to see you here, Minister Carroll MacNeill. I say that having been your colleague on the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and in this fantastic body. It is fantastic to see you stand up and reflect on a lot of the work and the sentiment that we have seen in our shared work. You are absolutely right about the reset in relationships, which have been incredibly positive in recent times, and the reset in the institutions set up under the Good Friday Agreement.

Again, you are right: it is the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill that will hold that back. That will not go away, because the people who are invested in stopping that Bill will not give up, so the issue will not go away. It is an issue that *[Inaudible]* at the Good Friday Agreement *[Inaudible]* UK and Ireland relationships.

At the Queen's University conference to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, I was struck by the fact that the Secretary of State himself pointed out the importance of the principle of consent, and yet here we have a Bill that nobody supports, apart from some members of the Conservative Party. In his speech, the Secretary of State also acknowledged "the suffering of the victims" and paid tribute to the peacemakers for:

"their passion for peaceful and democratic means ... and their clear-eyed view of the impact of violence on vulnerable communities".

Yet, we are at a stage where we can see perpetrators being prioritised over victims and the rule of law, as you have said.

Today, we see Zelensky come to the UK, and we are talking about impact of amnesties on the rule of law. How do you feel about that? A former Lord Chief Justice has been appointed chair of a body that has not been put into legislation. To me, that is a statement of intent. What is your reaction to that?

I will quote again from the speech that the Secretary of State made in Belfast. He said:

"Real leaders know when to say yes".

Real leaders also know when to say no and to stop. I ask you to reflect on that, too.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thanks, Emer. Minister, I will take another question and group them, because we are running into time difficulty.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I want to pick up on the issue of financial services that has been alluded

to by Members, including Lord Bruce. I thank the Minister for her clear interest in Scotland; she has already visited. That evidences an intent, which is very welcome indeed. Of course, Edinburgh is a key financial services centre, and we have lost our single market access in terms of single market banking and investment services licences. What consideration has Dublin given to potential initiatives that could help to pursue better relations post Brexit between the Edinburgh financial services centre and Dublin, which, of course, is a key financial services centre, as well?

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

Thank you very much. I will take that question first. I was really struck by the scale, depth and history of financial services in Edinburgh. I was also really struck by the partnership between Dublin and Edinburgh. A man living in Blackrock, which is in my constituency, is the head of one of the biggest investment companies in Edinburgh, and he travels from Dublin to Edinburgh to run that business, so the links are very strong.

The particular opportunity that we might focus on is fintech. Clearly, Edinburgh has a very strong fintech hub, as does not just Dublin but Ireland as a whole. Given the juxtaposition of a very strong tech sector and a very strong financial services centre, there is a unique opportunity to work on anti-money laundering, in particular, and to be able to use the skills from both as we step into a new world that is focused more and more on digital finance and fintech in particular. We both have hubs and strengths, so it is something on which I would like to continue the conversation.

Senator Currie, thank you for your tireless work on legacy, in the Oireachtas and beyond. Indeed, just last week, we had the families of the disappeared in the Fine Gael parliamentary party room in Dublin. It was a privilege to listen to them — for the third time, I think, in the Oireachtas — and what they said speaks to how deeply felt their hurt is after all this time. The passage of time means nothing when there is a hurt that is yet to be resolved, whether that is

related to the disappeared or the Ballymurphy massacre. We met families from Ballymurphy and Springhill and other families from right across Ireland who are looking for a resolution process of some kind to the hurt that they are feeling. The closing off of that is particularly difficult.

You alluded to the rule of law. The capacity to inquire and test evidence, even if it is not to a criminal standard, is the most basic in the rule of law. We do that in employment disputes, never mind anything else or anything as serious as the legacy issues that we have. There are important questions about the standards to which we hold ourselves. You correctly referenced the consent principle. You cannot pick and choose your democracies, you cannot pick and choose your consents and you cannot pick and choose your rule of law. They must be applied equally and equivalently. I take a very strong view on that, as I know you do.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smyth TD):

Thank you, Minister

Mr Frank Feighan TD:

First, I congratulate you, Minister, on your appointment. Thanks for coming here today. I add my support to the calls to scrap the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill. We have met all the various stakeholders, including the families of the disappeared and the Ballymurphy families, as well as the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and it is quite obvious that it is certainly causing a lot of concern.

It is great to be back at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I understand I am replacing you, Minister. *[Laughter.]* As a former Co-Chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, there is one thing that I want to note and maybe take your views on. For many generations, from the 1950s and 1960s, there was no huge cooperation, politically, between Ireland and the UK, despite hundreds of thousands of Irish people living and working in the UK. It was only when we entered the EEC in 1973 together that those relationships started to build. On average,

there were 28 meetings a day between Irish and UK officials. That, by chance, brought on the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Good Friday Agreement, and that is what brought peace to the island of Ireland and between our two countries. People do not fully understand that.

With the UK exiting the EU, we need to work twice as hard. That is where the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly comes to the fore, but we need a lot more relationships such as this, because you can see what happens here today and what happens at dinner. Those relationships help to foster cooperation. Again, in the current climate, we need to work twice as hard. I am proposing a lot more cooperation and a lot more bodies like this to fill the void in cooperation and relationships with the UK, which is a very valued partner of Ireland and vice versa. I ask for your opinion on that, please.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smyth TD):

Thanks, Frank. Stephen Hammond and Paul Kehoe are our final two contributors. I am conscious that the Minister needs to leave us at 11.00 am, so can the questions be as concise as possible, please?

Mr Stephen Hammond MP:

I will take your stricture and be brief. Minister, congratulations. I was very pleased to hear what you said about the memorandum of understanding, because that is key for the future. I am sure that, when you spoke to Minister Griffiths, you spoke about the Financial Services and Markets Bill, in which we put a secondary objective on the regulator to look at the competitiveness of regulatory regimes. What are your thoughts on how that is being reflected across Europe, particularly with the threat from Dubai and Singapore?

Secondly, what thought has been given to the regulation of the crypto asset space? You mentioned fintech a moment ago. That is clearly going to be a challenge for everybody in Europe in terms of financial regulation.

Mr Paul Kehoe TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair, and congratulations, Minister. As a newbie to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I am delighted to be part of this group of people.

Minister, I welcome your comments. I have two questions on the legacy Bill and echo what other Members have said about it.

11.00 am

When you speak to and deal with the private sector, specifically financial services, in your role as Minister, what are their concerns for relationships between Ireland and Britain now, post Brexit? How important is the relationship between Ireland and England? Formerly, I was a Minister for a number of years. When you were in Brussels or wherever, one of your most important bilateral meetings was always with your UK counterpart. We have fallen behind on that. This group meets twice yearly. Are there other areas where we can strengthen our relationships, groups or organisations? We should strengthen our relationships. I welcome your saying that one of the first meetings that you had was with your British counterpart. That is very welcome, and other Ministers should take a leaf out of your book. As Chairperson of the all-party Committee on Education in the Oireachtas, I try to reach out to members of the Education Committee at Westminster. I would be interested in your comments on that.

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

I think that a couple of Members have asked similar questions on what we can do better in British-Irish relations and how we can create better, deeper and more regular structures. I have said that I do not want it to be informal or left to personalities to make those decisions. We need to be better than that and build in structures that cannot be deviated from. There is a body of work now, post Windsor Framework. Obviously, it has come through clearly in the views of Members here – maybe it comes from the work of this conference – that that is a key request of the Assembly, just from listening to Members' reflections and contributions.

For private sector relationships, the concern is political stability. It is important to us all. We

have talked about the importance of political stability in Northern Ireland. We would like to see investment in Northern Ireland. We think that the decisions that are being made are linked to having predictable and functioning government. It is just another reason why we want to see the Assembly and Executive back at work — so that that that can be provided.

On the regulation of crypto assets, Mr Hammond, obviously, MiCA is finalised, or close to being finalised. There is a little bit to go. There is an interesting and important body of work to be done there. There are huge opportunities through blockchain, and that should not be confused too far. Obviously, crypto is a slightly different space. We have to think carefully about that.

I welcome Deputy Feighan back to BIPA. You have a long association with BIPA, going back many years. Thank you for your comments. Again, it speaks to the point about better, deeper cooperation. I make the point about engagement. I have been back to London a number of times, and I will be back again next month. It is about turning up, talking to your friends and ensuring that the relationships are there, that you can speak frankly and often, and that you build those relationships over time. Nowhere is that more evident than in BIPA's work. I am certainly appreciative and glad of the opportunity that I had to be a BIPA member, to see that at first hand and learn that practice and experience as a BIPA member. It has certainly helped me in the past weeks and months, and I would like to see more of it. I would also like to apologise to you that I cannot stay around and return the courtesy that Minister Baker paid to everybody last year by being able to stay for the full conference. It is just unavoidable. I assure you that, any other time that I come, I will have the full opportunity. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Minister, I thank you sincerely on behalf of the Assembly for your address and your responses to all questions. We will now take a break and resume at 11.15 am sharp.

The sitting was suspended at 11.04 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.19 am.

ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF MINISTER OF JERSEY

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

It might be a BIPA record for us to be only five minutes late back from a coffee break, so well done, everyone. I invite Deputy Kristina Moore, Chief Minister of Jersey, to address us. Chief Minister, you are incredibly welcome. We are so pleased to be meeting here in Jersey for the first time as an Assembly. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Deputy Kristina Moore:

Good morning, and thank you very much for the warm welcome, and a warm welcome to Jersey. It is great that so many of you have made it. I am so sorry about the weather and the disruption to travel that was incurred by so many of you yesterday; I hope that it will not put too much of a dampener on your meeting and the progress that you are able to make over the next day or so.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that Jersey has had the honour of hosting a BIPA plenary meeting. It is indeed a great privilege for us to do so. As many of you will be aware, we have previously hosted four British-Irish Council summits, and we are due to host another one next month, so it is definitely high time that BIPA came to Jersey. I therefore very much hope that this will be the first of many occasions on which we will be able to welcome the Assembly to the island for a plenary meeting.

In Jersey, we are proud of our constitutional history and status and of being part of the British Isles. In addition to the local population of around 50,000 people, Jersey is home to nearly 30,000 people who have moved here from the constituent nations of the United Kingdom, and we have a strong community of over 1,600 citizens from the Republic of Ireland alone. Our community has, both historically and in more recent times, been shaped by migration from the UK and Ireland, and we all enjoy the benefits that that brings: innovation, industriousness and,

perhaps above all, friendly and healthy competition. Indeed, the social connections that Jersey enjoys across the British islands and Ireland are a strong and key part of our character as a small island nation.

Jersey participates in a number of political, economic and cultural structures across these islands. We hope that, despite being a relatively small island, we bring a valuable perspective to discussions. I hope that you will hear more about our current areas of dialogue and cooperation across the UK and Ireland in your formal and informal engagements during your time here. For example, we are the lead jurisdiction for the creative industries work section in the British-Irish Council, and we participate as actively as we can in other key strands, including housing and energy. Those are policy areas of significant shared interest to us all.

Jersey and our colleague Crown dependencies joined the Assembly in 2001 along with the devolved legislatures, thus mirroring at a legislative level the arrangements that have been in place for the executive across the British-Irish Council since 1999. In our 22 years of membership, the Jersey Member and associate Member have always sought to participate actively and enthusiastically in the work of the Assembly. I know that Connétable David Johnson and Deputy Rob Ward, our current representatives, share that enthusiasm, and they will continue in their roles for the foreseeable future. We may have only one Member and one associate, but the benefit for Jersey of being part of structures such as BIPA is invaluable, and I hope that the benefit that we see from our engagement is felt reciprocally across other jurisdictions.

As everyone in the room knows, 2023 has marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, an important historical milestone in British-Irish relations. In Jersey, we welcome the peace that has now been enjoyed for a generation, and we respect the democratic structures and processes that are in place. Equally, we recognise that there can be difficulties and challenges along any path, and we will always support the

continuation of peace, cooperation, dialogue and democracy as we all seek resolutions. Those values are enshrined in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly — indeed, they reflect its very purpose — which is why I am especially pleased to be able to host you in Jersey over the next few days.

I hope that, while you are here, we can share some of our own challenges, successes and opportunities with you and speak about them openly and frankly.

The Government that I am privileged to lead came into office last July, following a general election that saw widespread political change, with most members of the previous Government either standing down or losing their seats. We are now not far from one year in office. I am pleased to be able to say that our Parliament, the States Assembly, is now the most representative that it has been of our diverse island community. The same can be said of our Government, the Council of Ministers, which, for the first time, is 50:50 gender-balanced between men and women. Of course, we are not perfect, but we are making great progress in reflecting the diverse island that we represent.

Of course, what matters most is our policy focus and how we tackle the issues of each day. We face policy challenges that you will all recognise from your jurisdictions, such as affordable housing, an ongoing cost-of-living crisis and challenges with staff recruitment and retention in the public and private sectors. As a Government, we have a relentless focus on addressing those challenges and on creating a community where everyone can thrive. Our young people need to have hope of a long-term future on the island in which they can buy their own home and have opportunities for a well-paid job in a diverse range of careers. We are working with our social housing provider to build the affordable homes that we need on Government-owned sites using modern construction methods and are simultaneously regenerating our public realm. Equally, we have set money aside to provide assistance for first-time buyers and affordable purchases. We know that Jersey needs to be an island where people want and can afford to come and work.

We are also looking at how our rental market operates, and the Housing Minister is considering options that will ensure a fair deal and more security for both landlords and tenants, with a consultation going on as we speak.

None of that is easy, as you all know, and we are conscious of the effect that government can have in disturbing the economic balance, but I hope that the actions that we are taking and will take in future will have a largely positive effect. To help with the cost of living, we increased tax thresholds within weeks of coming into office to put more money into the pockets of all working islanders. We have provided additional targeted and permanent support to low-income pensioners and islanders on fixed incomes, mainly for heating bills and food costs, to insulate them as best we can from rising prices. We are rapidly moving our minimum wage, which we increased from £9.22 to £10.50 in November last year, and we are working towards everyone receiving a living wage, which is currently £12.19 an hour. That is an ongoing challenge. Inflation here remains high, at 12.7%, and the levers available to us for bringing it down are limited. As a small island, we are subject to global events and generally have higher costs as a matter of course, while not exacerbating the situation ourselves. We hope that, in respect of inflation, the optimism that the governor of the Bank of England expressed last week becomes a reality.

Within government, we have set up a new Cabinet Office to give greater central focus to the delivery of our policy priorities. A delivery unit within the Cabinet Office has been tasked, among other projects, with improving the welcome and ongoing support packages that we give to key workers to help with our own recruitment and retention. Attracting and keeping staff is interwoven with housing and the cost of living. We know that we cannot just say that we value our front-line workers — we need to show it as well. We are conscious that it is not only Jersey that needs more doctors, nurses and care sector staff, to name just some of the professions where we are experiencing shortages. A key part of addressing those challenges and creating

thriving communities is the need to maintain a strong economy. That is important for our individual economies but also for our region and Europe as a whole. In Jersey, our general economic performance remains strong, with rising numbers of jobs, although not necessarily with the people immediately available to fill them. We are seeing areas of strength and growth, of challenge and of new opportunities — a picture, I suspect, that you will all recognise. We also have skills and productivity challenges, which we are tackling with the need to maintain a suitably trained and qualified workforce in both the short and long term if we are to stay relevant and competitive.

11.30 am

In my 10 months as Chief Minister here, I have quickly learned that, if it is not already all too difficult in government to not stray or be strayed off course, events have their effect. I am conscious that sometimes our focus can be too broad, making it more of a challenge to deliver on our core agenda. That said, it is a further core issue that I am determined to see driven forward. We are lucky in Jersey to have beautiful countryside and outstanding coastline, which we all enjoy and are immensely proud of. A third of the population, however, lives here in St Helier, one of our 12 parishes and our most urbanised parish by far. It is the parish that has taken the brunt of development in recent years, and it continues to do so. In my view, that has not been balanced with equivalent investment in St Helier in appropriate walking routes, cycle lanes, town parks and other public spaces and amenities. I want to leave St Helier, our capital, greener, cleaner and more accessible when my time in office concludes. We are already progressing plans for new town schools, which we desperately need to replace outdated existing schools. We also intend to create new parks in town and improve community spaces. As part of that work, we recently announced plans to develop a “Coronation Way”, aligning key areas of St Helier and making them more accessible via sustainable modes of transport. I hope that my remarks have given you a flavour of our focus in Jersey. As we face mutual

challenges, it is always helpful to discuss them together, tackle them jointly where we can, and, of course, learn from one another. I hope that this plenary meeting provides another opportunity for us to do so. I wish you a very successful meeting in Jersey and hope that you are able to be joined by some of the colleagues who are missing from around the tables. I look forward to seeing you all in St Mary this evening for dinner. Thank you all very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Chief Minister. I think that you are happy to take questions, so, if anyone would like to catch my eye, we will have some questions.

Mr Nigel Mills MP:

Obviously, one of Jersey's economic income generators is being an offshore financial centre. I will not say "tax haven", because I know that that causes offence in these places, but how do you see Jersey managing to keep that industry thriving given the various challenges around the world, such as minimum tax rates and greater disclosures of ownership? Can Jersey steer a course of being a reputable centre of that, without perhaps having that clobbered by larger countries that are after their share of the money?

Deputy Kristina Moore:

We have a good track record, over many decades, of being a reputable partner with international organisations such as the OECD. We continue to work with those organisations and demonstrate high levels of regulation and practice. We are generally and regularly recognised as one of the best offshore financial centres in the world, and we are very proud of that. It is, of course, always an evolving process. We are in discussions with the OECD about the minimum global tax rate. We are moving towards that, along with our colleagues in other jurisdictions.

Baroness Hooper:

Congratulations, Chief Minister, on your newish responsibilities, and thank you so much for what you have been able to tell us this morning.

My question follows on somewhat from the previous one. It is about your relationship with the overseas territories. In London last week, we had parliamentary meetings with representatives of the overseas territories, and the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) also met. I am not sure whether Jersey was represented at any of those meetings. I am interested in knowing how that relationship develops.

If I may be allowed a separate question, you referred to some responsibility for the creative industries here under the BIC arrangements. Will you be kind enough to elaborate a little as to what that means?

Deputy Kristina Moore:

Thank you for the questions. I will talk first about the British-Irish Council and the creative industries. That is a strand of work that we lead on. Our current Deputy Chief Minister, Deputy Morel, is our Minister for Culture. He recently attended a BIC session — in Liverpool, I think, but somewhere in the United Kingdom — where that work was progressed. It is a great area of interest. I hope that, when BIC attends next month, it will be treated to a brief performance from the Ballet d'Jèrri. We are fortunate to have our own small ballet company, which is about to go out on tour. As many in the room will recognise, culture and the arts help to bring our communities together and inspire people, and we feel that it is important to support that. I am really excited by that piece of work and look forward to discussing it with BIC colleagues next month.

You raise the issue of the relationship with the overseas territories, which is very interesting. We are quite separate; in fact, we sit under different Ministries in the United Kingdom Government. Our point of liaison is through the Ministry of Justice with the Crown dependencies. We were delighted to meet the Lord Chancellor last week. That was a first, I

think, particularly so early in a Lord Chancellor's time in Government. We were delighted to have that opportunity to raise issues with him and begin discussions of matters that are of relevance to the Crown dependencies. The overseas territories, of course, have a different constitutional arrangement. They sit in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which is their link point. At the end of JMC on Friday, I was fortunate to attend a reception that was hosted by Lord Goldsmith. It was nice of them to invite the Crown dependencies' heads of government. We were delighted to participate in that and engage with the heads of government from across the overseas territories, but we retain some differences in our constitutional positions.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

Congratulations, Chief Minister. Godspeed in all the work that you will do.

My question relates to your remarks about recruitment and retention. Can you explain to us how you will address those matters and what migration policies exist here?

I have a related question about third-level education. Where do most students from Jersey go for third-level education? Is there a particular policy on it, or is it entirely a choice for them? Do they normally go to the United Kingdom? Do some come to Ireland, or do they go further afield within Europe?

Deputy Kristina Moore:

I have not prepared a full lecture on this topic, so I will try to keep my answer concise and to the point.

Our students travel far and wide for educational purposes. They tend, in the main, to go to England and Scotland, and to Wales as well, actually. I am aware of some students who go to Irish universities, as well as to Irish schools, and to Europe, and some go to Canada and the United States.

Jersey has always been an outward-looking, global island. We had, of course, a great cod-

fishing trade in the 18th century. Wherever you go in the world, you will bump into somebody from Jersey, because, as an island nation, we are always on the go.

The point that you were really making was about recruitment and retention. As I said in my speech, housing and access to housing go hand in hand with recruitment and retention. In this global market, where workforce restrictions are a pressing matter for so many governments, we all need to ensure that we are offering people a good quality of life in the place that they work. That has been our area of focus: ensuring that our key workers have access to quality accommodation at a good price so that they can afford an excellent quality of life and can get out to enjoy the beautiful environment that the island has to offer.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Go raibh maith agat. Well done, and good luck in the future.

In your earlier comments, you mentioned cycleways. In Ireland, and probably elsewhere, there is always a pressure from the economy to develop, develop, develop. Although we want the housing, the office blocks and so on, sometimes they are built but are not appropriate. There are those tensions.

In the short while that I have been here, there has been mention of the huge pressure on building companies in Jersey because of the cost of building supplies. Some of the building companies are no longer sustainable, because the cost ensures that the offices or housing that they build will not be purchased by the ordinary people whom you want to hold on to.

We have similar problems in Ireland, where the pressure is about housing, housing, housing. If we do not provide the housing, we cannot attract or hold on to some of the companies. I do not know whether you have any additional solutions that we can learn from, given that, in comparison with other nations, we are all island nations and are open to the vagaries of international commerce and the supply chain.

I cannot remember the name of the ship that got stuck in the canal. When that happened,

everything on building sites stopped for six months, and we know the cost of that to companies that had builders on sites who were waiting for bits and pieces to be delivered. I presume that the same was true here.

Deputy Kristina Moore:

Absolutely. Inflationary pressures on construction are a big issue for us. That is exacerbated somewhat by the additional shipping route to bring items to the island. That is why we are looking particularly at modern methods of construction and making sure that a lot of our construction is done off-island where costs are, perhaps, lower. Items are then shipped to the island: for example, bathroom pods are slotted in. You can see that construction sites — blocks of flats, for example — now go up extremely quickly when, for example, Hadley steel-framed structures are used. I recently visited a building site where the construction of flats was under way. Only eight workers were on that site, instead of the 50 that would be on a conventional site. I think that that really shows the power of modern methods of construction, which reduce the burden on workforce and labour and, therefore, help companies with offsetting the increasing costs at this time when the international economy is the way that it is.

Ms Emma Harper MSP:

It is really interesting to hear everybody's questions. I am an MSP for South Scotland. We have been doing a lot of work that looks at marine tourism, the well-being economy and improved mental health and well-being. Evidence shows that folk have improved mental health if they live near water, and you have lots of that here. You outlined the issues of the cost of living, housing, jobs and keeping young people here and supporting them into the housing market. Is the well-being economy part of work that you will take forward to support the economy? Some people argue that we should not just be measuring GDP but should be looking at other things such as well-being.

Deputy Kristina Moore:

We watch different monitors very closely. For example, the OECD's Better Life Index has been a very helpful measure for us. We also have built into the public finances law sustainable well-being, so, as we embark on our next Budget, we have to ensure that we demonstrate sustainable well-being through that Budget process. I think that that is an important thing to do in the current economy.

You are right: having access to open space and water is a really important thing, and that is one of the reasons why we are trying to improve access to open spaces in our urban centres in particular. Our former Children's Commissioner sadly identified that, although many children may live in close proximity to the sea, unfortunately, for different reasons, many do not get the opportunity to go to the beach as a leisure activity. That is something that we need to understand better and overcome, because it is quite hard to understand how a child can go to a primary school that is literally 200 metres from the nearest beach but never have been to the beach as a leisure activity. There is always work to do, and that is one area on which we are focused. That is why we talk about creating a community where everyone can thrive.

11.45 am

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I will ask a question, if that is OK. We have talked about the importance of dialogue between parliamentarians from all the Parliaments, and the UK's leaving the European Union demonstrated very acutely how legislation passed in Westminster can have a very severe effect on Crown dependencies and overseas territories. I made a contribution to the debate, last week, on exactly that point. I chair the House of Commons Procedure Committee, and we are looking at how we can build in procedures to enable the voice of Crown dependencies, overseas territories and the devolved Parliaments in our legislative process. We will debate this later as BIPA. Do you have any thoughts about how, specifically, we can improve engagement with parliamentarians from around these nations and about how we might

make sure that your voice, as Jersey, is heard in Westminster when we are doing important legislation that has a direct impact on you?

Deputy Kristina Moore:

I think that we all need to keep talking, and that is why we are so pleased to welcome you all here this week and again to welcome BIC next month. It is really important that we enhance understanding of the different relationships that we all have. Of course, the UK Government cannot legislate for us, but we form part of the British Isles family, and we are, of course, very pleased to do that and have been loyal to the Crown for many, many centuries. It is always good to keep those channels of communication open, and we were so delighted to have the opportunity to engage with the Lord Chancellor last week and to begin strengthening that relationship in that way. I also endeavoured last week to start to engage with my colleagues in the other Crown dependencies, and we look forward to providing some educational engagement with parliamentarians in the United Kingdom. It would also be good to reach out further to ensure that there is a greater level of understanding and engagement. So, we really welcome it.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

I cannot see anyone else who wants to ask a question, so we will conclude the session. Thank you, Chief Minister, for your time. It was an incredibly interesting and insightful contribution, and we wish you every success in hosting the British-Irish Council meeting next month. BIPA is very interested in seeing the outcomes from the BIC. Thank you for spending the time with us, and we look forward to seeing you later at a winery. How exciting.

The sitting was suspended at 11.46 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.54 am.

ADDRESS BY THE JERSEY MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Colleagues, I welcome Deputy Kirsten Morel, the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture. I know that we are all looking forward to hearing about the work of the Government of Jersey in leading the creative industries work stream of the British-Irish Council. I call on Minister Morel to give his address. *[Applause.]*

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Good morning, everyone. It is a pleasure to be with you today. I welcome you all to Jersey. In the short time that I have, I will talk to you about a shared challenge that we all face across each of our jurisdictions and explain how Jersey is working to address it. The challenge that I am talking about is the major demographic challenge that this island faces within the next 20 years; in fact, it is far less than that. By 2040, there will be fewer islanders in work as a proportion of the population, and many more islanders will have retired. That will increase demands on public services and, most significantly, healthcare. On the one hand, as challenges go, that is an interesting one, because it comes as a result of islanders living longer and, therefore, being able to enjoy their retirement, but there are costs associated with that.

On the island, there are almost two people of working age for every person who is too young or too old to work. As life expectancy continues to rise, and with the fertility rate continuing to fall, Jersey's elderly population will grow much faster than the number of people in work. By 2040, with a smaller share of the island's population in work, Jersey's dependency ratio will rise, but that smaller share of the working-age population will still need to provide and fund vital public services for everybody.

At the heart of the challenge are living standards. Jersey enjoys some of the highest living standards in the world. We are incredibly lucky, but we have worked hard to make that a reality. When the economy grows and average incomes rise, workers and businesses pay more taxes, and the Government has more to spend on public services. As you all know, that makes us all better off. It is clear that there is a direct link between economic growth and living standards,

but, without economic growth, by 2040, we will have some very difficult choices to make. Those could include choices around workers paying more tax or the Government spending less on education, health, public spaces and so on.

What do we want? What do we need to do to address the challenge? First, as I have said since taking office, we need to do things differently. At the heart of that is that we, as an island, need to become vastly more productive. If we improve our productivity, the population may not need to increase so significantly in order to maintain our living standards. Indeed, decoupling economic growth from population growth is a driver of my economic thinking as Economic Development Minister. In reality, that has not been achieved, but I am convinced that, in a small jurisdiction such as Jersey, we can succeed in that decoupling.

Striking out the possibility of significant population growth means that productivity has to come from the efficient use of new technologies, the learning of new skills or adapting of old ones, or the spotting of opportunities to be more coordinated and work together more efficiently. It also means finding new sectors in our economy that can deliver the value that the island needs. What it comes down to is making more out of the people, skills and resources that we have. To put that in context, for the past 10 to 15 years — pretty much since the financial crash — Jersey's economic growth rate has been at 0.5%, as an average. That is relatively healthy, but, to meet the challenges that we will face by 2040, we need an economic growth rate that sits between 2% and 3%. That means increasing our growth by four to five times from where we are today.

I started by saying that these challenges are not unique to Jersey. Indeed, all the jurisdictions represented in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly share them. We will be looking to learn from other jurisdictions, as well as testing new ideas that we have tried locally and sharing that knowledge. That is why forums such as this are so important.

What it means is that Jersey is set to embark upon a new economic journey. Collectively, this

programme is labelled the future economy programme, which I will unveil later this year. Ultimately, the programme is created to give support and direction to the process of refinding an economic growth story. At its centre will be the vision for Jersey to become a consistently high-performing, environmentally sustainable and technologically advanced small island economy by 2040. Much of the groundwork needed to achieve that will be undertaken during this parliamentary term. The truth is that we have 17 years to get this right. The rewards will not come for another 15 to 17 years, but, if we do not start today, we will not succeed by 2040. We will work closely with islanders, businesses and key stakeholders to gather their views as we chart the risks and opportunities for Jersey's future. For me, the future economy programme will be a landmark in this island's economic journey. It means using and building on the financial services sector that we already have, but, as I have suggested, it also means finding new industries — we have some in mind, but I am not yet willing to share them [Laughter] — and making sure that those can take root on an island where population growth is not desired. The desire, in many jurisdictions, not to increase the population much further is really important.

Although this has been a very brief outline, you will also understand that Jersey's focus and my focus is on addressing the challenge that will ultimately be affecting all of us. I welcome your views and comments on how your jurisdictions are also seeking to secure economic growth over the next 20 to 30 years to meet these challenges.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Mr Morel, for your very informative contribution on issues of concern, not just to this jurisdiction but across all of the jurisdictions that are represented in this Assembly.

Mr John Lahart TD:

Thanks for the insightful comment. As you were speaking, I was noting in my head that the

population of Jersey is the size of the population of my constituency. I was thinking, “How can you face these kinds of challenges, and how can they be so significant?”, but actually, when you reduce it to that kind of level and you have to govern for that constituency, everything is relative with those challenges. In Ireland, our big challenge currently is demographic, as yours is. We are fortunate at the moment to have an abundance of corporation tax receipts, but that brings with it one of the challenges facing the Government, which is to try to squirrel away some of that. There are various forms of “rainy day fund” options that are being considered by the Government. You outlined the demographic piece. What do you think is the biggest challenge in what you have outlined in getting to your strategy for 2040? You talked about the transformation digitally. It is a very interesting space that you have described for the island.

12.00 pm

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

It is a huge challenge. I have referenced it in there that the big issue is decoupling economic growth. Our economic growth has gone hand in hand with population growth. As our population has grown, so the economy has grown. We do not have a huge amount of room. We have 45 square miles, so there was a real sense among the population that they do not want significant population growth going forward. The real challenge for us is of how we grow the economy without significantly growing the population. That absolutely means adopting technologies in all sorts of ways, and, to be honest, that is a challenge that Jersey has not succeeded in enormously so far. You can see that within the public service, where we are very far from being a digitally enabled government. We have looked to Estonia for some learning in this area, and one of the things that seems to come out of Estonia is that transforming and digitising as many public services as possible acts as a catalyst for the private sector. As much as anything, by interacting with government on a digital basis, islanders then get a lot more used to interacting with other services and private sector services.

It is not just about technology, although we need to get better at embracing it. As I have said, it is also about trying to find new elements to the economy. The financial services sector has carried Jersey for the past 50 years or so, and it will continue to do that. At the same time, we know that there are lots of pressures on financial services, from all sorts of areas. From the European Union to the OECD, the financial services sector attracts a huge amount of international interaction. From the OECD pillar 1 and pillar 2 conversations that have been going on, I know that Ireland is in the same position as us. It forces us to act in ways that perhaps we would not have done without those particular pressures.

So, we also need to find industries that lie outside the financial services industry. We have a really simple catchphrase: “high value, low footprint”. It is very easy to say but much harder to do. However, we are focused on that and have identified some new industries. That should and, I believe, will make a significant difference.

Mr John Lahart TD:

May I ask a brief supplementary? Everybody grapples with the politically unpopular but very obvious go-to, which is retirement age. What are the challenges there?

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

It is interesting. We sit just a few miles from France, where there have been quite vociferous complaints about changes to the retirement age. We have already increased our retirement age — that happened a couple of Governments ago. The retirement age in Jersey is 67 now. I noticed that there was talk in the media recently about raising it again. I have said in the media that there is a reality that people need to work longer. That does not necessarily mean having a full-time job throughout your retirement, but we need to look at the idea that we can work longer and be willing to change careers, relearn and retrain.

I cannot help but look at my own experience in those sorts of areas. In my father’s generation, the idea was very much that people did one job until the end of their career. When they retired,

they stopped. I can see that retirement and stopping is not necessarily good for your health either, and *[Inaudible]* is really important. There will be an element of extending your working life. Whether that is backed up by further increasing the retirement age, I do not know, but we need to be realistic. Our retirement and social security system was created in the 1960s. It was not expected that people would live as long as they do now, and we need to adjust accordingly. We cannot pretend that people are not living longer lives, because they are. The retirement package needs to adjust to that.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much for your words. I want to ask you about tourism. I represent a United Kingdom constituency that has in it the Alton Towers theme park, so I am only too aware of the challenges that are faced when you have an influx of visitors to your area who are, perhaps, not always welcomed by the locals, who see them as a hindrance and an encumbrance. Our local economy, however, desperately needs Alton Towers and visitors to it. You must have an incredible increase in your population over the summer. You must have demands on your infrastructure that few of us can imagine. How do you balance making sure that there is local support for tourism and keeping the island attractive for visitors? I know that it is a difficult balancing act.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

It can be. I have said that, outside of the future economy programme, tourism is my priority sector for this year. There is a really important reason for that. Tourism is not just about bringing visitors to Jersey. For our island, tourism is also about maintaining connectivity to the rest of the world. I will go back to the gentleman from Ireland's comment about the size of Jersey and its population being just 100,000. In order to maintain connectivity, we have 10 flights a day to London, and we have flights to Liverpool, Bristol, Newcastle and Edinburgh. We are also trying to grow connectivity into Europe. We have direct flights to Amsterdam

throughout the summer. With 100,000 people, it is not easy to maintain that connectivity, but we need to for the financial services sector and the rest of the economy. If you are looking at setting up a business in Jersey — maybe you have a business in the US and are thinking of moving it to Jersey — you will not necessarily want to come here if you cannot get back to the US easily, and so on and so forth. Tourism is absolutely vital for the wider economy.

We have come to an interesting point on the island where there has been a decline in tourism, Obviously, COVID hit that much harder as well. The sense that I get from people on the island is that they want to see a revival in tourism. One way of increasing productivity in tourism, which has eluded us for the last 20 years but is something that I will keep going on about, as my predecessors did, is through the shoulder months. Jersey's summer is full of tourists, as you say. If you go back 40 years, it used to be full of many more tourists. However, in October and November, and even now in April and May, our hotels are mainly empty. Again, using that infrastructure at different times of the year increases your productivity without needing growth in infrastructure. I see what you are saying about the growth in infrastructure, but we are having to develop that for our population anyway because it is creaking.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I offer Minister Steve Baker the opportunity to come in.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Thank you very much, because I recognise that I am only an observer. I appreciate your remarks. I am Minister of State for Northern Ireland.

You are speaking with great candour about the demographic challenges that we face. They reflect what is in the Office for Budget Responsibility's fiscal sustainability report and at least one report from the Government Actuary's Department on the national insurance fund. It is very difficult for a British Government Minister to be as frank as you are being. Is there something inherent in your political system that makes it much easier for you to face up to

those challenges?

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

There may be. I stand as an independent candidate, and there are 39 other independents out of 49. One of my colleagues who is part of a party is here; I value hugely the contributions from him and his party. I do not know whether being an independent candidate enables that. That said, at the same time, one of the strangest things about going into government having been independent is learning to make sure that your messages are on message in a way that you perhaps did not need to before.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

We definitely have that in common.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

It comes from the fact that, although Jersey's challenges are really plain to see, people do not always want to acknowledge them. As I did during the elections last year, I want to say to people, "These are the challenges. This is what we need to face. If we don't start dealing with them now, we will have massive problems in just 17 years' time. I really do not want us to have those challenges. It will take an awful lot of work, but I am up for that challenge". I stood to say, "This is the challenge. I'm up for it. Will you elect me to try to get on with the job?". That is what happened. You have to be honest with people. We cannot pretend that Jersey's economic future looks rosy from a demographic perspective. We have a really strong economy. Our chief economist says that, economically, he would rather be here than anywhere else in the world, but that does not mean that we can be complacent. I want to make sure that we avoid complacency.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Very good. Thank you very much.

Baroness Hooper:

I will also talk about tourism. It seems to me that, in order to move from the buckets-and-spades traditional tourism of the past to high-end tourism, you can rely very much on your green credentials, starting with Durrell zoo, which I visited yesterday. It was the first in the world to concentrate on the conservation of species that are in danger of extinction. It is clearly a great draw.

I want to ask about the cooperation that you, as the largest of the Channel Islands, have with the other islands. It seems to me that, with demographics again coming into force, Saga tours and cruises of that nature could well take in something. I am sure that you have some form of cooperation, but it would be interesting to hear about it.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

We have cooperation with our sister islands. There is no question that that cooperation should be better and closer than it is. I talked about connectivity. The population of the Channel Islands as a whole is 160,000 people. Jersey's is just 100,000. If I want to maintain our excellent connectivity, operating from a population of 160,000 rather than 100,000 is better. Following a trip to Normandy recently, I realised that there are 200,000 people living around Cherbourg who do not have easy access to an airport. They could use Jersey Airport. That would help us to maintain connectivity as well — suddenly, I have increased our travelling population to nearly 300,000. We are very used to looking beyond the shores of our island. It is really important.

I add another element to the point about tourism and green credentials: heritage. We know from our research that tourists come here to enjoy walks in the countryside, visit Durrell and see Jersey's incredible history — and it is incredible. In case you have not been told, there is a cave at St Brelade that was inhabited 250,000 years ago. There is a castle just over there where Prince Charles, as he was at the time, who became King Charles II took shelter. You have

Napoleonic forts up there, and there are Nazi fortifications intermingled with it all. In this tiny island, you have a quarter of a million years of history that anyone who has an interest in heritage can buy into. I strongly believe that we have never properly marketed that from a tourism perspective. I really want us to do that, Baroness, in order to achieve that higher-value tourist. That is a horrible term to use when you talk about people, so perhaps “higher-spending tourist” would be a better way to say it. It is really important that we do that.

My last quick point is that I am delighted that you enjoyed Durrell zoo. I used to work there. Having grown up in Jersey, I can say that it is a beacon to a small child in Jersey. It is one reason why Jersey has a strong environmental agenda. In the last election, something else that came through was that islanders care about their environment, and Durrell zoo has a lot to do with that.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

Thank you very much, Minister, for a very interesting and, indeed, candid contribution, as has been noted.

I will pick up on the tourism theme. This is, perhaps, some useful information from a local taxi driver whom I used yesterday: he suggested that the international conference market should be focused on yet again, because he felt that things had gone a bit quiet in that respect, obviously since the COVID pandemic. I will leave that with you.

I was also interested to hear about the reclamation of land from the sea. In fact, the site of this hotel is an example of reclaimed land. It would be interesting to hear what plans there are to continue with reclamation and, of course, what role that could play in the future economic growth that you are talking about in Jersey.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

In short, I know of no new plans for further reclamation. One of the issues with reclamation is that it strongly abuts environmental quality and growth. As I understand it, especially towards

the southern part of this area of reclamation, you are on land the reclamation of which, unfortunately, signalled the end of a really rich marine ecosystem just off the south of the island. They started to reclaim the land when I was a child, in the 1980s. I remember driving along the coast when, as I said, it was all sea here. It is now land, but we still have not worked out quite what to do with it, 40 years later. I therefore find it difficult to countenance further reclamation unless there is a very clear plan as to what would be done with that reclaimed land. That said, a shortage of land is one of our biggest challenges, so there is a sense and a logic behind land reclamation.

12.15 pm

On the issue of the conference circuit, I agree with that taxi driver in many ways. One of the problems is that we have seen a loss of conference facilities in Jersey. The high value of land, due to the demographic pressures, means that we have been losing hotels and hotel facilities because they have been moving into the residential space. As a result, I am looking to attract further investment in the hotel sector, but it becomes difficult to do that on a stand-alone basis; it tends to need the rewards of residential development alongside hotel development, because, sadly, the figures do not seem to add up if a hotel is on its own. Our land values are therefore another barrier to economic development on the island, but one that we are trying to work out ways to overcome.

I apologise for asking a question that I could equally ask in the States Assembly, but, in view of the number of Irish representatives here who are well known for their rugby ability, do you accept that sports tourism could be expanded? I ask that knowing that the Jersey Reds, for instance, have hosted the English rugby team, and I am sure that many Irish teams would like to come over. We could even beat them, as we did on their last visit. More seriously, is there scope for expanding sports tourism?

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Yes, there is. A really interesting private development that is being mooted is aimed precisely at sports tourism. We see that, and we did see it. To be fair, the rugby teams coming here — the British and Irish Lions; the Leicester Tigers, whom I met when they came over — attract crowds. We know that the rugby club itself attracts crowds, but we also have people who want to develop a fencing tournament on the island, and there are martial arts tournaments that want to come here. That links in with the conference idea. Conferences and sports events are not dissimilar, and they are areas that we absolutely need to develop, as well as the arts and culture space, which is something else that can bring many people to the island. Those are all areas that we are looking to. The big barrier at the moment is the lack of hotel facilities, which is why I am trying to address that side of it.

Mr David Rees MS:

I have listened to what you said, and you are very keen on putting through development projects. Some will require more energy, and others will require more or new technology, which requires more energy. Tourism and travel involve greater usage of transportation and energy. We have a Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill that requires Governments and public bodies to look carefully at the impact of policies on future generations, including the environmental part of that. How do you balance the target of moving towards net zero with all those tensions? Every one of them, so far, involves an increased usage of energy and will result in many forms of pollutants.

My second question is this: if you are to move closer to the financial sector, have you looked into artificial intelligence? That is a very big topic at the moment, and there are concerns about what impact it will have in the future.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Picking up on the last point, I strongly believe that we need to make more use of artificial intelligence, particularly in the financial services and legal sectors. To ignore the productivity

gains that can be made there would be a massive mistake on our part.

We are in a slightly fortuitous position with energy. I say “fortuitous”, but that position is the result of a rational decision in the 1990s. Jersey’s electricity is very low carbon because it is two thirds nuclear power from France. The other third is renewable energy from the La Rance barrage, also from France, which creates hydroelectric power. From that perspective, increasing energy use in Jersey does not necessarily increase our carbon footprint in the slightest. I really want us, as an island, to focus on transport and heating oil. Where houses are not heated by electricity, they tend to use heating oil. Those are the two areas that we need to focus on as an island to make significant inroads into our carbon footprint. We are in the fortunate position that our use of energy does not increase our carbon footprint. In that sense, we can act with more freedom than many other jurisdictions. The decision that was taken in the mid-1990s required infrastructure, and, obviously, we have cables to France, but it means that we can act with more freedom to promote economic growth.

Mr Éamon Ó Cuív TD:

I listened with great interest because I was on an Oireachtas Committee looking at future pension policy in Ireland and, in particular, at state pensions. In our case, there seems to be a slight contradiction in that there is a lot of migration into the country, much of which is because we have labour shortages in many essential services. Do you face the same labour shortages? Do you have to bring people in to provide services to the community, particularly as people in Jersey get older and you have less of a young population? Will you have to supplement your population to maintain the services as opposed to attracting migration for its own sake?

You have a population of just over 100,000. Has that grown in the last 20 years, or has it been relatively static? You seem to say that you could increase the working population to deal with the pension and the cost of servicing it. That is one way to deal with it, but you have discounted that as a means of increasing productivity. How big a factor will it be in the future that more

people work later in life and, therefore, even though pensioners might be getting a state pension, they will also pay taxes at the same time? When people retire or get a state pension here, do they have to be retired or can they continue to work?

Dealing with islands, when we were looking at population, I used to always look at the midweek population and the weekend population. That was on our island, because lots of people went away to school or college and came back at the weekend. More important, then, is the summer population. When you are talking about housing and accommodation and so on, is the pressure from the summer or the pressure from the winter? Is it from the permanent population or is it [*Inaudible*] to do with the total population, which includes, I presume, a hugely expanded summer population?

Finally, I hear what you say about energy from France, but do you have an internal renewable energy policy, either onshore or offshore wind, solar, wave, tidal or anything else that is renewable around the shores here?

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Thank you for the questions. Jersey's population has grown significantly. When I was at secondary school — mid-1980s to the beginning of the 1990s — the population was about 85,000. If you go back to the 1950s and 1960s, it was 60,000, so since I was a young teenager you are looking at basically 15,000 more. It is more like 105,000, so it is about 20,000 people. That is, effectively, an increase of 20% to 25%, which is huge. I see other, much larger jurisdictions that feel population pressures although they have had less immigration than Jersey. That immigration, in the main, is long-term all year round and not just seasonal, although, obviously, we have an increase during the season, particularly for tourism and in agriculture.

There is no doubt that we have a worker shortage in Jersey. That is why you may have noticed that, in the speech, I couched my terms about population growth around not wanting significant

growth. There is a reality that we will have to have some population growth, because we need it at the moment. We have shortages across all sectors, from finance through tourism to agriculture. I know that Ireland also has worker shortages. One of the things that I have asked is, "Why aren't we speaking to Ireland more often?" Ireland is part of the common travel area, and it is easier for people from Ireland to come to Jersey to work than it is for anyone else from the European Union countries. We had a large Polish population until 2020, and our Portuguese population, which has been very large over the last 20 to 30 years, seems to have diminished as well. We believe that we have lost people following COVID and the UK leaving the European Union, and we need to make that up. At the moment, we make up those people from further afield on work permits, but we are talking about countries from the Philippines and Nepal to Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda. These are the places that we are talking to at the moment to get workers into Jersey. People are coming here, and I hope that they are enjoying their time here. However, it is really important that we address the current skills and worker shortages at the same time as looking at that longer-term issue around the demographic challenge and the desire to not have a hugely increased population.

On the pension front, I do not have any figures, but I believe that one of the benefits of working longer is that you can balance off, to some extent, pension payments through increased taxation.

That is definitely one of the benefits of that.

I think that that answers all the questions.

Mr Stephen Hammond MP:

Thank you, Minister. This is a fascinating chat about the two great problems that we are all facing, which are productivity and the costs and challenges of an ageing population.

On productivity, you spoke about moving to a more technologically based economy in Jersey. Will you say a little bit more about how will be able to upskill the population increase as a result of that? You are following a strategy that pretty much everyone else recognises that they

will have to follow as well, so, comparatively, what do you think will be the differentiators?

On the second challenge, we all know that you can increase pension age and do certain things, but there is a huge intergenerational challenge as well. What might you say about the appeal to, shall we say, the sub-40s who will have to carry the over-65s?

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

I will take the last matter — the younger generation — first, which is people of my daughter's age. My daughter is 16. We have a massive problem with that cohort, in that they do not look at Jersey as a viable option for their future lives. That is incredibly sad and is predicated mostly on the cost of housing in Jersey. If you are a 16-year-old asking yourself where you will go with your career and looking at the cost of housing on the island, you will say, "This place does not want me". That is a massive problem.

The future economy programme will be underpinned by something that I told our Government is vital: our economy needs to make Jersey attractive to young islanders so that they can envisage living their lives here. It is about not just increasing productivity and standards of living but having variety. One of the real problems of being a small island is the lack of variety. I grew up not wanting to work in financial services, but trying to find a role that was not in financial services was incredibly difficult. The reality is that not everyone wants to work in the same industry. We all have different desires and ways of fulfilling ourselves, so having more industries in which to work is crucial. I am working on that, and it is one reason why our future economy programme will be about new industries as well as getting more out of our current industries.

It is true that all Western jurisdictions are looking at these problems. That is where Jersey benefits from its size. Normandy gets 16 million visitors a year from the US to visit the D-Day landing features, but none of them come to Jersey. They are 80 miles away. I was speaking to people from the US and said, "We need just 10,000 of those 16 million". It is the same across

the board. We do not need vast numbers of people or businesses to come to Jersey; two or three significantly sized businesses can make a massive difference. That is where we have a big advantage over larger jurisdictions such as the UK or Ireland: we do not need much for it to make a big difference.

12.30 pm

That takes me to the next point, which is how we make that difference. We need a far more targeted approach. One of the things that I identified, shortly after becoming Minister, was that our approach to inward investment has been scattergun. It has not been targeted at all. We have said to anyone, “If you earn enough, you can come to Jersey”. That is not the way it should be. We should target the sectors, and the businesses within them, that can make a difference to the existing sectors. Take artificial intelligence within the legal profession, for example. There are already contract reading and contract drafting software providers out there. We have a legal profession that could do with some technological overhaul, so let us attract one or two of those businesses that make legal artificial intelligence. Let us encourage them to come to Jersey, set up here and make a meaningful investment in the island that will make Jersey’s law firms early adopters of those technologies. We need that sort of approach. Our inward investment strategy has to change, and is changing, to become far more targeted. That is one of the ways in which we will try to achieve those productivity gains, while everyone else is trying to achieve the same gains.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Minister. Quite a number of colleagues are offering questions, so I will need to group questions.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

I will make a quick observation, if I may, and then ask a question. I will pick up Stephen Hammond’s point on productivity. Last week, our Economic and Social Research Institute

presented a report to an Oireachtas Committee at home about the divergence in productivity between Northern Ireland and the Republic over the past 20 years. Interestingly, it focused not on the work ethic but on the quality of jobs and the industries that now employ people. It is not easy to increase productivity. Obviously, education is a key component of that.

My question is quite separate from that. One of the things that the Steering Committee of our Assembly wants to do, Chair, is to have better integration with BIC, which is coming up here. Minister, Jersey leads the creative industries work module of that. You might explain to us where you are on that, what the issues are and what we might better understand from it.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Thank you. I agree that the British-Irish Council is a fantastic forum. I was pleased to attend two conferences. The first one was in Cardiff and was about social enterprises. The second one, which I chaired, as you quite rightly said, was in the Isle of Man and was concerned with the creative industries. The sharing that can go on now is vital. After I went to Cardiff, social enterprises formed part of my manifesto when I stood for election. Jersey does not have an easy legal framework in which to set up social enterprises.

Nevertheless, I am a strong believer that whilst I really want to increase productivity, I also appreciate that you do not always set up a business purely focused on profit. You can set up businesses and organisations for the wider benefit of the community. I know, however, from other people's practice, that it is not necessarily easy in Jersey. I was blown away to see that the figures in Wales show £4 billion of revenue turnover from creative and social enterprises. That is the scale of Jersey's entire economy, but it is solely Wales's social enterprise economy. That made me understand its value.

We saw some social enterprises in Wales. One of them was to do with a new way of delivering services via food banks. As a result of that visit in November, we are trying to change the way in which some of the food banks operate in Jersey, to bring them into line with what we saw in

Wales. There is a huge value in the British-Irish Council: it is very much about being on the ground and seeing real-life examples. Often, one of the difficulties in politics is that we look at policy and strategy but then have to bring it down to the real world.

From my perspective, there were two elements to the creative industries front. In my mind, the creative industries are vital for Jersey. It is one way of ensuring that young people want to stay in Jersey, because the creative industries are incredibly fulfilling. It is an area in which Jersey has not had a great deal of activity over the past 30 or 40 years, and we really want to change that. Secondly, the creative industries can also help with other elements. In Jersey, we have used the social recovery fund that followed COVID to enable the creative industries to help to deliver services to people for healthcare reasons. On a personal note, my mum, sadly, suffers from dementia, but she participates in art for dementia, and it helps her enormously. We see that in all sorts of areas: it can be through music for other issues, and, essentially, it is social prescribing. Something that came through quite strongly in the Isle of Man was how to use the creative industries for greater social benefit, including direct health benefits.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Minister. We have five more contributors. We will take all the questions and then ask you to make a group response. Is that OK, Minister? We are running into time constraints.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

A group reply? Yes.

Mr Frank Feighan TD:

I was here six or seven years ago with the steering group and have seen most of Jersey now. From a tourism point of view, I come from the west of Ireland, and Knock airport is our local airport. We had huge difficulties over the years with accessibility, because there was a lot of fog, but that has been sorted out through technology on the ground. I was surprised that we were not able to land in Jersey, and that is a huge issue. Is it a matter of a lack of technology

on the ground at the airport and on the runway? Might it be the technology on the aircraft? Even today's conference has been affected. It is not a criticism, but we all need to use flights now. Was this just a one-off, or can it be resolved?

Sir Peter Bottomley MP:

I observed that you and the Chief Minister were in Birmingham and were in the media. Was that a way for you to observe what needs doing so that you can put it forward, or is it because you have the publicity and the words that work?

I have a more serious question. You referred to previous Governments. Each of you is relatively young, at least in my terms. How much of what you do is continuity, and how much of it is change? Is it evolution or revolution in the way in which you approach your responsibilities?

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Those are really interesting questions.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

You will have to respond to them shortly, Minister.

Mr Paul Kehoe TD:

This question has been touched on by a number of my colleagues: in the tourism and services industry, given the challenges for employers and seasonal employability, are many students coming on to the island for the months of May, June, July and August to cover? For the rest of the year, are there challenges for employers?

You spoke about looking for investment for additional hotel accommodation. Who are you looking at to commit to that investment on the island? Also, could you touch on planning for the building of hotels? Is it difficult for someone to come in to invest and to build hotels?

The other issue is COVID. In my constituency and across the island of Ireland, the change brought about by COVID has made working from home a new phenomenon. In Jersey, have

you seen an increase in the number of people who might have been working in the financial sector in London or wherever and who are now able to work from home? Have you seen an increase in the population by any manner or means?

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Paul. Senator Boyhan, has your question been covered?

Senator Victor Boyhan:

Yes, it has been asked.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thanks.

Ms Emma Harper MSP:

Thank you, Minister, for taking all these questions. I am interested in the healthcare aspects. In the future, you will need people to provide healthcare, whether at home or in hospital. We spend 50% of Scotland's block grant on providing healthcare. We are trying to develop a national care service as well, because we need to keep people at home longer, rather than having them admitted to hospital, for instance. I am interested in hearing about your approach to balancing the need to fund and staff healthcare with trying to staff all the other areas as well. Everybody needs the young people in their jobs.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

OK, Minister, you have a number of questions there. *[Laughter]*.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Am I meant to remember them all? *[Laughter]*.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

We have total confidence in you

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

I will pick up on healthcare. One of our problems, and it is the same for the whole of the Western World, is that we do not have enough doctors, nurses or care workers in our care homes. A really simple example of why that is a big problem, as I am sure you can imagine, is that we do not have enough care homes or enough workers in those care homes. As a result, people are staying in hospital longer because they cannot move out of hospital and into care homes. This is an awful term, but that is how beds end up being “blocked”, and then you cannot provide care for the new people who need it. Again, we are going far afield to find workers, but it is tough. It is a problem all the way down to GPs. We do not quite have enough GPs, although as I was speaking to somebody about ratios in other countries recently, I realised that our ratio of patients to GPs is really good. Jurisdictions that have wider ratios might not want as many GPs as we do, but I think that a narrower ratio is good. I am all for having more GPs, meaning that each has fewer patients.

It is interesting that there were comments about Birmingham — a pure coincidence. I believe strongly in evolution. I do not believe that revolution is ever the right way forward. That is how people get hurt and how things tend to end up happening wrongly. Inevitably, you end up with a counter-revolution, which means that revolution is a waste of time in the first place. So, I strongly believe in evolution. At the same time, trying to evolve matters can be difficult at times. That can also mean trying to refocus government on to different areas on which it might not have been so focused before, but that is still part of evolution. It is change, but it is not revolutionary change; it is evolutionary change.

Do you have any more?

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Frank Feighan asked about connectivity.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

It was about the airport and landing at it.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Yes, landing at the airport. That is a really good question. Technically, I do not exactly know the answer, but I have a funny feeling that it is down to the technology at our end. We have some really good technology to enable planes to land with a certain amount of fog, but I do not know whether it is the best that it could be. It has always been an issue. We lose many days a year through fog at the airport, and that is a big problem. As you heard me say earlier, connectivity is vital for this island and for our future economic growth. The more that we can do to reduce the number of days that are lost by fog, the better.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Paul Kehoe asked about hospitality and remote working.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

And students.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

That is right. We do not make enough use of students in the surrounding jurisdictions. Last week, our Education Minister visited Rennes — I have been previously — where there is a business school and a really good hospitality college. We do not bring any of those students here, even just for a summer to work, which would be enormously useful. However, although Rennes is just 60 miles or 70 miles away, we have a really good exchange programme with Antigua, which is thousands of miles away. Some wonderful Antiguan hospitality workers are working at a really high level in Jersey at the moment. We need to send our students over there to learn as well.

Student exchanges are really important. We need to make more use of them. We do not automatically think about that because we do not have a wide range of educational institutions in Jersey. Our numbers who are training in hospitality, for instance, are really small, whereas much larger jurisdictions have large hospitality training venues that are of premium quality.

We tend to take rather than give, which is not always the right way. We need to make a lot more of that — that is for sure.

Many people still work from home. Retailers in town have felt it. I believe that there is still around a 20% or 30% lower footfall on the high street on a weekday as a result of people working from home. Friends of mine often work three or four days a week from home and just one or two days a week in the office. It has fundamentally changed the way in which people operate, but it is helping our carbon footprint, given that so much is based on travel.

Mr Paul Kehoe TD:

My other question was about investment in hotels and planning for the future.

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

We are speaking to international hotel groups to try to bring them to Jersey. As I said, the main issue is identifying sites and, once you have identified those, about making it affordable for them. They know their figures very well and what works and what does not. As I said, it seems that mixed-use developments are needed to make any new hotel work in Jersey. That is what we are working on. We have plans here for the waterfront. The Jersey Development Company is looking to put hotels here as part of a mixed-use development. It is the same with the port. However, those plans are much further down the line; I want to find ways of using existing ready-to-use sites that a hotel chain could move in to. We have some wonderful independent hotel owners in Jersey, but it is good to mix it up a bit with chains. Radisson is one international chain that is here. Chains have the capital to maintain investment over time. That can be a problem when you are a much smaller entity.

Planning is always going to be difficult in Jersey. I need to be as diplomatic as I can be, but, as Economic Development Minister, I have frustrations.

12.45 pm

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Minister, thank you very much for your initial address to us and for answering so comprehensively the range of questions on practically every subject. We thank you sincerely for your contribution today. *[Applause.]*

Deputy Kirsten Morel:

Thank you very much. Thank you, everyone.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

The questions demonstrated the range of common interests and concerns that we have.

The Bailiff has kindly offered Assembly Members an opportunity to visit the States Assembly Chamber this afternoon after our final sitting. It is a short walk from the hotel, I understand. Members who would like to visit the Chamber should make themselves known. The group will meet in the hotel lobby at about 4.30 pm.

I will now suspend the Assembly session for lunch until 2.30 pm. Lunch will be served in the hotel restaurant. A group photograph will be taken outside the hotel now. I presume that the weather will be kind to us. I ask Members to go directly for the photograph and then for lunch. We have to reassemble at 2.30 pm sharp. Thank you, colleagues.

The sitting was suspended at 12.47 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.32 pm.

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Can we make a start, please, everybody?

I have a couple of points. I welcome Joyce Watson, who has made it here: well done. We are very pleased to have you here. You are extraordinarily welcome. I also have a piece of sad news. I have just learned that Lord Peter Brooke has died. Obviously, him being a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a member of this Assembly at one time, I am sure we are all thinking of him and his family. With the permission of the Assembly, I suggest that

Brendan and I write to his family and send our condolences.

We will now move to the next bit of business. We will now hear from our next speaker, Steve Baker MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland. Steve, I am absolutely thrilled that you are back. I know I gave you a very hard time before the session in County Cavan to make sure that you came, and not only did you come, but you stayed for significantly longer than any of us expected. We were absolutely thrilled that you were there, and for you to be back here, and to have joined us for dinner last night and be here for the day, is a real tribute to you and your commitment to the work that we do. From BIPA's point of view, with our feeling sometimes that government does not always listen, it is a real thing for you to be here and to take the time with us. I am very grateful that you are here, and we are looking forward to hearing your address. Thank you.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Karen, thank you very much. [*Inaudible*] to invite me again. It is a tremendous honour, and I am very grateful. Brendan, it was a joy to meet you in Cavan, a beautiful place, and, indeed, Jersey is a beautiful place. My wife has already insisted that we are to return, so I look forward to doing just that. Thank you for the invitation. Earlier, Minister Carroll MacNeill said that we needed to:

“speak frankly and often”.

Of course, she is absolutely right, and I am delighted to be here. I shall stay tomorrow, Karen. I am really looking forward to all of the proceedings,

We are in for a bumper period of meetings in British-Irish relations. Before the first six months of this year are out, we will have held two British-Irish Intergovernmental Conferences, two plenary sessions of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and one British-Irish Council, which will also be in Jersey. All that is in addition, of course, to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations. It has been a busy time of renewal in our

relations, and I am very grateful that there has been such a positive atmosphere here. I am very grateful to all those of you who have made me feel welcome.

The frequency of these engagements speaks to the breadth and depth of the relationship. It speaks to the Government's intent to ensure, as the Tánaiste has said, that the relationship between Britain and Ireland is fundamental. It is fundamental. We recognise that. I am grateful that we have this opportunity to keep improving and deepening the relationship.

Since we took up our posts, the Secretary of State and I have put particular personal emphasis on upholding and promoting the ties and connections between the UK and Ireland. I am very grateful that, as Karen and others have pointed out, it seems to be working. Strong Irish-UK relations have been integral to achieving some of the great milestones in the life of our two countries, leading to greater peace and prosperity. It is crucial to continue on that trajectory. Our partnership with Ireland is vital in a host of different areas, even beyond our shared interest in Northern Ireland. With no other country do we share a land border and common travel area, and with no other country is our history and culture so entwined. That was reflected in Ireland's being the only country in the world whose head of state and head of Government were both invited to the coronation.

Since I became a Minister, many people have spoken to me of the great significance of the visit of Her Late Majesty The Queen to Ireland in 2011 and the return state visit of President Michael D Higgins to the UK in 2014. His Majesty The King visited Ireland many times as Prince of Wales, including, most recently, Waterford and Tipperary in March 2022. In his St Patrick's Day message to the president this year, he said:

“our bilateral partnership could not be more important, in particular as we together mark the twenty fifth anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement”.

I echo those words heartily and share the Taoiseach's hope that, together, we can see a visit by Their Majesties to Ireland soon.

We have all noted that the world's attention was drawn to Northern Ireland for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations. That has helped to deepen the strong east-west bonds that we enjoy. Those bonds are intrinsic to the agreement itself, which established new institutions to build upon the frameworks for UK-Irish cooperation that were already set in motion by this Assembly in 1990. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the British-Irish Council, the other principal strand three institution. The Prime Minister reiterated his Government's commitment to BIC when he hosted the plenary in Blackpool last November. We will continue to invest in the totality of relationships across these islands that BIC represents. We look forward to June's BIC summit in Jersey and November's in Dublin.

We note that the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement serves as a shining example of what can be achieved when leaders across the United Kingdom and Ireland work together, collectively, towards shared aims. In recent months, there has been much reflection on the peace, prosperity and progress that Northern Ireland has seen because of the agreement. I know that BIPA took the opportunity to mark that at Stormont's Parliament Buildings in March. Across all the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement commemorations, my main reflection has been on just how much the agreement has meant to the people of Northern Ireland. It has been a huge privilege to hear at first hand how peace has brought opportunity and formed connections that would have been unthinkable 25 years ago. There is, of course, much more still to do on political stability, reconciliation and education. Perhaps, that will come up in the Q&A.

It is important that we have achieved the Windsor Framework. The framework is of historic significance. It provides us with a base from which we can move forward. It is partially thanks to the networks that we have developed over many years that the framework became possible. When I first spoke to this Assembly in October, I restated the Government's conviction that the Northern Ireland protocol could and should be improved to better reflect the delicate but crucial balances at the heart of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. I believe that the Windsor

Framework has successfully achieved that. By fundamentally amending the Northern Ireland protocol and removing the Irish Sea border on the green lane, the framework has addressed a significant obstacle to connectivity within the British Isles that BIPA Members are, rightly, focused on.

The pathway to reaching an agreement on the framework showed, once again, the power of UK-Irish cooperation. The Prime Minister made working together with the Irish Government a priority in seeking a resolution to the issues surrounding the protocol. He took the earliest opportunity to meet the then Taoiseach and now Tánaiste, Micheál Martin, at the British-Irish Council in November and pledged to deepen UK-Irish ties. That endeavour has certainly borne fruit, and I am glad to have this opportunity to celebrate it with you. I very much echo the sentiments behind what the Tánaiste said in April:

“our partnership is manifestly better now than it has been for quite some time”,

and I have no doubt that the strength of that partnership was fundamental to achieving such a positive result for Northern Ireland in the form of the framework.

That said, I want to be frank, and I have been frank and realistic about the challenges that the framework poses to our unionist and, indeed, Eurosceptic, friends. I recognise that the framework is a hard compromise for many sections of the unionist community because it leaves in place some European Union law in order to have an infrastructure-free border. Believe me, it is a hard compromise for Eurosceptics like me, too, but I also recognise that of all the plausible futures for Northern Ireland that are before us, the one that is best is the one enabled by the Windsor Framework, including the Stormont brake and the consent mechanism. I very much hope that unionism and Euroscepticism will choose, as I have chosen, to move forward together in a spirit of friendship and cooperation, looking forward to further progress together in that new spirit.

The essential element in building a better future for Northern Ireland is, of course, a fully

functional devolved government. BIPA is rooted, primarily, in relationships between legislatures, and, initially, that relationship was between the UK Parliament and the Oireachtas. Now, as we gather in the twenty-fifth anniversary year of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland is without the functioning Assembly and Executive that were envisaged by that agreement and its successors. I can assure you that that is a matter that weighs very heavily on all of us in government, because people in Northern Ireland expect and deserve locally elected decision makers to address the issues that matter to them, and the devolved institutions are the best means of delivering positive outcomes for them. On behalf of our Government, I can say that I believe that the devolved institutions are also the best means of promoting and upholding Northern Ireland's future within the Union.

At the plenary sitting in March, Members reflected on the urgent need to restore the Assembly and Executive as soon as possible. I am grateful for the support of BIPA, and of the Governments and Administrations represented here today, as we continue to work towards that restoration.

I will conclude by returning to the theme of cooperation and our shared goals. Of course, there are differences in our approach on some areas of policy — I am confident that we will come to legacy in the Q&A. We need to acknowledge those differences, be frank and do our best to work through them. However, there is much more that unites us than divides us: from people-to-people links to our culture and values. All of those are hugely significant. Irish and British people are represented across the economies and societies of their neighbouring countries, and they move back and forth seamlessly. There are around 325,000 Irish-born people living in the UK and a much larger group with Irish heritage. There are close to 120,000 British nationals living in Ireland. We have strong cultural links, from media and music to sports. I understand that Ireland has certainly had much more recent success in rugby than England has had, but, if you wish to explore rugby, I will have to phone my wife. In any event, I will certainly continue

to enjoy her running commentary on every match. We also look forward to a joint UK/Ireland bid to host the 2028 UEFA European Football Championship. That is the Secretary of State's area of expertise, but I look forward to his commenting on it, as I do to my wife's rugby commentary.

We, of course, will continue to navigate the choppy political waters. There is no doubt that we can and will work together to solve problems that we face together, be they problems on cyber-resilience and energy, Russia's war on Ukraine, hybrid warfare, changing energy sources or the urgent need for climate action.

Once again, I thank the Co-Chairs: Karen and Brendan, thank you very much for having me here. It has been a real honour to be here again. I look forward to the Q&A that will follow immediately and to the rest of the proceedings. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Minister. I understand that Committee D is due to go on a visit this afternoon. On that basis, I will favour members of Committee D, if they catch my eye, and bring them in as a priority. Senator Victor Boyhan has already done the job and been noticed.

Senator Victor Boyhan:

Thank you very much. First, I thank the Minister. That was a very soft and diplomatic speech. I would expect nothing less of a Government Minister.

Minister, you talked about being frank, and this is a place in which it is important for us to be frank and to have some engagement.

2.45 pm

Earlier, I took time to do a Google check on you and Northern Ireland. I typed in "education" and then "amnesty" and "legacy". It was interesting to read some of the commentary, but I do not accept the commentary on Google. So, I subsequently checked with two parliamentary resources that were available to me, and I saw clearly the very strong trends and indications of

commitments from you, which I have two questions about.

Minister, you heard a very eloquent and unequivocal contribution from our Minister Jennifer Carroll MacNeill on amnesty and legacy. That is a really vexed issue for people on the island of Ireland. There is commonality on that, as there is from Members of the House of Commons. It is a serious concern. When we listened to an inspirational delivery from the Women's Coalition in Belfast, one of the resounding messages was, "Yes, we can have peace, but where's the reconciliation?". Reconciliation is a long path. How will we address that? How have you and your Government taken on board our concerns? I am also conscious that legacy works in two, three or four ways. There are many different sides to the historical divisions on our island and in our peace process, and, clearly, there were prices to be paid for negotiations and getting people to the table and to buy into that process. I am always mindful of that. It depends on the perspective that you come at it from. Where do you see that going?

My second question is about integrated education. You say that you are committed to integrated education. I am more interested in choices in education. Choices is the key word. It is about choices in education. You are quoted as saying that it comes at a cost, and you ask who will pay for that. Integrated education, or choice in education, should never come down to cost, or certainly not cost alone. That is another important part of reconciliation and choice. What are your short-term plans for promoting that, rather than just talking about it? What are the real and tangible ways in which we can enhance integrated education and choices in education in Northern Ireland?

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Thank you very much. Do you mind if I answer the education question first?

Senator Victor Boyhan:

I will give you the easy one first.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Thank you. One in six of my constituents is a British Muslim, and many of my supporters are British Muslims. I told one of my friends and closest supporters about the peace walls — you will know what they look like. He looked at me absolutely aghast and surprised when he discovered that there are peace walls in Belfast. It is a real sign of how Northern Ireland continues to differ from elsewhere in the UK and, indeed, other parts of the developed world. I am determined that we must have a normalisation of so much in Northern Ireland. Honestly, I find it extraordinary that, in the 21st century, there could be a conversation about integrated education, and yet, of course, there is the element of school choice. I am a Christian. There is a Catholic school in my constituency, and Muslim parents choose to send their children there. I say yes to school choice. The wide variety of secondary schools in my constituency is appreciated by parents and pupils. It is right to have school choice.

A tension is caused by the cost of maintaining a divided education system. In the context of everything that is being done in the Budget of Northern Ireland right now, £600,000 a day, according to Ulster University, is an enormous sum that I would rather see being spent on, for example, providing free school meals to children in poverty over the holidays. It is one of the issues that really gets me. I do not want to meet any more young people in a decade's time who say, "I was 16 before I met my first Catholic" or, "I was 18 before I met my first unionist". That is why I started with the peace walls. Is it any wonder that we still need peace walls when people are growing up wondering what unionists, nationalists, Catholics or Protestants are like? We can do so much better.

I am a Baptist, but I like to think of myself as a mere Christian. We have practising Catholics who take communion in my Baptist church, and they are very welcome. The particular lady whom I have in mind is perfectly content that I celebrate, with you, the fact that she comes to our communions.

So much of the division in Northern Ireland, however, is not about theology, is it? It is about

keeping people apart and people somehow not recognising that we are all only human and that we have an enormous amount in common. The solution must come from the Executive. I cannot enforce it on anyone, but I think that Northern Ireland Office Ministers can cultivate a conversation, say yes to school choice, but also ask whether you really want to be spending that much money in those ways. I am very interested in anyone else's reflections on that.

On the issue of legacy, I got into politics to promote parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. A number of things propelled me into politics. The Lisbon Treaty was one of those; you do not need me to rehearse that. To be very candid with you, another one was intelligence failures that led to things that I was not willing to tolerate, such as the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes — people may remember that — the Iraq War and extraordinary rendition. Some of those things matter very deeply to me, so, after I listened to what was, as you said, an extremely articulate, focused and very professional critique from Minister MacNeill — I am sure that she would not mind me saying that we also met privately discuss it — I probed and tried to get to the heart of the issues. The accusations made about us in relation to the rule of law are very painful for me. That is why I put that personal perspective on it.

I am determined that we need to keep listening. We have tabled some amendments already, and we have the opportunity to table further amendments. I ask, though, whether we would really want to stop the Bill and to do nothing. I invite anybody to explain how, if we were to do nothing, we would get better outcomes than if we were to proceed with the Bill. I would absolutely like to get to the point where we have, at least tolerable, answers to all of the questions that Minister MacNeill and the Irish Government have raised.

I was very grateful to Minister MacNeill for the very kind remarks that she directed towards me; they were very honouring, and I am appreciative, if slightly embarrassed, to have received those compliments, in the circumstances.

Look at this: all of us have worked to deal with one stone in our shoe, through the Windsor

Framework. It is pretty clear that legacy will be the other stone in our shoe. I would really like us to get to a point where we can all agree that we have reached a way forward that is, at least, tolerable.

I am very much looking forward to discussing all of these issues with Sir Declan Morgan. Obviously, he is independent, but I wonder whether Karen and Brendan might consider inviting him to address this body in due course, when he is a bit further down the road. It seems to me that a former Lord Chief Justice would be better able to address issues of legacy and the rule of law than a humble aerospace and software engineer. I will do my humble best, but I am deeply concerned by the points that the Irish Government, in particular, and the victims' group have made, albeit I have only seen those second-hand, through read-outs. We are, however, absolutely listening to you.

Senator Victor Boyhan:

Thank you.

Ms Sarah Jones MP:

I want to ask for reflections on two things. I will not mention the legacy Bill, because you just responded on that. Many, many years ago, I worked for Mo Mowlam, and I have two things to reflect on. The first is that, when I worked for her, she was the Shadow Secretary of State. The interaction between Tony Blair and John Major, Mo and Paddy Mayhew was part of the way that we worked. That was very instrumental in all of the processes that we needed in order to get to the Good Friday Agreement. When it comes to Northern Ireland, cross-party working is important. I just wanted to reflect on that.

The second thing is that I went to Derry a few weeks ago and met some students. I was struck by how the students were very acutely aware of the value of democracy and of working and finding solutions together. They valued those things because of the history of Northern Ireland.

I do not know if this is the same in Ireland, but, in Britain, discussions about the value of

democracy and some of those core arguments about what we are and what we believe in are not had with our young people, so they are lost. When you ask young people, you increasingly find that they favour more of a dictatorship style, because they do not understand the value of democracy. It is a huge issue in America, and it is coming to us too. Do you have any reflections on how we can capture the sense of how valuable the institutions in Northern Ireland and across all our countries are? It is really important.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Sarah, I am so grateful for those questions. How long have I got? I have to be brief enough.

On the first one, Mo Mowlam is a huge figure in this story who has, rightly, received so many tributes. I am really grateful that you bring up the cross-party working at the time because that allows me to put on record my heartfelt thanks to Peter Kyle and Tonia Antoniazzi, who work very hard to keep party politics out of Northern Ireland. It is not a partisan issue. Whilst holding us to account, they make sure that Northern Ireland is not a political football. I am very grateful that they do it that way. The Secretary of State and Peter will have conversations as matters come up, and we are most interested in working consensually on Northern Ireland. I absolutely agree with you about cross-party working. I hope that, as we build our relations with Leo Varadkar and Micheál Martin, possibilities will grow.

On students, I absolutely recognise the phenomenon that you raise. One of my favourite books is a little, slim volume called 'Principles for a Free Society'. It is a classical liberal book, but it starts with civil society and goes through democracy and toleration. I will just dwell on toleration. It is a strange thing that people now who, I think, would describe themselves as liberal and tolerant actually want to cancel and shut other people down. I do not like the culture war. I want to free people from that extent of politics in their lives, but we should be capable of saying very firmly, "No. To be tolerant means you agree to disagree, and you go your way in peace". My Muslim friends and I will never agree about the theology of the person of Jesus,

and that is why we cannot have any blasphemy laws. However, we can agree to disagree and go our way in peace. On all these issues, however sensitive they may be, if it is possible to avoid imposing our will on one another, we should tolerate the difference. I am very worried about young people and tolerance, and the correct understanding of what it means to be tolerant of views with which you will never agree but that are not doing you any harm.

I want to make another point to pick up on what you said. I walked out of the screening of the documentary film 'Lyra'. Across the street, as the police were ushering me to the armoured car, was a group of young people. I sidestepped the car, to the police officers' alarm, and went to talk to those young people. I started shaking hands. One half shook hands with me, and the other half did not because they realised that I was saying that I was Steve Baker, Minister of State for Northern Ireland. They were young people who had come up from Dublin who absolutely did not accept the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. I said, "Do you know what? It's easy for me to accept the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. We've surrendered any strategic or selfish interests, and it's the principle of consent. I'm a democrat. That's why I fought to leave the EU — or to at least have a referendum and then leave. That's why I can support the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in good faith. It's the principle of consent". They said, "Yeah, but it's ours, and we're not—". I said, "Are you not democrats?", and they said, "Well, no. It's ours". I thought, "Oh, this is dangerous territory now". It is literally dangerous territory; is it not? They, as youngsters of university age, were there to protest that they do not accept the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. It was actually very salutary. There were only a few of them, but I agree with you, I am afraid, that there is a risk there. We could talk for a long time about that; perhaps we will talk about it over a drink later.

3.00 pm

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thanks, Steve. I think that Committee D is leaving now. Sarah, that might include you. Oh, are

you staying? You have asked your question.

Ms Sarah Jones MP:

I did not want to leave when my own Minister was here, so I had said that I would not go.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Please. You are welcome to leave. The rest of the Committee are going, so we will not take any offence. Your question gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to my opposite number when I was in the Northern Ireland Office: Tony Lloyd, who is an associate member of this Assembly. He was always a wonderful person to work with, and there was no party politics in what we did. So, thank you for that.

Talking of former Secretaries of State, I call Lord Paul Murphy.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

Thank you very much indeed, Co-Chairs. Minister, much of what you said, I absolutely agree with. I particularly congratulate the Government on the achievement of the Windsor Framework. I just wish that the Democratic Unionist Party would be a bit more flexible in respect of it. Perhaps in the next few weeks, when the elections are over, that will happen.

I want to touch, inevitably, on the Legacy Bill. I do not want to go through all the ins and outs and pros and cons of it. Those are rehearsed all the time. They were debated last week, as Malcolm said, in the House of Lords. I see no evidence whatsoever — perhaps the amendments that you mentioned may change it, but I doubt it — of a change in the attitude of everybody and every political party that is involved in Northern Ireland. It is the one thing that they agree with, and it is an achievement in itself to bring them all together in their agreement on their opposition to this. That can also be said of the two archbishops, the Churches, civic society, the Irish Government, the Opposition and the Victims' Commission. There is almost universal disagreement to it, and all my experience, including that of the Good Friday Agreement, tells me that that was successful because it was owned and created by the parties themselves, with

the two Governments helping them. It was not imposed. This is, quite clearly, imposition, and, as a consequence, it will not work.

I agree with you on one thing, and that is that we cannot do nothing. However, this is not the answer. It is not a Westminster party thing, but it is an issue that absolutely is becoming a very big one that can cause enormous difficulties. I think that the time has come for it to be reviewed and paused in order to have another look. All that I am asking is that you take back to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and, if you get the chance, the Prime Minister the strength of feeling here in this Assembly, which represents people far wider than me. Take that back and simply say that this is another example of why we need to look again at this.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Paul, I can absolutely assure you that we will take that back. I can see that officials have made copious notes even as you spoke and have made readouts from earlier meetings. I have already been in text message conversation with the Secretary of State this morning following earlier meetings. Your point is well made, and its importance presses upon me personally. You do not need me to stand here and rehearse the Government's line, but your point is well made. If the question asked is whether I will relay it, yes, 100%, we will do that.

Senator Emer Currie:

Thank you, Minister, for your speech and thank you for your support of the Windsor Framework and the intervention that you made when you made it. I also felt that your presence in Cavan was a very positive presence and that you were there to listen. I think that we have seen the benefits of that since, and I am hoping that today and tomorrow will also have a positive effect on what you described as the other stone in the shoe, which is a burden that has been carried by so many hundreds of people for decades and absolutely needs to be resolved. It is not just a stone in their shoe but a hole in their heart.

Doing nothing is not an option, and I do not think that anybody is suggesting that nothing be

done. The whole point of this is that we have to do something for legacy and that it is hurting people that we are not. In fact, the one thing that this has shown us is that there is the will and the drive to come up with a workable solution because everyone is in consensus, apart from the British Government, that we need a solution. The Stormont House Agreement is a great starting point. I have been at events with Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Caine where he has said that it came to the British Government at Westminster to find a solution because Stormont could not, but all those parties are on board.

So now is the time to do something about this. I have tried the logical argument that we have shown that you will not get truth without having the levers of the criminal justice system to bring us there. It is not always about prosecution but is about accountability, and that comes in so many different forms. There are ways in which people have achieved the truth: we have seen it happen through the ombudsman and through some inquests recently. We also have 30 files sitting with Operation Kenova, and I ask you where that report is. Of course, an amnesty would mean the end of all that work before the files have seen the light of day.

You talked about things that hit your heart; this is something that hits me and so many other people in the heart, because hundreds of families experienced the most brutal form of violence and lost their loved ones. They were innocent families who did not retaliate, who believed in the rule of law and who have been looking for answers for decades. There are people who dedicated their lives to peace, democracy and getting to the point of the Good Friday Agreement, and they ask, "What is the point, if an amnesty is brought in and the perpetrators win?". I therefore ask you to have empathy for those victims' families and for the people who worked so hard for peace and want reconciliation, and not to side with the people of violence. I will leave it at that.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

First, thank you for your kind words. Let me tell you that the private conversation that we had

in Cavan — I hope that you will not mind my saying — has stayed with me and has been very much in my mind. I appreciate what you have said now. I hope that we will speak again later, because I really want to understand where everybody is coming from.

There is absolutely no way in which I want to side with men of violence. If I may, I will try to put that in context. I joined the air force when I was 18, in 1989. The brief was this: do not go to Ireland; do not go to Northern Ireland; if you must go to Ireland or Northern Ireland, grow your hair long, get a brief before you go and get one when you come back, but do not go if you can avoid it, because of the Troubles.

I remember that, when I was a young man, two young soldiers were shot dead, in the back of the head, at a railway station near me in Lincolnshire. My experience of the Troubles was distant. However, when talking about the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, I ran into a man who came up to me, shook me by the hand and said, “I really like what you have been saying recently a lot more than I did during Brexit. Let me tell you that, 30 years ago, I would have shot you dead and would have been glad to do so. I would have bombed your car; I would have lit the fuse and walked away, smiling”. That was lovely. We had a nice little conversation for a while. It was one of the most important conversations that I have had, through meeting somebody who would have been glad to kill me.

What is it like to live with that all the time? I do not know. I have not done it. I have met only one man, and he was talking about events from 30 years ago. I want you to know, however, that I want justice. Of course I do. I want all those people, wherever they may have been and whether they were loyalists, republicans or people possibly within the state here and there – I certainly read with horror the de Silva report on Pat Finucane – to suffer justice. The question is about what is possible, as you know better than I do. That is what we are all wrestling with: what is possible. I do not want to mislead people that convictions will be possible after all these years.

You asked where the Kenova report is. That is a good question. Obviously, as a Government Minister, and with at least one camera still running, there is a limit to what I can say. I will simply say that I have also asked that question. It is a big machine, and not all parts of it respond to my fingertip touches, but I am keen to be involved in understanding what is going on and how we communicate the findings of that report.

Have I answered your questions, broadly? You called for empathy: I hope that I am witnessing some. I share my experience only to say that I recognise my distance from those events. I wish that Northern Ireland would return some Conservative MPs, but for all the time that it does not, you have to have somebody from, say, Buckinghamshire. I will do my very best for you, particularly on empathy.

Senator Emer Currie:

I will just say again what I tried to say in my remarks. It is not just about the prosecution; it is about the process of truth and accountability, which comes in all forms. Not everybody will get a conviction, but they still want access to the criminal justice system because that is how they get the truth. You are talking about the intimacy of a lot of these events, and, in some communities, the families know who the perpetrators were.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

I remember you saying that.

Senator Emer Currie:

Yes, and they are still affected by that. Families will not accept this, and another burden will be placed on them to fight it legally, potentially all the way to an interstate case. This process is not working now, and I cannot see it working. Therefore, instead of increasing the burden on people, now is the time to, as you say, listen, work and find those solutions, because I honestly believe — I think that everybody in this room would say this — that, if we work in partnership, the solutions are there.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

I have had people come up to me and say that there will be a blanket amnesty, but that is not true. It is not a blanket amnesty. You could have an argument about whether the bar is high enough, but it requires people to come forward and cooperate truthfully. People have come to me and said, “A review is not good enough. We need a criminal investigation”, but it is very clear, as stated in my notes, that the commission:

“will have all the necessary powers to conduct criminal investigations as part of any review, ensuring compliance with the Government's international obligations under the ECHR.”

I am not suggesting this of you, but members of the public have approached me quite angrily and suggested that there will be a blanket amnesty and no criminal prosecutions. That is not correct, and we have tabled some amendments to make, in particular, the issue of criminal prosecutions plain in the Bill.

There is another thing about the state. Again, forgive me for reading from my notes. State bodies, including government Departments and agencies, will be under a legal requirement to disclose all relevant information to the commission. So, the commission really should have the power to get all the information that it needs from the state to conduct criminal investigations and to only give an amnesty where there is satisfaction that the truth has been told.

I could not be more honest about it, and I am earnestly trying to put myself where you are, but it is practically impossible. All I can do is listen to you, preferably one-to-one and not in this format. That is the same for any of you. Try to educate me, because I am listening and want to be educated. As I say, the story that you told me last time stayed with me. However, as I listen, I am hearing a call for truth, and I am looking at this and thinking, “That is what we are going for”.

Senator Emer Currie:

Can I come back on that?

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Yes.

Senator Emer Currie:

It is important to say that, in the Bill, there is no threshold put on truth; it is based on cooperation. If somebody cooperates, there is no threshold there for truth. When it comes to criminal investigations, that is a decision for the chair of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery, which is a lot of power to invest in somebody who is appointed by the Secretary of State and not through an independent process. There are legitimate concerns, but we share the same —.

3.15 pm

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Can I find a way to wrap this up? I do not know Sir Declan Morgan, but I understand that he is a former Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and is from a Catholic background. I am struggling to see how he would not enjoy your confidence, but I do not want to have that conversation here. Nothing would make me happier, between now and Report Stage in the House of Lords, than to find ways to satisfy everybody that this is at least a tolerable way forward. Whether it is communicating what we are actually doing or further amending at Report Stage, I would love nothing more than for us all to come back at the next session and agree that this is tolerable and that we can all move on.

Karen, may I make a suggestion? I am not rushing off anywhere and will be around this evening. I am staying through tomorrow, and I will talk to anybody one-to-one. We will need to have a Private Secretary to take notes, but I will talk with any of you. I want to learn as much as possible from you.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you, Steve. We need to move on. I will take the last three questions together, and you

can respond to them all at once. I have John Lahart, Mairéad Farrell and Annabelle Ewing, and Brendan Smith will make a quick comment.

Mr John Lahart TD:

Thanks, Minister; that is appreciated, and your comments are appreciated. It goes back to that comment about Britain having no selfish or strategic interest in the North. Sometimes, from the republican side, south of the border, it is a hard pill to swallow, based on the evidence. We all have to be persuaders in one shape or form. I want to raise with you the consequences of not moving this forward.

Seán Lemass was one of the great Prime Ministers or Taoisigh of my country in the 1960s and had been involved in the civil war, which was a pretty appalling event in our history. We have been commemorating that period in Ireland in the last year or two. When he was asked about it, 40 years later, by a journalist — he had lost family members — all he would say, in 1967 or 1968, was that terrible things were done by both sides and that he preferred not to talk about it. Would it not be great if that was the attitude?

The thing is that that came at a price. What emerged out of the civil war, in fairly broad brushstrokes, was two political parties. It took just shy of 100 years and political circumstances for them to coalesce. The commemoration period has been very sensitive, because the wounds are still deep. I belong to one of those traditions, and I find strong feelings evoked and elicited in me when the history of that period is recalled, and I regard myself as reasonably rational.

To some degree, the price of not addressing this is that it will go on and fester. In a century, everybody who took part in any of the atrocities or the issues that are described now as legacy issues will be dead, and the people who were affected will be dead, but their descendants will still live. We do not want that festering for another multiple number of decades. That is the importance of it. As Emer Currie said, it is probably not all going to be about prosecutions and prison sentences. It is about conversations and about truth and accountability.

I will finish on this. We discovered some new facts about our civil war that allowed people from both sides to look at things differently. Some were quite surprising to us — how the state acted; how the rebels acted — but, even a century later, what I am saying to you is that it is raw. They may say that they went about a building a republic — they did — and put those events behind them, but they did not really put those events behind them. They festered and divided the country politically for a century.

Ms Mairéad Farrell TD:

Go raibh maith agat, a Aire, as teacht os comhair an choiste seo arís. Thank you for coming in front of this Committee again. I have a number of questions. First, I listened with interest when you mentioned your deep feelings towards democracy. Of course, that made me think about this time last year, when we had elections in the North and my party came out as the strongest in that election. Since then, we have had a situation where the Assembly is not sitting. The DUP had spoken about the protocol, and now it is the Windsor Framework.

I am interested to hear your analysis, because I imagine that you are dealing with this daily. When do you think that a decision will be made by the DUP, and when do you see Stormont being back up and running? Of course, we all know the very real impact that it has on the people of the North that the Executive are not up and running, especially in the very difficult times that we have at the moment.

My other question relates to a report that was published recently by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), which showed a productivity gap of 40% between the North and the South. I am interested in your views as to why the North's economy is underperforming. It is interesting to look at the history. Belfast and the North used to be the economic hub of Ireland. In my view, after partition, it greatly declined in comparison to the South, which has increased in prosperity. It is also my view — it will not surprise you — that Irish unity or a united Ireland will allow for a change in that. I wonder what your views are in relation to that.

Lastly, I want to say that Emer's contribution was very strong in relation to the legacy Bill and the real-life impact that it has on families. I cannot say it as eloquently as Emer did, but I know from families the huge impact that not getting to the truth has had. We see now that that generation, and a lot of those family members who campaigned all their lives to get truth, are passing away. However, it does not simply pass away with them; it moves on to the next generation of family members. I do not suggest that you think this, but I imagine that people who do not have as deep an understanding of the conflict and the killings on families think that life will move on, come another generation, and maybe people will forget about it. However, the trauma is intergenerational and is not something that will go away. It is cruel not to give families the level of truth and justice that they require.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

I will be brief. My question relates to the role of BIPA. We are about to have a discussion on this, and a very good case can be made for BIPA to have a greater role. In that regard, is the Minister able to say whether, as a matter of principle, he can be an honest broker in making that case? Also, of course, the greater role should involve the proper resourcing of BIPA. I do not think we are talking about huge sums, so the Minister need not look particularly alarmed. However, it would need a bit more resourcing to achieve that objective. Is the Minister prepared to act as an honest broker at court on that issue, as well?

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Brendan just wants to make a comment.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Minister, I wholeheartedly endorse every word that Senator Emer Currie said, and the comments of other contributors as well. I have campaigned for decades along with some families who lost loved ones, and there were never proper investigations into those atrocities. Those people say to me, "Brendan, we are getting older. I will pass away before the truth is

ever established”. As Emer strongly pointed out, those families never resorted to violence or condoned it. They went the political path and supported parties that were absolutely opposed to violence in any shape or form. It is very hard for us to go back and give them the message, “Nothing is changing”.

On 28 December last, my colleague Senator Diarmuid Wilson and I attended the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Belturbet in my constituency, in which two teenagers were killed. There is plenty of evidence of where the bomb came from and who was involved in it, but there has never been a prosecution. However, those families are not interested in prosecutions as such, because they realise that there is a negligible chance of getting a prosecution at this stage. They are not out for revenge; they want the truth in regard to who carried out those atrocities. In our capital city and in Monaghan in my constituency, this Wednesday marks the 49th anniversary of the Dublin/Monaghan bombings, the darkest day of all in that era known as the Troubles on our island. Thirty-three people were killed and 300 and more were badly injured. In 2008, 2011 and 2016 we, as a Parliament, passed unanimous motions calling on the British Government to give access to all files and papers pertaining to the Dublin/Monaghan bombings to an independent international legal expert. Regrettably, Minister after Minister, Taoiseach after Taoiseach, Government after Government, has had to ask the British Government to respond positively to that unanimous request of a neighbouring and friendly sovereign Parliament and people.

3.30 pm

Minister, I cannot appeal to you strongly enough, again. I will meet those families again on Wednesday, and we are in the same position as we were when I became a public representative many decades ago. We are no further on. As has been said, the third generation now fights for the truth. Those people are not out for revenge. They would love to see prosecution of the people who are guilty, but the chance of that becoming a reality is negligible. I emphasise the

importance of having mechanisms in place to establish the truth.

We had the Stormont House Agreement in 2014. It was achieved after a lot of difficult negotiations by both Governments, to their credit, and by the political parties in Stormont as well. Thank you again for your presence, Minister.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

You are very welcome. First, I have listened extremely carefully to everything that you said, and I am very grateful to everybody who spoke and for the force and good manners with which everything has been said on these sensitive issues. Officials at the back have captured it all.

I hope that you will forgive me for saying that some matters that are coming up are above my pay grade or predate my arrival in the Department. You will have heard what I said earlier about the reasons why I went into politics, and you do not need me to spell out too much that, if I were an Irish TD, I would have the same set of concerns as you do, but I would be going way beyond my brief if I were to elaborate on that here and now.

The point about the truth is that, as you both said, we want to give people the truth. What I am struggling with is that I keep hearing that people do not want prosecutions; they want the truth. We have a Bill and a commission that seeks to get the truth. The price of that truth is giving an amnesty to individuals who cooperate, and there are full criminal justice powers available to that commission. It is all very high level, but I am still trying to get my teeth into what we need to do to give you what you want, because we want to give you what you want. If it is the truth, that is what we want to give you. I do not want to keep going round in circles.

John, you mentioned that it is difficult to reconcile the selfish and strategic. We are still unionists. I am a member of the Conservative Party and a unionist, and there is obvious tension in surrendering the selfish and strategic whilst being a unionist, but, in a sense, one is the policy position and the other is the political, but I assure you that we go to lengths to govern in an impartial way. If you ever find some area where you think that we have not been impartial, tell

me — you can have my number. Typically, I find that the DUP tells us that we are a Sinn Féin front, and Sinn Féin tells us that we pander to the DUP. That is what I experience.

You made your point on consequences extremely well. I will just add that I am extremely grateful to you, Éamon, for the book on Irish history. I have read it very carefully, and my knowledge of Irish history is accelerating.

Annabelle, you asked about being an honest broker in relation to BIPA. Possibly, we ought to have a conversation about that separately. I will get in trouble with my boss if I stand here and commit to more resource, but I will be very happy to take it up with you afterwards, if I may.

Karen, I think that I have covered things adequately.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Minister. You covered an enormous amount of ground there. You have been very frank and open with us, and we appreciate that.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Probably too much.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

No, you are absolutely fine. As a former Minister, I would not be at all upset by anything that you said. I think that you have been extraordinarily candid but have also held the line very well, so do not worry.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We are about to move on to our debate on matters of the relationship that BIPA can have with other institutions. We hope that the Minister will stay and listen carefully to that. Before that, we will take two minutes for a quick photograph.

The sitting was suspended at 3.32 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 3.36 pm.

CONSOLIDATING THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UK AND IRELAND

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Colleagues, you will recall that, at our plenary sitting in Cavan, last October, Committee A brought forward a report that made some very important recommendations on how to consolidate the bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland. The Steering Committee met recently to consider the recommendations [*Inaudible.*]

In brief, we have decided to write to the British-Irish Council to indicate the Assembly's willingness to seek close cooperation with the Council; to explore how similar interparliamentary bodies, such as the Nordic Council, the Baltic council and the Benelux Parliament, promote an active role for themselves in the relationships between the jurisdictions presented in them; to write to the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to seek statistics on the number of bilateral meetings; and to further consider whether the present remit of the Standing Committees remain relevant after the UK's exit from the European Union and in the wider context of current political priorities. While the Steering Committee welcomed the suggestion of more thematic plenaries, it considered it important to preserve time at plenary for discussing current political topics.

Following our discussions here today, we will review any suggestions on how we as an Assembly can help to consolidate the bilateral relationships, and we look forward to building an ambitious new British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Brendan.

We now commence our political debate on the motion that was approved by the Steering

Committee this morning and which has been circulated in the programme of business. The motion is:

that this Assembly endorses the report of the Committee on Sovereign Matters on Consolidating the bilateral relationship between Britain and Ireland; emphasises the importance of the strongest possible relationship between the two Governments in Dublin and in London and the governments across the British Isles; welcomes the positive initial responses to the report from the UK Government and the Government of Ireland; commends the practical proposals made in the report to enhance the relationship; and directs the Steering Committee to develop the Committee's proposals for the Assembly to play a more active role in promoting the relationship.

Senator Emer Currie:

I move the motion.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

I call on Members to make contributions on the subject of the motion. I ask that Members keep their contributions succinct, so that we can get as many people in as possible. We will have to finish at 4.30 pm because of the tour of the States Chamber. I will have to be very strict, and it would be better to involve as many Members as possible. Who would like to catch my eye? I will start off with Lord Murphy. Oh, hang on: does Emer get to speak first?

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

Emer gets to speak first.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

OK. Emer, you speak first and then we will take Paul.

Senator Emer Currie:

Sorry for the confusion.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

It was my fault.

Senator Emer Currie:

I was asked yesterday for the *[Inaudible]* of the debate, so that is fine. First of all, I want to thank you for the interest that has been shown in the report and the feedback that we got, both on that day in Cavan and since. I also want to thank the Clerks, Chris Morash and Nick Taylor, and Emma McCarron for her work in fleshing out the challenge to BIPA on this subject.

There are lots of themes in the report and the motion. First, we have taken a practical approach to the relationship. It is fundamentally about redefining the bilateral relationship since Brexit. In the absence of having, essentially, a hand-in-glove approach, where we took for granted access to each other's decision-makers and things happened fluidly, we have to deliberately create or consciously work on issues together.

Secondly, as the report shows, that will become only more complicated because we now have convergence and divergence. The UK and Ireland are on different paths, and we have to ensure that, when it comes to particular issues, they are well flagged and there is an understanding of the effects that legislation can have in each other's state. I suppose that an example of that is the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the introduction of the electronic travel authorisation. Proposed legislation on legacy is another example. Even getting to this point with the Windsor Framework is an example. It is a pity that Steve Aiken MLA is not here, because he would definitely have something to say about that. I will come back to that in a minute.

Thirdly, our relationship with the UK is a strategically important one, but it is so much more than that. It is about that interconnecting and interdependent nature that we want to foster.

Fourthly, there is the challenge to BIPA, the future of the institution and interparliamentary cooperation. Can we, as an institution, see the opportunity to step up?

The report was written when we did not have the Windsor Framework. Hope was really at the lowest that it had been in a couple of decades. I am glad to say that, overwhelmingly, when

you read the report, there is a sense of having to bring our two nations back together. There is also the sense that goodwill alone will not get us through this and that we cannot coast through this. Although we previously had access to each other at EU meetings, now that we do not have that we must work harder at it. We see that in the institutions in the Good Friday Agreement; obviously, not just BIPA, which is mentioned, but the BIC and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIC). Time and time again, people told us that those institutions had not been worked to their fullest and that there was opportunity there.

I will just finish by saying that I am sure that you are all aware of report's practical recommendations, such as having our premiers meeting three to four times a year, having more high-level ministerial meetings, and concentrating not only on crisis issues but on working in partnership in the BIIC and the BIC. In relation to divergence, we have seen in the *[Inaudible]* framework that we have the Stormont brake when the decision has been made where there is not agreement on law. In order to get to that point, however, they would still have to work out what framework, what committees or what process they would follow to do that.

We have our Committee on European Union Affairs, and Senator Martin Conway has been appointed as chair of a new committee in that regard, in the South. We also have the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and there is the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, but BIPA would give us a good opportunity to discuss those issues as well.

There is lots of food for thought. We would be glad to hear what people think and answer any questions.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thanks, Emer, it is an excellent report. I pay tribute, as you have done, to the work that has been done by the Clerks and others to turn it into the paper that has been presented to us today.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

If I may, Co-Chairperson, I echo your comments on the Committee's work. It is a first-class

report, and probably one of the most important reports that we are going to have to deal with over the next couple of years.

Twenty-six years ago, Liz O'Donnell, who was then the Irish Minister of State, and I chaired strand 3 of the Good Friday Agreement. It was the easiest of the strands, and there were no objections. It went through swimmingly, and the institutions that strand 3 set up, which were essentially the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, resulted from it. Incidentally, when we were discussing those matters all those years ago, this body, then known as the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, was very much in our minds in being the legislative aspect of east-west relations.

3.45 pm

In the first year, certainly, the BIIC got off to a very good start. It met regularly and was chaired jointly by the Republic's Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Northern Ireland Secretary. Eventually, though, it petered out. Indeed, one great effect of the British-Irish Council was that it brought together all the Governments of these islands. That was the first time that that had ever happened. In that respect, it was a great success. Then Brexit came and drove a torpedo right through the lot of it, in the sense that, ultimately, the bilateral relations that Britain and Ireland had were very much based on the joint membership of that club.

There were 25 meetings every day between either officials or Ministers of the two countries, whether in Brussels or elsewhere. That meant that there was constant dialogue between both countries. That went, and we all know the history of the last couple of years, when, frankly, relations between the countries have been at rock bottom as a consequence of the protocol and of Brexit and for other reasons. Happily, that has changed because of the Windsor Framework, which has got off to a really good start. We still have those bodies left, however, and it seems to me that very sensible recommendations have been made by the Committee for more use of the BIIGC, which did not meet for seven years, and of the British-Irish Council, with a new

role in ensuring we have relations between the two countries on a different footing, to replace, as far as we can under Brexit, what they had been.

The only recommendation I would make is that this is so important that the two Co-Chairs — assuming that we agree with the contents of this report, and I am sure that we will — should present the report in person to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and/or the Foreign Secretary in London, and to the Tánaiste in Dublin. This is so important that we must try to arrange meetings. It should not be just a letter, saying, “Have a look at this, do you think it is a good idea?”. We must explain to them why it is so hugely significant. I absolutely, firmly and warmly welcome the report.

Mr Nigel Mills MP:

There is no need to turn the microphone off, Paul. They could have just passed it to us.

I am speaking as the vice-chair of the Committee, so I do not want to praise our own work. Paul Murphy has spoken with far more experience of the governmental aspects of this than I can.

One thing that struck us when we were producing this report was that it would not be the right approach to assume that this would happen organically and that, if we did nothing, the interaction and the joined-up work would just be there, almost as if nature intended it. If there is not that structure put in place and some work done to make sure that those meetings are happening and that dialogue is taking place, with some record of it that can be held to account, it will probably just not happen and we will drift apart.

That is what we are trying to recommend as to how we should use the existing structures. We are clear that we do not want to create new structures. That would be a huge complexity that we do not want. We must decide how to use the ones we have, ensure that they work and then, hopefully, use this body as some way of holding to account what is happening in those important bodies. As Paul suggested, this should be the parliamentary version of that, because

we just do not know. There is not always a great deal of disclosure of it. That would be some progress.

The motion we have before us is a little generous in welcoming the responses we have had from the two Governments, which are warm words, but they are about a side of paper long, and we have just written back to the UK Government asking them to answer the recommendations that we have made. Maybe there is a role, actually, for the Co-Chairs to escalate this to a different level and try to get a bit more engagement with them. The Governments both accept the principle; they just have not agreed any actual changes.

As to the future of this Assembly, I have been coming for eight years, and it is fair to say that some of the meetings have been better than others. It is nice to go to a very nice hotel in Ireland or, usually, a very average one in the UK. It is quite nice to be here for once, is it not? It is a good social occasion, but have we achieved very much? If we are going to keep this institution going and refresh it, we have to ensure that, at the end of the day, we deliver stuff.

I learned quite a lot from the response from the Steering Committee on what the similar bodies in the Benelux, Nordic and Baltic states do. Maybe there are lessons here that we should look at; maybe, as a Committee, we should have gone and looked at one of them before we wrote the report. Perhaps that is something that we should consider as we decide the way forward.

The Committees that the Benelux Assembly has may give us a good model for how we go forward. At times, when we are planning our next inquiry, we sit there and think, "Is that for us, or is it for the European Affairs Committee?". I wonder whether our Committees are a bit narrow, and possibly overlapping. We could extend them into some more areas of interest right across the jurisdictions. The Benelux Assembly has Committees on foreign affairs, economy, agriculture, energy, cross-border cooperation, social affairs and health education. Those would work pretty well for us if we sat and thought about what we really should be talking about and where the opportunities for joined-up working are. Maybe the Steering Committee could think

whether we should look to re-energising our Committees. Maybe we need more than four — I think we are allowed six — and we could tweak them around. Perhaps we could look at that for the next plenary.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

It is a shame that Darren Millar has not been able to make it, because that was one of the big contributions he made to our Steering Committee meeting. He said we should look very carefully at the Committees we have and whether we want to have Ad Hoc Committees on issues like legacy, energy cooperation or things like that, but also that we should look at the structure of the existing Standing Committees, as there is quite clearly, as you say, duplication and overlap, and they are quite narrow. That is one of the things that Darren is very keen on. I am sure that he will not mind me mentioning that that was one of his key points at the meeting.

Mr John Lahart TD:

I commend my colleagues on Committee A for their work. I enjoyed reading the report. It was very well researched, and I agree with all the conclusions. It reflects the fact that relationships have changed. There is an estrangement of sorts. It does not mean that that is everlasting, but it is a result of Britain's departure from the European Union. There is a change in the relationship between these islands and between the UK and Europe. There is an awful lot of volatility and convulsions internationally, generally speaking. This report reflects our place in a changing world.

From a couple of parliamentary visits that have come to Dublin in the last number of months, which the Co-Chair and some of my colleagues here were involved in, I detect an appetite on the part of individual devolved Assemblies and Parliaments to deepen and engage more regularly with their Irish counterparts. Recently, we had very rich discussions with Members of the Welsh Assembly in relation to that, and I would welcome that.

The UK, because it has left the European Union, and Ireland, because it has lost such a strategic

partner, the United Kingdom, in its relationship with the rest of Europe, are seeking new relationships. Therefore, it could be easy to take the eye off the ball and for things to begin to slowly part, and we need mechanisms to bring them back together. I will repeat this, because I think that it is worth repeating and because I believe it: do not underestimate the impact of your loss on the European Union and how it is felt, particularly but not exclusively from the Irish side. I agree that we need to up our game as a result of that, and I liked what you said, Co-Chair, about what Darren, the chair of Committee B, which I sit on and which looks at European affairs — said. Our report, which we will present tomorrow, might represent a little bit of a step in the direction of taking a couple of really meaty topics on which there are disparate views because of our traditions and attempting to deal with those in an intelligent, sensitive and practical way, recognising that the world has changed and that words such as “security” that used to frighten us and meant completely different things to the two countries now bind us together in the areas of cybersecurity, protecting our infrastructure and developing digital infrastructure off our coasts.

In summary, I agree that there is a need to up our game and set more practical targets for committees. I very much welcome the report and its conclusions.

Baroness Hooper:

I also welcome the report, which I found very useful. This is my second BIPA meeting, so forgive me if what I am about to raise has been discussed previously and dismissed, but I think it is important to discuss this issue in an international context. Like others, I lament our departure from the European situation, and the things that are said in the report about the usefulness of the informal and fringe contact between Ministers and others are vital. My question is on something that has been mooted in the past. Is there no way that we can develop a special relationship for Ireland with the Commonwealth? This would, again, give a framework of meetings and a wider context to the issues. It need not represent full membership,

but there could be a special relationship. Given that countries such as Rwanda and Mozambique, which do not have historical connections with the United Kingdom, are now members of the Commonwealth, it seems to me that our very special relationship with Ireland could be developed further in that forum.

Mr Frank Feighan TD:

I very much welcome the report, which points us in the right direction. In 2015, we were talking about working much more closely together in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and coming up with ideas. Then Brexit happened, and the United Kingdom was throwing glances at Donald Trump in the United States. It is no secret that, in the Republic of Ireland, we are strengthening our role in and friendship with the EU. When I walk out of Leinster House and on to Merrion Square every day, I see one big banner on the French Embassy that says, “France, your closest EU neighbour”. That is what it is. You can see that, although the old certainties of the United States and the United Kingdom are very important — there are traditions that we share with those countries, with millions of Irish living there — we are now looking towards Europe because there is more certainty, including economic certainty.

Thank you, Baroness, for bringing up the Commonwealth. I am one of the few Irish politicians who has always talked not about joining the Commonwealth but about having more association with the Commonwealth of Nations — there are 2.4 billion people in it — from a legal, sporting, education and political perspective. Those are things that need to be mentioned, and, if we are going to have an agreed Ireland, we need to talk not of Ireland joining the Commonwealth but of having more association with it. It is a goodwill movement. There are very good opportunities there, but that is something that will not be discussed in Irish political discourse, because people do not want to go there. I have always discussed it, but I agree that there has been something like that.

4.00 pm

I will just finish off with a history lesson. We were members of the Commonwealth until 1949, and it was de Valera who ensured that we were retained in the Commonwealth, because it kept the friendships and relationships going. It was a Fine Gael Government that declared Ireland a republic in 1949, which got us thrown out of the Commonwealth. The rules were changed after that to allow us back in, and we said no, but India availed itself of the opportunity. Tim Pat Coogan said that the Republic of Ireland leaving the Commonwealth — there was the Republic of Ireland Act 1948 and then the Ireland Act 1949 — further deepened divisions between North and South and ensured that partition was much deeper.

This is an area that I have always talked about, and it is one that some of my colleagues give me a lot of grief about, but, like the Commonwealth and like our relationships with the EU, it is something that we all need to be adult enough to discuss. I am glad that you brought it up, but remember that we are moving much closer to our 500 million EU neighbours and friends. When my grandfather, my father and then I went to the UK to work, 95% of our exports were to the UK. Now it is down to something like 7%.

You have been great friends and great neighbours. I am one of the one million people from the west of Ireland, most of whom worked in the UK, and everyone would say that we were treated well, fairly and with respect, but those friendships need to be worked at much longer and much tougher, and we need to be much more open about what we want from the relationship. I want to keep the relationship between Ireland and the UK. You are our near friends and our near neighbours, and, as I said before, we are great friends and great allies in Europe. Whatever happens, we look forward to working much more collaboratively and being much more friendly. That is what the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly does.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I will bring in my Co-Chair, Brendan Smith, and then Brendan Howlin. Emer, I will make sure that you have an opportunity at the end to wrap up, given that this is

about your report.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Karen, like you, I commend Committee A on its work and its report and Emer on her presentation this afternoon. One thing that we have to address is the lack of knowledge in our Parliaments of the work of our Assembly. That goes across all legislatures. Karen and I, along with other colleagues on the Steering Committee, discussed the idea of presenting an annual report to each legislature, whereby the two Co-Chairs would make a presentation. We fully realise that it may not be possible to address a full Parliament, but we could address some relevant committee. It is very important that there is at least a knowledge within our own constituent Assemblies of the work of BIPA.

Just less than two weeks ago, Karen and I took part in the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee of the Welsh Parliament, and we had very good discussions about improving relationships. That Committee had been in Dublin, and John Lahart referred to the meetings with different Committees of the Oireachtas. We should do more at every level of our Parliaments; we should do more at committee level and meet committees across the different jurisdictions. We are determined to do that, and we have asked our secretariat support to discuss the introduction of a mechanism with the relevant Speakers in each of the Parliaments or Assemblies to enable us to make those presentations.

At the end of the virtual plenary in Dublin in 2021, Micheál Martin, the Taoiseach, spoke about the need to strengthen relationships at government level and also at parliamentary level. He was very strong in his view that there should be a much stronger parliamentary bilateral relationship. When the Taoiseach was in Cavan with us, both Karen and I took the opportunity to have a discussion with him, and he was adamant that the Irish Government wanted better parliamentary relationships. This Assembly was given a remit to drive that forward. I am sure that view is shared by members of the British Government as well, and we intend to do that.

Thank you, Karen.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you, Brendan.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

Like others, I begin by complimenting Committee A and Emer for both the presentation and the thought-provoking report. I want to make an observation on the way the discussion has evolved. We are all struggling to see how, in the post-Brexit era, we can maintain very close links between our countries at every level: parliamentary, governmental and so on. There are structures there, but they are not structures that have been developed sufficiently well to replace the weekly or monthly meetings that we lost. The notion of Ireland joining the Commonwealth arises occasionally, and there is an invitation to send observers every year, but I really do not think that that will hack it. Our relationship with the UK is much more fundamental than, quite frankly, Rwanda's or anywhere else's. To attend an assembly where the broad themes of the world are being debated is not what we need to do. There would be a difficulty with that.

The second largest French-speaking country in the world, Algeria, is not part of the Francophonie, for understandable historic reasons. It is not natural or necessarily obvious for countries that have had very intimate relationships — Algeria was a part of formal France in the past — to be associated with the broader post-colonial structures that emerge from those countries. At the heart of the report, and of what we need to do, is the development of this organisation — this Assembly — into a more meaningful structure.

I am very new to this, although I am a long time in Parliament. We need to have very frank and open discussions of the nature that we have had today, and the attendance of people like Minister Baker is enormously helpful to that — not to breeze in and out, to be truthful, but to listen. That is a really generous and wonderful strengthening of what we are about, but we need to go an awful lot further. I hope that we can build on the report that we have to look not for

new institutions but at how we can strengthen the resources, frequency of meetings and depth of interaction of this Assembly. Thanks.

Mr Paul Kehoe TD:

I will be very brief.

As a new Member, I was thinking about what British-Irish means at the weekend. I thought I would shut my mouth, say nothing and just listen, and here I am on my third contribution of the day. *[Laughter.]* I read the report, although I have not really gone into it in depth, and I have listened to some of the contributions from other delegates.

We have a very strong link with the UK, but there is a generation coming behind us that will have a very different relationship with the UK because of the departure from Europe. I have a 12-year-old, an 11-year-old and an eight-year-old, and my 11-year-old fella is very much interested in — I will not say politics, but Europe, our relations with Europe, populations and things like that. He can never understand and get his head around why the UK, or Britain, departed the European Union. I tried to tell him, but anyhow. His relationship with Britain will be very different from my relationship with it, and it is upon us as a group, maybe just as one part of making sure that we continue the relationship and build the relationship. To echo Brendan's words, our organisation should build on the report that we have been discussing today.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

I call Emma Harper, and Gloria wants to come back in with one comment.

Ms Emma Harper MSP:

I will be brief. I still consider myself a new member here, and I was planning just to listen and not speak, but I want to highlight a couple of things that I have heard already. Thank you for the report, and thank you, Emer, for laying it out, and thanks to everybody else for contributing. After hearing what everybody, including Minister Steve Baker, has said so far, I think that it is

evident that we need to look at what we can do to highlight the work of BIPA.

To pick up on what Brendan Smith said, at the last BIPA session, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition talked about its contribution to the peace process, and I used that as an opportunity, during the International Women's Day debate in the Scottish Parliament, to say, "BIPA exists". I used that as an opportunity to talk about the work of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. My colleagues in the Scottish Parliament do not know what goes on here, so it would be really useful to raise awareness of BIPA. Annabelle Ewing talked about more resources, and we probably should consider that.

I also want to pick up on conclusion K, which states:

"BIPA could play an important role in scrutinising new, complex and divergent legislation".

In the Scottish Parliament, we are seeing issues coming up about genetically edited or genetically modified food, and the National Farmers' Union of Scotland wants to make sure that people know the difference between genetic modification and genetic editing. As we move forward, we need to be very aware of that when it comes to agriculture and how we work together to educate and raise awareness about it.

I have one final thing to touch on. As a Member of the Scottish Parliament, I think that BIPA is absolutely important in looking at firming and strengthening relationships, not just formally but informally. I so enjoy talking to everybody, whether it is outside while having coffee or here around the table. For me, BIPA can be an absolutely fantastic model for thinking about Scotland's future intergovernmental relationships.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Gloria wants to come back in.

Baroness Hooper:

I am sorry, but I meant to mention this when I spoke before. In the UK Parliament, we have, some people think, an overextended number of all-party parliamentary groups. They are

obviously more flexible and less formal than the Select Committees. It seems to me that we could build some relationships between all-party parliamentary groups. In saying that, I cite the example of the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and there are other special interest all-party groups that could have some sort of informal relationship with similar groups in the Irish Parliament and other Parliaments.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

That is a very good point, and you are right: we have an awful lot of all-party parliamentary groups, Gloria. They are more flexible and allow more licence to do other things, so we should definitely explore that.

We should not forget that BIPA is constituted in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Unlike many of those groups, it has a statutory underpinning. I build on the point that Lord Murphy made when I say that the institutions that were set up under strand three — the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference — are also probably misunderstood and little known. If we were to have the role of scrutinising those institutions and looking at their discussions, in the same way that a select committee in any of our Parliaments would look at the role of the Department that it scrutinises, that would build the profiles of the BIC and the BIIC and give them more visibility. For anyone listening with a Government hat on, scrutiny of BIC and BIIC should not be shied away from, because that could present an opportunity to build and get more visibility for those two institutions and for the Government to get more from them. I urge and hope that anyone listening who has the ability to speak to government will take note of that and perhaps try to build in some form of formal scrutiny role for BIPA, so that it can help to be that democratic side of the institutions and to improve visibility.

I also take the point that Brendan mentioned earlier about us both giving evidence to one of the Senedd committees in Wales a couple of weeks ago. It was interesting to talk about the role that interparliamentary and multilateral relations play. Anyone who was at the Inter-

Parliamentary Union (IPU) assembly in Bahrain recently — I know that Gloria was there — will have heard me speak about the BIPA work, the plenary conference in Belfast and the panel of representatives from the Women’s Coalition, who gave us such an incredible presentation at that conference, energising the room, but also demonstrating the bravery that those women showed by putting their heads above the parapet at a time when it was not just the case that a few trolls on social media would have a go at you; you were actually putting yourself in physical danger. Many people at the IPU talked to me about that afterwards; they had not really thought about the role that interparliamentary relations and BIPA — the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, as it was — played in helping to form that agreement. We should not underestimate what we can do. I am quite convinced that, if we did not have these BIPA conferences, things like the Windsor Framework would be much harder to arrive at, because there would have been more challenge within Parliament if people had not had a chance to have this dialogue and to listen to each other. We have a real role to play. The report is fantastic. I cannot see anyone else who wants to catch my eye. John, do you want to come back in?

4.15 pm

Mr John Lahart TD:

Briefly. When the Welsh delegation was there, Co-Chair Brendan Smith TD mentioned parliamentary friendship groups. We have had those in the Dáil for a number of years, and we probably never thought of the necessity of them for Ireland-Scotland, Ireland-Wales or Ireland-England. They are exactly what they say on the tin. You assume that your counterparts in the other Parliaments are doing the same thing and establishing those groups. They facilitate the meeting of people on a much more informal basis and that getting-to-know-you piece. I think that they may have a valuable part to play, or some role to play, going forward.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

There can only be benefit in talking to each other and having a greater number of elected

representatives talking to each other as much as possible. It cannot possibly be detrimental.

On the basis that I cannot see anyone else who wants to speak, I will ask Emer to wind up.

Senator Emer Currie:

Thank you, Co-Chair. We are definitely in the space of beefing up what we have, rather than creating anything new. It is about recreating the intimacy of the relationships that we have had over the years.

It is very worthwhile to read what Emma McCarron put together, which is an overview of comparable interparliamentary bodies. She looked at how the Nordic Council, the Baltic Assembly and the Benelux Parliament have a bigger status attributed to them, at how they have operated and developed and at what we can glean from them when it comes to beefing up BIPA. That is a really important step for us to take, so I recommend that people read that. You never know what people will pick up on in reports, but that is an important one for us to examine.

We have suggested that we should have a closer relationship with BIC, not just since I have been here but previously, and I do not think that that has got us anywhere. We are still trying to figure out why that is the case, because, as Karen said, a rising tide lifts all boats. It would serve to elevate the work of BIC and BIIC, and it would elevate what we do here.

I say to Emma Harper that, yes, there definitely is a role for us. We have seen how our generic debates can have a great impact on the Ministers who are here. Making way, where there is divergence, and allowing people to discuss that is a good thing. It would give more attention to the Channel Islands, for instance, if we had a framework such as the Nordic Council or something similar. If we were able to elevate the work that we do, it would give more emphasis to those kinds of issues as they arise.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. The Question before the Assembly is as on the programme of business.

Question put and agreed to.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. That was a very worthwhile and frank exchange of views. It builds on the work that we did when we met as a Steering Committee. It is good to hear so much agreement with what we discussed recently in Dublin and to know that those are the views of the wider Assembly. The Steering Committee will work in the coming weeks to develop Committee A's proposals for the work of the Assembly.

Members, that concludes the programme of business for today. Colleagues who would like to visit the States Assembly are encouraged to gather in the foyer now to walk over to the town centre. I remind you all that coaches will depart at 6.30 pm for our evening meal at the winery. The plenary is suspended until 9.30 am tomorrow. Thank you.

Adjourned at 4.20 pm.

Tuesday 16 May 2023

The Assembly met at 9.38 am.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Good morning, colleagues. This morning, Committee B will present its interim report to our Assembly, and it will be followed by Committee D. Jonathan Renouf, Jersey Minister for the Environment, will then address the Assembly and take questions. Tuesday's session will conclude with a debate among Members on recent political developments.

Programme of Business agreed.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We will make sure that there is a break for checking out of the hotel for those people, like me, who have been refused late checkout.

COMMITTEE B — 'UK-EU DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION POST-BREXIT'

Mr John Lahart TD:

At the 63rd plenary in October, the Committee's report on the COVID vaccine roll-out in BIPA jurisdictions was formally agreed. The report recommended a continuation of the consistent approach to the vaccine roll-out in BIPA jurisdictions, while taking forward the learning from the pandemic to develop an improved preparedness for any future similar events, thus preventing, where possible, any return to intense restrictions. The Irish Department of Health responded, noting the findings of the report and outlining that the National Immunisation Advisory Committee continues to examine evidence on vaccine boosters to inform recommendations surrounding any future immunisation plans.

Since the October plenary, our main piece of work has been the continuation of our new inquiry into UK-EU defence and security cooperation post-Brexit. I now present our interim report on behalf of Darren Millar and the members of Committee B.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there has been a significant shift in the European defence and security landscape. The war in Ukraine has led to a significant shift in German defence policy and resulted in applications by Sweden and Finland to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The Irish Government announced the upcoming consultative forum on international security policy, which will allow:

“for a discussion on Ireland's policy of military neutrality.”

We note reports that Russia has a programme to sabotage wind farms and communication cables in the North Sea and that UK Ministers have warned of Russia-aligned hackers who seek to disrupt or destroy Britain's critical infrastructure.

Ireland plays a significant role in the world of data, with thousands of kilometres of cables, which present complex security concerns. It was with all of that in mind that we launched a new three-part inquiry into UK-EU defence and security cooperation post-Brexit to review the current landscape and make recommendations based on the evidence that we receive. Our inquiry examines the response to the war in Ukraine, cybersecurity and intelligence and policing.

Our considerations on Ukraine included the various approaches and responses to the crisis in Ukraine, how effective cooperation has been, and the impact of Brexit on the UK's cooperation with European partners in the context of Ukraine. Considerations on cybersecurity included the biggest challenges facing the UK, Ireland and the EU in cybersecurity; how we can cooperate effectively to tackle those challenges; whether there are lessons to be learnt from how the UK and EU member states pursue such cooperation in other settings; and the importance of UK researchers being able to participate fully in EU-funded research into new cybersecurity measures under the Horizon Europe programme.

Intelligence and policing considerations included the practical impact of Brexit on cooperation in these areas, including whether the UK and Ireland have concluded any bilateral cooperation

agreements since the United Kingdom left the EU. We took evidence from Ian Bond, director of foreign policy at the Centre for European Reform; Dr Nicholas Wright, visiting researcher at the Centre for Britain in Europe at the University of Surrey; retired Irish Vice Admiral Mark Mellett DSM; Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby CMG, ambassador and head of the UK Mission to the European Union; Brigadier John Oldroyd, deputy MILREP (European Union) and UK defence adviser at the UK Mission to the European Union; Angelina Eichhorst, managing director of the European division at the EU European External Action Service; Joanneke Balfourt, director of security and defence policy at the EU European External Action Service; and Nick Pickard, deputy permanent representative of the UK Joint Delegation to NATO. We received written evidence submissions from a number of stakeholders, including Cisco UK and Ireland; Dr Amanda Kramer at Queen's University Belfast; Gemma Davies from Durham University; and Rights and Security International. We are extremely grateful to all those who engaged with our inquiry by providing evidence or briefing on the subject.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has highlighted vulnerabilities across Europe to geopolitical threats. All stakeholders share the view that the invasion is a gross violation of international laws. The report looked at UK-EU cooperation on Ukraine and found very strong cooperation. The impact of Brexit on the EU and UK response to the war is felt to be minimal. We heard that the intelligence relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom post-Brexit is now weaker. There is potential for British intelligence to be made available across the EU once again.

9.45 am

We touched on the establishment of the 44-nation European Political Community. We were told that the United Kingdom feels that it has agility in its role outside the European Union. Concerns were raised, however, about a turnover of staff responsible for consolidating key EU-UK relationships that could result in loss of trust and weakened EU-UK relationships.

We discussed the significant vulnerabilities exposed by the attacks on Nord Stream and attempts to interfere with undersea communication cables. We noted that Ireland is a major centre for IT and banking, and its sovereign rights over 1 million square kilometres of area through which there are significant interconnectors between Ireland and the USA. We noted the significant challenge for Ireland and Europe as a whole in protecting that infrastructure. It was made clear that any offshore infrastructure, be it floating wind farms or cabling infrastructure, carries a potential security risk, and we heard about the readiness or otherwise of dealing with that. We noted that, from a Government perspective, the issue of cybersecurity has never been more relevant. We heard about the need to strengthen mutuality in the area due to the cross-border nature of attacks.

To summarise the conclusions of the work to date, we noted that most scope for improvement lies in cooperating more effectively on critical infrastructure. We recommend improving information sharing between the United Kingdom Government and Crown dependencies on cybersecurity and financial intelligence. We recommend that adequate resourcing for defence and security is provided by the relevant Governments to ensure that security levels are maintained effectively in BIPA jurisdictions. We recommend that staff churn, particularly in the UK Government, is addressed to avoid a detrimental impact on security and defence relationships with Ireland and the European Union. We recommend a full review of the memorandum of understanding regarding defence cooperation between Ireland and the UK to ensure that it is up to date with current arrangements following Brexit and to enhance future defence cooperation. We recommend an examination of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki as models for greater collaboration and understanding of hybrid and cyber threats.

We recommend that greater consideration be given to the area of energy security. We

recommend that Governments support the ambitions around floating offshore wind without delay, and encourage the development of port infrastructure to facilitate that in BIPA jurisdictions. We also recommend that priority is given to developing security for offshore wind infrastructure, in advance of or in tandem with such ambitions, as part of the licensing process. We recommend that unilateral approaches to cybersecurity be avoided. Due to its cross-border nature, we recommend that, so far as is practicable, regulatory divergence in the area of cybersecurity be avoided between the UK and EU member states, in order to best protect the security of all jurisdictions. We recommend a review of the bilateral arrangements and mechanisms between Ireland and the UK, following Brexit, to ensure efficient sharing of evidence and information in the area of intelligence and policing. We also recommend a closer UK-EU relationship on extradition and intelligence sharing.

We will, Co-Chairs, make copies of our report available to our witnesses and to the relevant Governments so that they can consider and respond to it. Moving forward, we hope to take evidence from Irish witnesses on the security and defence of critical infrastructure, particularly undersea cables off the west coast of Ireland. As I said, we may also choose to visit the two centres of excellence that are referenced in the report, if we get time before the next plenary session, which is where we hope to present our final report on this topic. That report will look at the cyber, intelligence and policing elements of the inquiry in greater detail.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I know that the Committee has done extensive work. This interim report is very thorough, and it will be followed up with further work. I wonder whether there are comments. Lord Bruce.

Rt Hon the Lord Bruce:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. Thank you, John, for summarising the report, which, as a member of the Committee, I support.

I have three comments to draw out from it. One is on the issue of offshore wind, which was mentioned, and the concern that we do not have adequate port-based support. I think that that is true, but I think that is also fair to report that, in the last week, the port of Aberdeen opened its new deepwater southern harbour. One of the largest offshore installation barges operating for wind turbine installation docked there this week. Other companies have announced that they will have offshore wind manufacturing and support facilities based in and around the city. The supply chain for the oil and gas industry is diversifying into that, but we need to do more. My second point is to reinforce the fact that cybersecurity is increasingly becoming a worry. One of the reasons why the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence is based in Tallinn is that Estonia has been on the receiving end of a sustained cyberattack by Russia and has first-hand experience of how to head it off and how to recover quickly. That is why I think that a visit might be informative.

The third issue is the fact that, having left Europe through Brexit, the UK no longer has access to Europol information. That is still a concern. The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement allows for negotiations around that, but I think that that issue is becoming increasingly urgent and that we should take note of that fact and do anything that we can to encourage that negotiation to take place. It is not in anybody's interest for that intelligence not to be shared. At the moment, however, it is not being fully shared.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

John, do you wish to respond, or would you like to wait until the end?

Mr John Lahart TD:

I will respond very briefly on each contribution.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Of course.

Mr John Lahart TD:

Lord Bruce is right that the report kind of says that there is completely inadequate port infrastructure for the development of wind farm turbine infrastructure off coast. He highlighted that informally in discussions. It looks as though it is beginning, but that concern was raised by the witnesses.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you. Lord Murphy.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am a member of the Committee, too. It is a very comprehensive report, but it is, of course, an interim report; there is more to be done. Post-Brexit, cooperation between Ireland and the United Kingdom on intelligence and security matters has, inevitably, changed. The report is, therefore, very timely.

There is a summit between France and the United Kingdom on defence. I think that something like that could happen between the UK and Ireland on security and intelligence, but, most specifically, it seems to me that, when the final report is produced, that will be the ideal opportunity to present it to the British-Irish Council and to the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, which, as you know, used to do an awful lot on security cooperation. Instead of just sending it into the machinery of different Governments, this goes not just specifically to the Ministers but with a request that it be considered by the BIC and the BIIC. That follows on from our debate yesterday.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Absolutely. I concur with that. On every occasion that I attended the BIIC, it had security cooperation as one of its topics, so that is very timely.

Alan Farrell and Brendan Howlin want to come in, and then I will go back to John to sum up.

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

Thanks very much, Co-Chair, and thank you very much to the Committee for its report. I read it yesterday and look forward to the final copy whenever that is available. There are two or three areas that I just want to touch on.

I am very grateful to Paul for his comments. They are along the lines of what I was going to suggest, which is that there are opportunities for Ireland and the UK to cooperate on a number of issues, given our heightened security concerns in relation to activities off the coasts of both our islands. There was recent recognition by the Irish Government that we have chronically underfunded our defence forces, arguably for generations position, and that that is a position that is about to change. That change may not be to the extent that our nearest neighbours would perhaps appreciate, but it will be significant for us nonetheless.

One area that is worthy of at least discussion is cooperation on procurement, because the opportunity for a small country like ours to avail itself of the vast military presence of the United Kingdom is worth discussing. It does not affect one's neutrality or anything of the like, but it certainly gives us the opportunity to save significant sums on the sorts of equipment that we have identified through the Commission on the Defence Forces. That is a publicly available document, if any member is interested. It is on defence.ie.

The other area that I want to touch on very briefly is the necessity for ongoing, continued and perhaps deepened cooperation in relation to patrols and availability of the British defence forces to support Ireland in the patrolling of our exclusive economic zone, which, as we know, is a very significant piece of real estate that Ireland is dreadfully ill-equipped to patrol. While our naval service and our air corps do their best, it is a very large piece of real estate in international waters, which, of course, is freely accessible. Unfortunately, that has meant both overflies and the presence of a number of very strategic Russian vessels in the last year or so, culminating in the rather laughable interference of fishermen from Donegal, if I am not mistaken, and south-west Cork, I am told, who went out to addle the Russian navy, and

successfully so. That being said, it is a serious matter that should form part of ongoing discussions between our nations.

Finally, in response to the comment in relation to ports, you are quite correct. I am a member of the Committee on Environment and Climate Action, and, in an hour, a large number of port chief executives are meeting the Committee in the Oireachtas to discuss that very point because, right now, the only port that has availability on the island is Belfast port. That is to change, but it will take time. In the intervening period, four offshore wind parks have been given their consent to go to planning, which means that we could have the requirement for turbines and relevant infrastructure within 24 to 36 months. Clearly, a port will most likely not be ready in that time. In saying that, there is opportunity presented to Belfast and other ports on the west coast of the UK to supply and support the delivery of that critical energy infrastructure.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Alan. We will go to Brendan Howlin, then Paul Kehoe, then Frank Feighan, and then we will go back to John to sum up.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

First, I commend the Committee on its work. The report is most interesting. I was intrigued to read this morning in 'The Irish Times' that European heads of navies and NATO heads of navies are meeting in Cork today, including the heads of all the NATO countries in Europe and heads of navies of all the EU countries in Europe, and on the agenda is the concern about the presence of so many Russian vessels in Irish coastal waters.

We are slowly, if you like, disentangling exactly what the cooperation agreement between Ireland and the UK means for defence. There was some controversy last week about our reliance on the RAF to monitor Irish airspace and the exact nature of the agreement. It is timely and healthy that that is exposed, so that we know exactly the nature of the agreement, how

dependent we are on the UK and how inadequate Irish investment in our security has been to date. I wonder whether that will be part of the Committee's work.

I tabled a priority question for answer on Thursday, but it has been disallowed because of a legal case. A member of the Oireachtas has taken legal action against the Government on that agreement. A healthy debate about it would be very good indeed.

Mr Paul Kehoe TD:

I very much welcome the report. Given my background, as a former Defence Minister, I find it very interesting. The war in Ukraine has made us all wise up to the threats that face each of our countries. We all have to take it very seriously. There are areas in which we can have closer cooperation. Brendan Howlin spoke about one of those areas, which was covered up for many years but has been back in the news in the last couple of days. The UK is part of NATO; we are not. That is a conversation for another day.

The report is very timely. It is up to this body to make sure that it gets the notice that it deserves from both Governments. Lord Murphy spoke about a number of groups towards which we should push the report, and I would very much welcome that. Although it is an interim report, there is still a lot of work to do and a lot more evidence that we can take from both our countries.

Thank you.

10.00 am

Mr Frank Feighan TD:

We have had a very relaxed attitude to the security of our state, especially around the coast. We have been, I suppose, in a beautiful position, because, if any Russian planes came down the east or west coast, there was always somebody else to take care of them. A wake-up call certainly happened before the invasion of Ukraine when we had those Russians ships. That situation was dealt with with some kind of joviality: "The Russians are on the coast, and the Irish fishermen from Cork are going out to sort them out." The seriousness certainly was not

seen. I do not apologise for making the observation that the Russians missed a trick before that. Had they come in on a few long boats, with a few male and female sailors, and gone into the pubs in Cahersiveen, we would probably have said how great they were.

We need to wake up to the seriousness of the challenges that face us. I say that as someone who has been a politician for 20 years. I was the Minister of State for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy, but I was never on the Justice Committee. I simply do not know what exactly we do or what our capabilities are, so it would do no harm for us for this Committee to go and see what happens in NATO headquarters. I have to put up my hand and say that we, as politicians, are not informed; we sometimes do not want to be informed. It is a wake-up call for us. We need to wise up to what is happening all around our coastline. I welcome the report, which is very apt and timely. We have a lot of lessons to learn.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I would encourage a visit to Finland. I went as part of a UK parliamentary delegation last year as it was applying for NATO membership. Finland's defence expertise is absolutely extraordinary, given the existential threat from Russia that it faces. I echo Lord Bruce's comments about Estonia, and a trip to Helsinki would be very valuable. Perhaps the two could be combined. I certainly learnt an awful lot from that visit.

Mr John Lahart TD:

I want to acknowledge Lord Bruce's comments on port readiness in respect of infrastructure provision and Lord Murphy's comments on security between Ireland and the UK post Brexit. My colleague Alan Farrell raised a number of issues, and I particularly noted the procurement issue. He also commented on the port infrastructure, and the Committee is taking that on board. My colleague Deputy Brendan Howlin highlighted the issue of why it was pushed down the agenda, given the presence of so many Soviet vessels in Irish seas. Paul Kehoe was Minister of State for Defence for a number of years. Deputy Frank Feighan commented on the relaxed

attitude that Ireland has had heretofore. At this stage, it is a cliché that the threat that cybersecurity presents is very obvious, in that it knows no borders, and that the traditional defence and security mechanisms that may have been in place heretofore are simply inadequate.

From an Irish perspective, the Tánaiste and the Irish Government's announcement on the upcoming consultative forum on international security policy in June will probably feed into the ongoing work of the Committee. I want to assure colleagues that I have taken note of their comments and will feed them back to the Committee as it carries out the remainder of its work.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I ask the plenary to formally adopt the report of Committee B.

Report agreed.

COMMITTEE D REPORT: PROVISION FOR INDIGENOUS MINORITY LANGUAGES IN THE BIPA JURISDICTIONS

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I call the Vice-Chair of Committee D, Seán Crowe TD, to present its report on provision for indigenous minority languages in the BIPA jurisdictions.

Mr Seán Crowe TD:

Committee D has finished taking evidence for its inquiry into the provision of indigenous minority languages. In January, we met in Dublin to hear evidence on Irish, and, in early March, we met just after the Belfast plenary sitting, where we heard from witnesses about the provision of Irish and Ulster Scots. A few weeks ago, we had an online meeting to discuss the heads of the report. We also discussed the draft report yesterday with the Committee Chair, Alf Dubs, who, as you know, was very disappointed not to be able to be here today to present the report. We have asked the secretary to scope out a few topics for our next inquiry. One is to consider the so-called just transition, the description of which is a framework that encompasses a range

of social interventions, with the aim to protect rights and secure livelihoods as the economy shifts to more sustainable production, due to combating climate change. An inquiry into that subject would look at policies that BIPA jurisdictions are putting in place to achieve a just transition and at what steps should be taken to ensure that the benefits of the just transition are distributed equally.

Secondly, we have discussed an inquiry into the effect of high energy costs and the pressures that they are exerting on domestic households, particularly the impact that they are having on people living in poverty. This will continue to be a concern over the coming year, and it should be a fruitful area for the Committee to look into, should we decide to go with that.

At our meeting yesterday, members raised a third topic, rural housing, which we also asked the secretary to scope out. We will hold an online meeting as soon as we can to finalise the inquiry topic and evidence sessions.

I will move on to the report on the provision for indigenous minority languages. We took evidence over a long period because our schedule was disrupted: first, by the general elections in Britain and Ireland; secondly, because of the COVID pandemic; and, thirdly, because of the death of Queen Elizabeth. We covered a lot of ground. We visited Cardiff, Edinburgh, Dublin and Belfast and took written evidence on languages from the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and Cornwall.

We think that we have come up with a very comprehensive analysis of the situation for indigenous minority languages in these islands. It is a fairly long report because we took so much evidence, but we have tried to do as much justice to the topic as possible. When I look around the room, I see people who are probably much more familiar with the subjects than I am, and I look forward to the debate. We expect to receive late evidence on Irish sign language, and we intend to incorporate that in an annex to the report.

Our key findings and recommendations seek to underline the cultural, social and economic

importance of indigenous minority languages, while we urge BIPA jurisdictions to cooperate closely and learn from each other in determining the best way to support the languages.

We saw how, in places such as the Western Isles in Scotland, traditional language communities are declining despite efforts to promote and protect Scottish Gaelic. The Scots language is almost a victim of its own success. Because so many people say that they have a familiarity with the language, it is sometimes overlooked in policy discussions on indigenous languages. Manx, Cornish and Channel Islands languages have such small numbers of speakers that their survival must be continuously supported. There is a notable difference between the political support that a language like Cornish receives and the support that other languages get.

On the other hand, although many schools study Welsh and Irish, we need real efforts to translate that into increased numbers of speakers for the long term. Wales and Ireland have both introduced targets, including the aim to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050, but those targets recognise the challenge of supporting indigenous minority languages and the need to ensure political buy-in. We encourage every BIPA jurisdiction to evaluate its language policy and consider whether it is appropriate to set similar targets. Wales and Ireland also offer an example of how cross-party consensus on provision for indigenous minority languages can bring significant benefits. An appreciation of the shared challenges facing these languages will contribute to strengthening the bonds between the diverse language communities on these islands.

It is wide-ranging piece of work, one that we believe makes some useful recommendations. We are very grateful to all our witnesses; to our clerks Darren Kelly, Emma McCarron and Tristan Stubbs; and to all our members for their hard work on this important matter. On behalf of myself and members, I thank Tristan Stubbs, who has spent five years with the Committee and has been involved in drafting a number of reports, including the report on indigenous minority languages. This is his last plenary, and I wish him well in his next challenge. On your

behalf, I thank him for all the work that he has done and for the support that he has given the organisation over the past five years. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thanks for your report, Seán, and I also commend the Committee on its work.

Ms Emma Harper MSP:

I am really interested in reading the report when it finally comes out. I am a Member of the Scottish Parliament and am the co-convener of the Scots language cross-party group. We continue to engage with Scots speakers so that we can help promote, protect and secure the Scots language. We have lots of work going on, and it is exciting to correlate all that is happening in Scotland right now. There is the Scots Language Centre, and we have the dictionary of Scots language. We have Wee Windaes and Scots Hoose, and, at the cross-party group, we often invite a makar, which is someone who comes and does poetry and song and highlights their own work. Our Scots scribe, Shane Strachan, was our last presenter at the cross-party group.

One of the things that we find challenging is tackling the stigma that Scots is just bad or poor English. That has to be tackled in order to help secure weans' confidence when they are speaking, so that they have the confidence to speak up in class as they enter their primary school years and can use their first language or native language as we take them through the whole school curriculum. That is something that I am really interested in. I am also aware that the Culture Committee in Westminster is starting an inquiry into the future of minority languages. The call for evidence for that has now closed, so the Committee will probably be taking evidence soon about minority languages, which is something that I will be following.

The goal, for me, is to promote and protect our language. We have also done a couple of things in the Scottish Parliament, such as creating a QR code on a wee poster which people can scan and it will take them to links to find Scottish words. We also suggest Scots words for

parliamentarians to use in Chamber debates and Committee work. We are taking forward some interesting work to promote and protect the Scots language in our Scottish Parliament.

I look forward to your report. I thank you for the work that you have done so far, and I will be keeping an eye on it. Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thanks very much, Emma. I call Joyce Watson MS.

Ms Joyce Watson MS:

Thank you. I found the report really interesting. Of course, in Wales, Welsh has equal status with English; we are a bilingual Parliament. We have a target of a million Welsh speakers, which will be delivered through schools, where pupils can take all their learning in the Welsh language if they choose. Every pupil in Wales will learn Welsh as part of their education in school. Utility bills are issued bilingually, as well as banking systems, and, through the Acts that we have brought forward, local supermarkets will have bilingual signage, road signs etc. It promotes the daily use of the language.

When we talk about the target of a million Welsh speakers, that will primarily be delivered through the education system of the next generation. Evidence found that a lot of school pupils were using the language in school but not in their communities, so there is a particular emphasis now on getting Welsh spoken as a working and living language and not a language where, in many cases, it is spoken in the classroom but not outside in the community.

Of course, the Welsh Parliament has invested very heavily in promotion, use and education. As parliamentarians, we have access to learning Welsh in the workplace, as do all the staff who work in Parliament. There is a huge drive to keep our language front and centre of who we are. When we talk about language, we must also talk about culture. It is not just a language; it is a culture. It is part of who you are. We are reclaiming, quite rightly, the Welsh place names. I am sure you have all heard about interventions and the Prime Minister saying that he is only

going to recognise Brecon Beacons as Brecon Beacons, and that is his choice, of course. The point is that it is about reclaiming the culture, because names matter and they tell you something about a place.

Thank you for your report. If anyone wants to look at a drive forward, look at Wales.

10.15 am

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Joyce.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Go raibh maith agat. Many books have been written about all our languages, and, even though it is a large report, well done to the Committee on managing to squash that down succinctly. Even as the report sits today, change is happening every single week. Last week, for example, in Belfast, the first official street signs as Gaeilge — in Irish— went up: communities can apply for and be granted Irish language street signs because of the new status that the language has in the Six Counties.

I am the Chair of the Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht and the Irish-speaking Community in the Dáil. We are debating legislation being brought forward by the Government to bring back elections to the authority that governs the Gaeltacht areas, which are the Irish-speaking areas that are mainly on the west coast, because they are under such threat of disappearing. The state has tried to protect those areas over many years, and it has failed and not failed in different measures. Over the decades, while the Gaeltacht areas have declined or reduced in size, the growth of the Irish language has mainly been outside of those areas, in the cities and elsewhere where there is a huge increase and a big demand for Irish language schools at primary and secondary level.

Languages, by themselves, and it does not matter which language, cannot survive unless they are spoken; otherwise, they exist only in books. Languages can be resurrected, as we have seen

in our history. Our visit yesterday to the Société Jersiaise showed that, even on a small island such as Jersey, a language can sustain itself and grow, if the people are proud of it and are willing to engage with it.

There are huge challenges, and the advantage, in some ways, is that we have learned from each other. In the time that I have spent as the Chair of our Committee, we have learned from what is happening in Wales, Scotland and elsewhere: we are not reinventing the wheel. During COVID, Aled Roberts, the then Welsh Language Commissioner came to the Committee with his insights. God rest his soul— he has since passed away. There is a new language commissioner whom I have not met. However, for someone who was raised speaking Irish in a city in Ireland, I agree with the Welsh approach on most issues, and I wish that we had the same approach in Ireland. The Welsh probably look to Ireland and say, “There is something that worked”.

We passed legislation last year that has not yet been fully assessed, and we will not assess how successful it has been for the Irish language. Already, however, because we introduced a minimum amount that all state bodies have to spend on promotion and advertising in Irish, we now see and hear the language on our radio and television a lot more. We have an Irish language channel, of course, but the language is now also heard on the smaller music and commercial radio channels. One of the ways to save a language is to have it heard. Once the language is heard, children, especially, believe that it is part of their culture. If they do not hear the language, it makes the work a little bit more difficult.

I welcome the report. I hope that everyone will read it, bring it back to their Parliament, engage with it and deliver on it.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Go raibh maith agat, Aengus.

Deputy Rob Ward:

I want to say a few words about what is happening in Jersey. It is interesting that you visited the Société Jersiaise. In 2019, my colleague, Deputy Tadier, brought an amendment to a proposition to make Jèrriais an official language of the States Assembly. There are very few Jèrriais speakers. I can feel the Greffier of the States looking at me right now, saying that I should take the lessons that are being offered. French is also an official language. Members take French lessons so that they can sometimes — rarely — speak French in the States Assembly. It adds a richness to what we do. Another undertaking has been to translate official signage into Jèrriais as signs are replaced. That was an economic decision more than anything else.

It is interesting that you mentioned music. My colleague will be pleased if I mention his band, Badlabecques — I have probably said that wrongly — who sing in Jèrriais. They have made records. One Member has undertaken a PhD in the language. There is a richness there. However, you are right about speaking the language: that is a difficult thing.

Once, I visited the Isle of Man. There is a Manx-speaking school, which is interesting. Whether we will ever get to the stage of having a Jèrriais-speaking school in Jersey, I do not know. Perhaps, French speaking might be the first step, because they are linked together.

Those are a few observations about the way in which a language stays alive. I have to say that I do not speak any Jèrriais, but, perhaps, after today, I should take up some of those offers.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Rob.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

I am the deputy presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament. I am sorry: I read the report yesterday, but I do not have it in front of me now, sadly. Very briefly, taking Brexit and, therefore, the loss of any potential EU funding to support minority languages into account, what consideration has been given in the report to the potential impact on the nations that

comprise the UK to actually do what they would wish to do to protect their minority languages, given that absence of EU funding now when other parts of the British Isles will, of course, be able to draw down such funding?

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Annabelle.

Seán, do you want to make a few concluding comments?

Mr Seán Crowe TD:

Yes. On the last point, we did look at the whole role of the EU in the promotion of languages. It was more about looking, particularly in the Irish context, at the importance of recognising the language in the EU and the funding streams that were coming forward for that. A certain amount of advertisement must be used within the EU structures. That, in itself, has been really positive for additional jobs. We heard evidence that it was difficult to try to get people to fill those positions.

I am glad that someone mentioned the fact that it adds a richness. That was quite clear in all the evidence that we had. It was disjointed because of the stoppages in between, but we met quite a lot of groups. There were all passionate about the language that they want to see being promoted and grow. They all stressed that it was not something that people should be afraid of or that they were trying to exclude people from. They want to include people in it.

We looked at figures in the evidence and census reports. One census record was of people who said that they were fluent in Irish, could speak the language or used it every day. It was based on those who were over three years of age but did not take account of children in those homes who were learning the language from the day that they were born.

I apologise on behalf of the Committee that there is not a report in front of you all. It is a lengthy report, but it is definitely worth reading. I will just give an example from the North of Ireland. They were talking about 50 nursery schools, 35 primary schools, five secondary schools for

Irish language education, 750 children entering Irish language education in the North, and so on. Those do not sound like huge numbers. However, that is coming from the point, 50 years ago, where there were no schools. If you put all those things in context, you can see the potential and the growth.

We are all impressed with the Welsh example and the fact that Wales has a target. People talk about the “rich tapestry” that we have with these languages, but, as Aengus Ó Snodaigh said, the importance is that, outside the school setting, there will be comfortable spaces where people will feel included.

It is important that the language is being used on television and radio. In Ireland, we have also had examples of pop-up Gaeltacht areas where people such as language activists could meet. They are examples that could probably be used in other jurisdictions. Hopefully, people will have time to go through the report and see how they can take it forward and adapt it to their own jurisdiction.

I thank all those who contributed. As I said in the opening session, we are still receiving reports, which is a pity because we could probably have made some more recommendations. The fact that we are trying to include as many people as possible is important as well. Thanks again for listening to me this morning, and apologies on behalf of Lord Dubs.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Seán. I ask the Assembly to formally adopt the report of Committee D.

Report agreed.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I commend again the members of Committee B and Committee D for their work on completing their reports. Our joint Clerks will arrange to send the reports to the British and Irish Governments, and we will ask the Governments to give us substantive responses to both reports.

As Karen and I indicated, we want more engagement with Committees of our respective Parliaments as well. That decision was made at our Steering Committee. The reports will be sent to the relevant Committees in each of our legislatures as well as to the Governments. Are we agreed?

Members indicated assent.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

That is a very good point to make; the Steering Committee did agree that.

COMMITTEES A AND C — UPDATES

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We will now hear from the other two Committees with short updates on the work that they are doing. I will start with the Chair of Committee A.

Senator Emer Currie:

Thank you, Chair.

Since the last plenary session, Committee A has made good progress on our new report on the common travel area (CTA), titled “Protecting the Common Travel Area in the Post-Brexit Era”. The Committee is considering citizens’ everyday lived experience of the CTA, which, of course, includes travel, access to employment, healthcare, education, social benefits and the right to vote in certain elections. The Committee is looking at how people who are neither British nor Irish citizens experience the CTA. These include visitors to our islands, as well as people living in border communities who are subject to new immigration rules, including the application of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and an electronic travel authorisation (ETA).

We also want to know how both Governments can protect the CTA in the context of Brexit. We have met the Home Office Minister, Lord Murray; Dr Bernard Ryan from the University of Leicester; Irish organisations in Britain; and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of the

House of Commons.

What is coming to the fore is the level of public knowledge — or lack of it — of the CTA, clarity on the rights available under the CTA, the lack of a mechanism to enforce rights, and concerns about the impact of the ETA on freedom of movement.

Next month, we will travel to Derry and Donegal to meet representatives from Altnagelvin Hospital and the North West Cancer Centre; Ulster University and Atlantic Technical University; the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance and Tourism Ireland; the North West Migrants Forum and the Committee on the Administration of Justice; and local chambers of commerce and public representatives. We are also going to seek evidence from the Government of Ireland, and we intend to bring that report to the plenary in the autumn. I want to thank the Members who made it here. We have the vice-chair, Nigel Mills MP, Éamon Ó Cuív TD and Senator Diarmuid Wilson. As always, our thanks go to the Clerks.

10.30 am

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Senator Currie. We will now hear an update from the Chair of Committee C.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Since the last plenary and the adoption of our report on the effects of the post-Brexit trading environment on UK-Irish trade, we have embarked on our new programme of work, which is looking at energy strategy and consumer energy policy. We started with a visit to Scotland, where we visited Glasgow and Dumfries and Galloway. I want to thank Emma Harper for facilitating our visit to her constituency. We met organisations there that support consumers who face fuel poverty and discussed the nature of fuel poverty there. We also met community organisations and representatives of the Scottish Government.

We also visited a community micro hydro project in Penpont to hear about the experience of

operating small-scale community energy facilities that might be replicated elsewhere in other jurisdictions. We visited Natural Power, a renewable energy consultancy and service provider in Castle Douglas, to hear about renewable energy strategy in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom, and the policy challenges that are facing the renewable sector. Yesterday, we took evidence from Jersey Electricity about the energy situation on this island. That was very informative, and we plan to go to England next month to have a look at renewable energy capacity and facility, and to discuss the impact of fuel poverty there.

That has been our work to date. I see that, in this section, we are to hear Government responses to our Committee reports. Should I give the response of both Governments to the Committee report that was adopted on the last occasion, or do you want to do that separately?

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We will do them separately.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

OK. That concludes my report.

ADDRESS BY THE JERSEY MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I welcome Deputy Jonathan Renouf, the Minister for the Environment here in Jersey, to give his address to our Assembly.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

Good morning, everyone. It is a pleasure to be here. I am Jonathan Renouf, the Minister for the Environment in Jersey, and I am going to talk to you about climate change this morning. By way of a bit of background, before I was a Minister, I was a television producer and I made science documentaries for the BBC. The very last science documentary that I made was David Attenborough's 'Climate Change - The Facts', which was quite a well-known programme.

When we were beginning the research for that programme, I remember that one of the team came to me and said, “Look, we’ve found a schoolgirl who is sitting outside the Parliament in Sweden and wants to go on strike to protest about climate change.” I said, “Hmm, I don’t think much is going to come of that.” Of course, that was Greta. I am going to bring that same level of wisdom and clarity to my ministerial role here in Jersey and, hopefully, maybe even improve. I have the ministerial brief for climate change and I will give you a brief summary of where we have go to with that. In the beginning, it was Deputy Rob Ward who persuaded the States to declare a climate emergency back in 2019. That was his proposition, and it was passed. That was, I suppose you could say, the beginning of Jersey’s journey to net zero. That was followed by a citizens’ assembly in 2021, which led, in turn, to the carbon-neutral road map, which was adopted last year. That commits the island to reduction targets of 68% by 2028-30, 78% by 2035 and net zero by 2050. The terms of the Paris agreement were also extended to Jersey in May last year.

The carbon-neutral roadmap is our lodestar, if you like: it guides what we are doing. To help us on our way, it established a climate emergency fund of £23 million for the period from now until 2025. Mostly funded by an above RPI increase on fuel duty, that gets us on our way.

The island's greenhouse gas inventory for 2021 has just been published. It is always in arrears, as I am sure you know, because of the complexities of accounting for carbon emissions. The overall story is that, since 1990, Jersey’s emissions have decreased by 46%. Our 2030 targets are pretty tough.

The largest sectors of emissions in Jersey are transport and buildings. A key point to understand about Jersey, if you do not understand it already, is that we have one huge advantage in our journey to net zero, but it is also a disadvantage in a strange way. Our electricity supply is decarbonised. We import our electricity from France, and it is a mixture of two thirds nuclear and one third hydro. All we have to do, essentially, is to switch transport and home heating to

electricity — job done. The problem is that the switch to the electricity supply is the easiest bit of the journey. No citizen has to do anything to achieve it. It is done by the electricity supply company making a decision to lay subsea cables, and, in a sense, the job is done for us. Now, we are at the bit where we need to persuade individual citizens to make changes to their lifestyles, purchases and so on. We have the basic building block in place, but there is a tough journey ahead of us because of that.

How are we getting on? If any of you read the local paper, you might have seen that, yesterday, we announced the launch of our home heating incentive scheme. That is an attempt to encourage people to replace oil and gas boilers with electric. We are supporting a suite of different technologies to achieve that — SLC pumps, electraflow boilers and so on — coupled with an advice service, and the incentive will also work to help to insulate homes. It is not that we will just switch boilers and not care about people's bills. The important part of the Jersey model for net zero is a just transition, which means that people, particularly low-income families, will not feel disadvantaged financially by making the transition. Insulation is a key part of that. In crude terms, the incentive is £5,000 with match funding from individuals, so it is £5,000 from the Government and up to £5,000 from the individual for a new boiler. If you are a low-income household, you get the full £10,000 from the Government. Those are the bare bones of the scheme. We will see how that goes.

One of the big jobs that we have had to do is to skill up people to implement that scheme in such a way that quality assurance is built into it. We do not want the scheme to be discredited by poor advice and people saying afterwards that the installations were bad or that the technology chosen was the wrong one for them. Getting that in place has been hard. We had to do a pilot scheme where we trained up some contractors, and, to be frank, we need more. We hope that, with the public launch of the scheme, more tradespeople will come on board and get trained up to implement it.

We are also developing an energy performance certificate tool. Islanders are currently able to receive a grant towards a home energy audit, so they can identify things that they can do quickly to improve their energy efficiency. The next stage will be policies on transport, which is the biggest single emitter in Jersey. Over 40% of our emissions come from transport: most of that comes from road transport, but a reasonably significant chunk of it comes from air transport. For our purposes, the carbon emissions of journeys on and off islands by boat or air count — not the onward journey, just the journey on and off the island — so we have to deal with that. We will again be developing a new incentive scheme to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles, along with a suite of policies around public transport and active travel. In fact, active travel is the highest priority on our list of things to do.

We are actively investigating and considering potential offshore wind development. The French have started building a 500 MW wind farm down to the south-west of us, and we see a significant opportunity for utility-scale electricity generation off our south-western coast. The conditions are good, and we have been approached by several different groups who want to invest in that. We are trying to work out what the best scheme would be. It is incredibly complex for a small jurisdiction to work out how we bring that forward with the consenting regimes and contractual arrangements that need to be gone into. Where you extract value, is it about driving stable and low electricity prices, or do you extract the money through taxation, royalties and so on? There are lots of difficult questions around that, but it is likely to be a very significant part of this Government's programme over the next year or two.

Finally, I sometimes ask myself what Jersey's unique contribution is to the global effort to decarbonise. Obviously, in pure carbon terms, we are a drop in the ocean, but, in a world of populism, bombastic statements and big claims, the simple business of getting on and delivering the incentives and the technologies that drive down emissions in a relentless and steady but quite calm and unpretentious way — just delivering — is one thing that we can do

on this island. Hopefully, it will be inspiring to other people to just see the job happening, almost in the background. Nothing pleases me more than just making an announcement and allowing people to get on with delivering the thing that we have just announced. That is what I would like to think that we can do in Jersey.

I have spoken about what I think is interesting, but I would love to hear your questions on issues that you would like to hear about, if I can answer them.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

Minister, thank you so much for your presentation this morning. I am the climate action spokesperson for my party, and I am a member of the Committee on Environment and Climate Action in Dublin, so I was very interested to hear what you had to say. Thankfully, you mentioned the area that I was going to touch on, which was offshore wind. It occurred to me that you have an abundance of opportunity in that area. I have been very critical of my Government's slowness to enable the delivery of offshore wind, although we have been making great progress of late, and I quite envy the position that you find yourself in, primarily because you have the ability to become energy independent very quickly. No doubt, all Jersey men and women will be proud of that when it happens.

The one thing that I will suggest, and I have had this conversation with a couple of jurisdictions over the years, is that you make sure that you hang on to the lines. If you are looking to investment firms to come in — undoubtedly you will be, because of the sheer cost of delivering and developing a wind farm — the bit that you absolutely must hold on to is the landing point and infrastructure that leads to such a farm. In our jurisdiction, the sheer cost of providing 5 gigawatts (GW) to 7 GW of offshore wind over the next seven years would run into very significant sums — multiple billions — and, for an island such as Jersey, I imagine that that

would be impossible.

I want to touch on something that I have observed — you did mention this — namely incentivisation for electric vehicles to replace the internal combustion engine (ICE) fleet. There is a very significant fleet of those cars on this island per head of population.

10.45 am

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

You have noticed.

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

That surprised me. I looked it up and was quite taken aback to learn that there is almost a car for everyone.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

More.

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

Is it more? OK. I have not seen electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, although I have not looked very hard. I have only seen two or three electric cars. I will make a suggestion, although you might be doing this already. In Ireland, we are supporting EV ownership through a grant of €5,000 for vehicles valued at less than €50,000. There is nothing for vehicles over that cost. In fact, we are tapering the support: it will drop to €3,500 in July and taper out of existence eventually. We did that for a number of reasons. First, the cost of electric vehicles, when they entered the market, was prohibitively expensive. They have dramatically reduced in cost, however. On an island such as this, with, I think, 400 kilometres of roads, it occurs to me that range anxiety will probably not be a problem here. I certainly see an opportunity for the island to excel in that regard and perhaps surpass the target in other countries such as the UK, Ireland and the rest of Europe to rule out purchases of ICE vehicles by 2035. You could undoubtedly

beat that, and the island will be better for it.

As I said, I am really passionate about this and was encouraged to hear what you had to say. I am envious, and I wish you well.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

Thank you very much. I will make a couple of very quick points. I would slightly quibble with the use of the word “quickly” in reference to wind farms, because it takes seven or eight years to get from the permission stage to the build stage. However, there is one big advantage in being relatively late to the party on wind power: it is now a highly investable proposition. The economics, in terms of the returns, are astoundingly good. We also now have bigger turbines, which means that we need fewer of them, and they turn slower. There are all sorts of benefits in terms of the impact on the environment and on wildlife, which are significant improvements. If we aimed for something like a 1 GW wind farm, we would be going quite big given the size of the island.

On EVs, yes, the whole thing depends on subsidies. People in Jersey are not convinced yet. There are also supply chain issues. In Jersey, we sit at the end of the supply chain, so we do not get first pick or first dibs on the relatively limited supply of EVs, particularly when it has been constrained over the last couple of years post COVID.

Our infrastructure is good and bad. We have quite a lot of public chargers actually, but they tend to be low-power ones. Without wishing to be too controversial, there are some problems with the Jersey Electricity app — My JE — and the customer experience, let us put it that way, of it. However, just last week, Jersey Electricity announced a big investment to improve that. The incentive scheme will look very similar to yours.

Mr Stephen Hammond MP:

Thank you for your presentation. Alan rightly identified that one of the big blocks is the scrappage scheme and the incentives. We have led several debates in the UK Parliament on EV

charging infrastructure, and that is the other big incentive. I hear what you say about that, but there are a number of things that one can do, with local by-laws often allowing private as well as public charging points. What thought have you given to that?

Secondly, you mentioned public transport and the need to shift people to it, but with relatively small and, shall we say, loosely interconnected communities, have you given any thought as to the regularity of transport and whether or not you have traditional public transport or on-demand systems?

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

Those are both very good points. When it comes to public transport, we are thinking about a range of things. The bus service is important, but there are also shared ownership models. We have a company over here called EVie, which has set itself up as a supplier of shared ownership and has done great work in terms of its model so far. We are going to try to turbocharge that, in some ways, over the next few months. We are working with EVie on how we do that, but, of course, we need a scheme that can also be open to other entrants.

We are looking at the possibility of our incentive scheme including support for EV charging. At the moment, Jersey Electricity, which is our electricity supplier, offers a scheme where it installs a charger for free if you sign up for, I think, three years to a low-cost tariff, which involves it managing demand; it does that so that you charge overnight, when it gets its electricity cheaply and has excess capacity. It likes that because it means that it can manage the potential increase in demand on the network that comes from EVs in a way that fits its supply. I think that that has seen reasonable uptake, but we will probably have to look at that to see whether we can get it to tweak it to make it more attractive. The question of how we get that charging infrastructure right is very much in our minds.

Ms Joyce Watson MS:

I am a member of the Environment Committee in Wales, and obviously we look at all things

to do with the environment, so I am really pleased that there is a report here today. The one thing that we do not have is time. The climate crisis is here and now; we are living it.

I am interested in a few things. In terms of energy use, our inquiry informed us that the biggest consumer of energy is our houses; 40% of energy use comes through the house. You mentioned the insulation of your existing properties. Yours are newer than ours; we have some of the oldest in the UK. We have made mistakes with insulating houses, and that has led to research and development pilot schemes. It has to be the right insulation for the right house; otherwise, you are just going to wrap a house up, which will produce huge issues.

Of importance is also the way in which you build houses and the skills that are needed to do so. I am also a founding member and chair of the all-party group on construction. Women are mostly not in the construction industry, but the industry and the jobs in it are evolving and changing. We are all challenged with — I have seen it around your island today — a skills shortage, so you cannot afford to leave 50% of your potential workforce out of that market. I bring that to the table, and that has to feed back in to schools. We have just introduced a GCSE in the construction industry to give people a taster of it.

We are bringing through a Clean Air Bill. I walked up your town very early this morning. I saved myself money, because the shops were shut. There are two things that go together: if you are going to have clean air, you have to do something about transport. We are bringing through a Clean Air Bill, but we also have active travel. In every built-up area, which will be most of your island, we have reduced the speed limit to 20 mph. I know that you have that in most places already. It is also about the type of car that you allow on your roads, and about a greater use of our buses, which has to be affordable.

In planning any new build, there are high expectations about using grey water and making the house as energy efficient as possible by putting on affordable solar panels and, in some cases, installing a heat pump. Those *[Inaudible.]* You have recognised things that we have taken

notice of.

It was interesting to hear from Alan Farrell, who has gone now, about the infrastructure that is needed to create offshore wind, which would apply in your case. In our case, it would be the national grid, which could probably just about take it. If everybody is going to use electricity, you need to have the infrastructure that allows that to happen. I do not know how you are placed to do that.

One of the things that we do not allow is investment in fossil fuels, because to invest your money in fossil fuels is to keep investing in the very industry that produced the climate crisis in the first place. We do not allow that in any case, and we have made a clear commitment to that. That also means disinvesting in pensions that are invested in fossil fuel production. I do not know where you are on that.

11.00 am

I am interested in whether your planning system takes notice of where you are building, what infrastructure there is around that and whether you can catch a bus instead of taking your car — you have an awful lot of cars, as we do in the UK.

I am also interested in the EV infrastructure. I cannot remember a Government ever investing in petrol stations or diesel stations, but there seems to be a conversation about who invests in the charging infrastructure. Who would gain from that? Would the public purse be paying substantial amounts of money from which private firms will gain? That is another question.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

Wow, there was quite a lot there. By a wonderful quirk of fate, I am also the Planning Minister in Jersey, so I have some responsibilities in that area. Indeed, things such as rainwater collection are very much on my radar. We also have a housing crisis in Jersey, and we are trying to build houses at an affordable price, so you always have that tension.

Thank you very much for all those comments, particularly on the issue of women in the

industry, which I take on board. I did not mention that, and it is a very valid point. I agree with almost everything you said.

Deputy Al Brouard:

Thank you to Deputy Renouf for his introduction and speech. I am Al Brouard from Guernsey, which is just a few miles north of Jersey; you have probably heard of us — just about. How do you mitigate the risk of reliance on France for your main electricity needs? We have the same issue in Guernsey.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

Of course. The key issue is wind farms. The policy on energy, whether you call it “energy dependence” or “energy sovereignty”, is evolving. I am expressing a personal view here as much as anything. If we had a 1-GW wind farm off our shores, it would produce far more than is needed at peak demand. Our peak demand is 170 MW in the middle of winter on a cold, dark night. It averages more like 70 MW to 80 MW, which we would be way over in normal circumstances, so we would have to export quite a lot. We cannot build that without a power purchase agreement with France or somewhere else, but it would have to go through France. We would expect to sell through France and to have our own supply as well. In normal times, nobody wants to rely on one particular source of electricity, so the expectation is that we would still have a contract to buy from France. We would supply some ourselves, and we would buy some. If there were to be an interruption of supply from France, for whatever reason, we would have the option of relying entirely on our wind farm. When the wind is not blowing, for all the people who worry about that, we also have fossil fuel backup to fuel the island in an emergency. The other point to make about the 1 GW is that, of course, it would be future-proof, in the sense that, even if we were to double or treble our consumption of electricity as we decarbonise, we would still have headroom with that size of wind farm.

Mr Éamon Ó Cuív TD:

Thank you for your presentation. One thing that struck me was the small number of roads on this island. In other places, I have seen people buying hybrid cars, even second-hand hybrids, bringing them in and running them in electric mode virtually 100% of the time. Presumably, there are ro-ro ferries from here to France and England, and people therefore take their cars outside the island quite frequently. When they do so, if they need to use petrol mode, they can, but they are saving on the island, which means that you are virtually 100% electric. That also means that people who cannot afford to buy a new car could get a second-hand car and still be virtually 100% electric.

My second question relates to the fact that, if you have an electric vehicle of any type, you need to have home charging. Home charging is much more efficient because you can use surplus electricity at night at a much cheaper rate. That is what makes it economical. One of the problems that seems to arise is that, if your house is in a village rather than a town, you cannot have the charging cable coming across the footpath. It is the same thing with apartments. How do you overcome the problem of providing people with home charging? It is fine when you have your own driveway at your house and what you do is your own business. Have you given any thought to that?

I have one comment on wind energy and one on solar. For wind energy, every country is developing its permissions and how you get your fair share out of it. It is quite complex, and I agree with that. Presumably, other jurisdictions would be willing to share knowledge with you. The information on how it is done and what the deals and arrangements are is openly available, certainly in our jurisdiction and, I presume, everywhere. It seems to me that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. It would be very attractive for an island to be energy independent and, in fact, to be an exporter of energy. One thing that was not mentioned is solar and its potential. You have a lot more sunshine and light here on the island. Has solar been looked at?

Finally, presumably, the ferries in and out of the island use fossil fuels at the moment. Has

much thought been given to that? It is a challenge to make our own offshore islands carbon neutral. The boat services are a challenge. The air services are obviously a challenge. Boats being on the water makes that a little easier, however. Has any thought been given to hydrogen power or electric power for boats? How will you deal with that challenge?

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

There is some meaty stuff there. I will make just a couple of comments on each point, because each one could be a little talk in itself.

On home charging, one of the things that we are doing is consulting on what we call supplementary planning guidance, which is how we evolve the planning system as we go along and add to the island plan a bit. One point in that is that any underground parking or parking for a large-scale development will have to supply cabling to enable all those parking spaces to be used for EV charging. That will become a requirement for new developments. That is one thing that we can do.

The question on hybrids is a good one. It is a live policy debate. The extent to which we incentivise the purchase of EVs and hybrids and whether, when we come to ban sales of conventional cars, that will also include hybrids are live policy discussions. We have a little bit of room because the earliest that will happen is 2030, so we will wait and see.

Solar is interesting. I am a huge fan of solar and have solar panels. Offering incentives for solar is difficult on an island on which we already have a decarbonised electricity supply, because you are just displacing one form of zero-carbon electricity with another. It is therefore hard to justify, with limited funds, subsidising that. I think that there is a case for it, because people's behaviour changes. If you get solar panels, you almost always get an EV. Why would you not? It means that, for six months of the year, you get free travel, basically. There is a case for it, but it is a tougher case to make than that for just directly swapping one technology for another. Ferries is an active area of consideration. It is not just down to us, because it is private ferry

companies that run those routes, but I know that they are investigating the potential from Northern Ireland. They have had discussions around a potential electric ferry. At the moment, an electric ferry would be at the very limit of range, and, given that you do not generally like to run at the limit of your range in stormy waters and so on, it is probably not viable. Ports of Jersey, our arm's-length organisation that runs the airport and the harbour, is also looking at hydrogen, and, of course, if there were a source of wind power coming in with surplus electricity, that might also become an option.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for providing your contribution to such an interesting discussion about the approach that Jersey is planning to take. I have a couple of points.

On the solar issue, I get what you say, but there are a couple of things there. First, it would not just be displacement of decarbonised electricity supply but potentially impact on the security of your supply, as opposed to your having to go back to France in times of need. I am not quite sure what the VAT situation would be with roof solar panels, but perhaps it would be an incentive in itself to consider that.

On the issue of the green hydrogen, what concrete plans do you have to see that as an important part of the future mix? Presumably, that would lead to potential export opportunities with battery storage.

Finally, on boiler replacement, it is interesting that you are going with electric boiler replacement and not heat pumps.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

No, both.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

You are going with both.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

All sorts.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

I am sorry. I misheard. That would make more sense. What is the likely timescale that you anticipate for a successful roll-out, factoring in the difficulties that you have mentioned around skill shortages at the moment? Thank you.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

Those are some very good points. On solar, we have the goods and services tax (GST), which is our version of VAT. I think that that is what you are asking about. The buzz phrase is that it is low, stable and something or other. John will know.

A Member:

Low, broad and simple.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

That is it: “low, broad and simple”. I have not quite got the lingo yet.

The point with that is that GST is charged on everything, and, that way, we are able to keep it low. It is 5%. It might therefore be the difference, but I feel that it is probably not the thing that is going to shift it. It would not have shifted my decision on it. We need to think about solar panels in another way in Jersey. We do not have much space to put them in fields. There are some attempts being made to do that at the moment, but, really, we are about roof space here, and that is more expensive in general.

Regarding green hydrogen, Jersey is such a good type case for electricity because of our on-island transport, with such short distances and so on. The need for hydrogen for that technology and, indeed, for home heating, when we have a grid that, give or take a few problems here and there in far-flung parts of the island, should be up to it, is such that you would go for hydrogen.

My view is that, given the extraordinary inefficiency of the process, you go for hydrogen when there is no realistic alternative. That, to me, means aviation, potentially, and shipping. That view might change when we get massive amounts of electricity — if we get massive amounts of electricity — but that is my view at the moment.

The target for the timescale for home heating is 1,000 conversions within, I think, the next two years, which does not sound like much. We have close to 20,000 boilers to convert. If, however, you do the maths on how many we therefore need to do a day, it is well over one a day, every day between now and that time. We do not have the capacity to do that at the moment. We hope that the capacity will ramp up, now that the scheme has been introduced. The idea is to start low but go high.

Mr David Rees MS:

I have a simple question. Solar power is obviously the big issue. It is one of the ways in which individual homes can be served with energy with lower costs, and, by that, I mean, lower running costs not lower initial costs. In my constituency, energy is a huge challenge for many families. Every effort that we can deploy to help those families will be important. I have seen in St Helier a lot of high-rise building happening. Do you have planning requirements that ensure that such buildings have panels on their roofs, so that those units, which may be housing, can provide lower energy costs if people move into the properties?

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

You touch on a really interesting debate on the island. I did not go into it in an earlier answer, but perhaps I should explain a little more. We still have relatively low electricity prices in Jersey. Jersey Electricity, the company that supplies our electricity, hedged — it does a series of rolling hedges — so our prices are still at about 18p per kilowatt-hour, whereas in the UK it is broadly double that. That is with the price caps. The question is whether we need to do as you suggest to give people their own electricity. What is the payback period? It is a different

payback period if you are paying 36p per kilowatt-hour as opposed to 18p per kilowatt-hour. As much as I am a huge fan of solar power, I feel that the economic case is not as strong in Jersey. I just cannot justify putting government money into it.

11.15 am

You asked about planning and why we do not put panels on buildings that are being built. The answer is that it is expensive to do so, with relatively little benefit, from developers' point of view, being derived. They are going to be giving a service to the people who come after them. Jersey Electricity will argue, with justification, that if more people produce their own electricity, it will sell fewer units but will still have to maintain the same infrastructure, so the unit cost will need to rise to maintain that infrastructure with fewer sales. That is a policy tension, and we have to make a judgement about it. At the moment, a lot of people are installing solar panels off their own bat, so we are not far off the tipping point. The question of whether we offer more incentives for that is partly a question about our relationship with the electricity company, which is, I think, 62% owned by the Government. That is an ongoing discussion, let us say.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Minister, once again, thank you sincerely for your remarks on policy and your detailed responses to each of the questions that was taken. Again, this debate could have been had in any of our legislatures. It came up yesterday, when your Government colleagues were here, among the common interests, concerns and challenges that we have. That was very evident from the discussions, your contributions this morning, and the questions and comments from our colleagues from all legislatures, right across our British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly area.

Deputy Jonathan Renouf:

As somebody mentioned, we are drawing on expertise from outside. Jersey is too small to start reinventing the wheel. Our policy team is small, but it draws on expertise. I am very happy to

establish links with any Members here who feel that they have something to contribute.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

One thing that we mentioned earlier is that we probably do not do enough work by way of interaction with the relevant Committees in our own Parliaments. I know that Alan Farrell is a very active member of our Committee on Environment and Climate Action at home. Perhaps linkages could be established among the various Committees and Governments' Ministers.

Minister, once again, sincere thanks for your contribution here today. *[Applause.]*

We will now take a short break. I ask colleagues to return for 11.30 am, please.

The sitting was suspended at 11.18 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.38 am.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We will now commence our political debate on the following motion approved by the Steering Committee:

That this Assembly has considered recent political developments.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

I move the motion.

I will open the debate and general discussion on political matters that are of interest. I am intrigued to see what will come up. Minister Steve Baker said that he is looking forward to the row after all the consensus.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Brendan. I now call on Members to make contributions on the subject of the motion. As I said, I ask Members to keep their contributions as succinct as possible to ensure that all those who wish to speak have an opportunity to do so. It is important to hear the

range of views, but, as I said, the debate will end at 12.25 pm, and I will apply time limits if I have to.

The first person who has caught my eye is John Lahart TD.

Mr John Lahart TD:

Time me at 90 seconds: I will be happy with that, Co-Chair. One thing that really struck me is that, when I talked informally at dinner and at different breaks to Jersey Ministers, they told me that Jersey, with a population of 103,000, has the same challenges as Ireland and the UK over shortages of doctors, significant housing pressures and demographic pressures. I found that fascinating. It does not matter how small or how big your country is, as that is the way of the world at the moment.

The other things to mention are the convulsions globally and how those are impacting on us all; the changes that that perhaps requires some of us to examine; and the sensitivities around a lot of those interrelationships among the countries, between these islands and between the United Kingdom and the European Union. I found it all a very valuable interaction.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. What a great example of brevity.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

I will not be quite as brief as that, but I will not take long. I want to raise again the issue, as we should do in this place, of Northern Ireland. Last week, Steve Baker introduced in the House of Commons the Northern Ireland (Interim Arrangements) Bill. It has an innocuous title, but it effectively means that there is now quite a slow drift towards direct rule in Northern Ireland because of the inability, or lack of ability, to form a Government and an Assembly in Northern Ireland. Effectively, time is running out, in that negotiations will have to be intensified considerably over the next few weeks and months. On Thursday of this week, there are local government elections in Northern Ireland, and the results of those elections could be very

interesting, but, whatever happens, the parties involved cannot just continue like this. Ultimately, if no resolution is found within a reasonable number of weeks and months, the rules that govern the establishment of the institutions in Northern Ireland, by agreement, will possibly have to be changed.

We had a very good commemoration of the Good Friday Agreement some weeks ago, in which this body took part, and there is a huge amount of optimism still in Northern Ireland, but there is an awful lot of work left to do.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Someone else must want to catch my eye.

Ms Emma Harper MSP:

I am interested in what has been said about the issues around the lack of healthcare professionals, GPs and nurses. We face the same issues in Dumfries and Galloway in the south of Scotland and in wider Scotland as there are in Jersey. The real challenges of health and social care as our population gets older is part of my work as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. We added sport to the Committee's portfolio because we know about the direct links between well-being, mental health and physical health, and that parity is required when we consider physical health. It is not just sport but all physical activities. Those are issues that I have been focusing on, and it is evident that you have similar issues here. We have just completed an inquiry into health inequalities that highlighted that young women do not participate in sport and physical activity in the way in which men continue to do. That is another piece of work that has been done in the Scottish Parliament.

When we looked at the need for more GPs, nurses and medical staff, the Scottish Government created a graduate entry to a medicine programme, whereby people in healthcare with a primary healthcare degree could have a more truncated GP training. That approach focuses on providing GPs for rural areas. The Scottish graduate entry medicine —ScotGEM — programme will take

registered nurses, pharmacists and physios — again, those with a primary degree — and help support GP training. Does that have the knock-on effect of a reduction in pharmacists, physios, nurses and even ambulance drivers, because you are taking them from one pool of employment and putting them into another? That is part of the training that is happening, however.

Another thing in which I have been interested is in focusing on the well-being economy and how we support people post-COVID. The stigma around mental health has reduced, so more people are saying, “I’m not well”, or, “I’m not in the best mental health”. It is a good thing that the stigma has reduced, but it means that we need to work on social prescribing and supporting people before they get into a crisis. Issues that were highlighted in evidence to our Committee include the fact that it has been noted that, if people live near brownfield sites or derelict buildings — in the post-industrial society, a lot of the mills in the south of Scotland closed — it affects the mental health of communities.

11.45 am

I am interested in what can be done with brownfield sites. There are the issues of whether we build on brownfield land versus greenfield sites and of VAT or no VAT being applied on building on greenfield sites rather than on brownfield sites, where 28% VAT is still applied. In Scotland, we cannae control that, because VAT is nae devolved. It may be interesting — if the Minister is listening from behind us — for that point to be taken back and for us to look at the potential for changing the VAT that is applied to renewing, renovating and repairing brownfield sites, especially in urban areas where we are desperately in need of housing.

Those are some of the issues that are of interest to me. When coming from the airport to the hotel, I did not see any brownfield sites or vacant, abandoned, derelict buildings. I did, however, see a lot of scaffolding and construction, which seems very positive for the economy of Jersey. Those are just a couple of things that I have noted on this BIPA visit, which I have really enjoyed. I want to put on record my thanks to everybody who organised it.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you, Emma. A big piece of work was done on women's participation in sport when I was at the then Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. That was part of the sport strategy and led to the This Girl Can campaign. Evidence of all sorts was found there, so it might be worth digging it out. That was back in 2016-17, and the campaign has some really good stuff about why girls do not stay in sport and the barriers to participating in it.

Ms Emma Harper MSP:

OK. I will look for that. Thank you.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

Co-Chair, if you will indulge me, I should perhaps preface my remarks by saying that I am probably speaking wearing my MSP hat and not my Deputy Presiding Officer hat.

I want to echo what Lord Murphy said. I am fairly new to BIPA. I have thoroughly enjoyed all the sessions and found them fascinating. I do not profess to be any expert on the subject of what is happening on the island of Ireland. A few things, however, have really stayed with me on my journey with BIPA. One was the session that we, as a Steering Committee, had in Belfast with the four academics. Those specialists in their areas of expertise talked about the impact that the impasse has had on the progression of social policy in Northern Ireland. That really struck me, because a lack of progress with social policy is not about little things, because those are big things in people's lives. As a Scot, it is very hard to imagine how that can be, because we progress social policy issues every day of the week. That is also the case, of course, for Members from other jurisdictions. With all the bombast, words and fury, it struck me that the day-to-day impact of the lack of progress is enormous. I worry that it is taking away from younger generations' life chances and will be very difficult to get back.

Another thing struck me when I had the privilege of attending the event at Stormont on Good Friday. There was a performance by young people from the Belfast School of Performing Arts

of a John Farnham song that I had forgotten about, 'You're the Voice', and two lines that they sung struck me:

"We're not gonna sit in silence

We're not gonna live with fear".

They belted that song out, and they made their voices absolutely crystal clear. As I said, I very much echo Lord Murphy's comment that this has gone on too long. The real danger is that the lives of future generations will be as blighted as the lives of their parents and grandparents. Surely, to us as Members of BIPA, that is simply not acceptable.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thanks, Annabelle. I remember that meeting, and it was very powerful. The point about the fact that children starting university this year have not had effective and functioning devolved government for the whole of their secondary education was powerful to me. A judge said that the lack of development of social policy in education throughout the whole of their secondary school education was shocking.

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

I associate myself with what Annabelle has said and, indeed, with your remarks, Co-Chairperson.

I do not want to make any particular point other than to thank our hosts for their generosity and time. It has been a lovely visit. I am delighted to come back to the island after 20 years, and a lot has changed for the better.

I will first take the opportunity to commend Committee D, on which I sit, on the work that it has done. Seán Crowe presented on the work earlier. I am sure that Alf would have made significant contributions to the discussion had he managed to get here, but Seán did a good job. There is a lot of work to do on fostering the cultural and heritage elements of our islands, but our languages are probably one of the most important aspects of that cultural identity.

In thanking our hosts, I reference the visit to the Société Jersiaise and the discussion with the chief translator for the island, in what was a fascinating hour or so. In my closing comments, I note the extraordinary amount of work that we as a parliamentary Assembly must do to encourage Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly to participate in our plenary sittings and Committee business. I have noted, over my two and a bit years of membership, a severe lack of engagement and presence, and that worries me. Although it may not be the same sort of attitude as that which has led to an Assembly not being formed at Stormont, there is no particular challenge to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland in attending a BIPA conference. On that basis, I find it somewhat confusing that the unionist majority in Northern Ireland do not participate in this Assembly. I want to note that for the record and perhaps for discussion at a later stage.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you, Alan.

Senator Emer Currie:

Thank you, Chair. I, too, want to build on what Annabelle Ewing has said. We had an Oireachtas meeting last week with the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and the Economic and Social Research Institute, which presented very stark figures indicating that there is now a productivity gap between the North and the South of approximately 40%. That comes after being on a par in 2001. We have seen Ireland's productivity increasing by about 0.2% per annum, while Northern Ireland's is falling by approximately 1.1%.

Not only is that a stark overview of the last 20 years, but to put that in the context of where things are now, it is very worrying. I am delighted that we had the twenty-fifth anniversary event in Stormont. I, too, was at Queen's, and I described it as like Disneyland for political nerds. You just walked around meeting so many amazing people whom you had read about

and with whom you connect regularly now. However, I am concerned about young people's connection to the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. We had George Mitchell's fantastic speech, and young people were engaging with that. I worry whether, certainly in the South, young people really have the connection to the Good Friday Agreement that they need. Reports like this are worrying.

We are all on the same page. It is about getting Stormont up and running, but we need to do a job of reconnecting people to the institutions and the value of the Good Friday Agreement in everyday life and not just when it is about crises.

Mr Frank Feighan TD:

I just wanted to thank everybody for a very successful plenary event. It is great to get to Jersey and to meet so many great friends again. Sometimes we can undervalue the importance of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. We have so many friends and colleagues that, when COVID happened, and even when Brexit happened, we were able to lift the phone, talk to one another, tease out issues and work together. We can do a lot more.

There are two issues. I wanted to go to Stormont, but I was new to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. When I rang to ask whether I could go, I was told that it was full. With hindsight, I should have got into the car and driven up to Stormont. We need to do a little bit more for our members. Emer Currie summed up the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement correctly. It was just very important. I did not get any invitation to the anniversary event, not from the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, the Good Friday Agreement Implementation Committee or the Taoiseach's office. We need to look out for one another so that these things will not happen. I am one of those people who wants to be there and to participate without causing any fuss.

There is one last issue regarding the ESRI report. People can talk about economics and about GDP or GNI or whatever, but the one stark omission from that report is that, over the last 25

years, if you were born in the Twenty-Six Counties, you will live 1.4 years longer than you would in Northern Ireland. That is data that you cannot challenge. There is a huge discrepancy, and this has happened in the last 20 years. This data, which we cannot challenge, should be very worrying for the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. We need to look at trying to remedy those very awful statistics, which have come about over 20 years since the Good Friday Agreement.

Thank you very much, Co-Chairs and everybody, for a very successful plenary event.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you, Frank. One of the things that came out of our recent Steering Committee meeting was the desire to have more of those special ad hoc meetings. We all felt that the Belfast meeting — it was such a shame that you were not there — was such a great event. We had the excuse there of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, but we need to find more excuses. We have got so much from visiting another component part of BIPA in this plenary event over the past two days.

Mr Stephen Hammond MP:

Co-Chair, like everybody else, I thank you and your Co-Chair and all the officials. This is the first plenary session that I have attended, and it has been a great pleasure. One of the things that has struck me as I have reflected is the relevance of some of the reports, the details of which we have listened to. John Lahart TD presented his report this morning, and we will face that issue as an even bigger challenge through the second half of this year. The public in all jurisdictions will experience war fatigue. We have already noticed how the war climbs down quite quickly in the publicity ratings. In the second half of the year, there will be a need for international cooperation to support Ukraine, and, in that regard, it will be important for those who are still inside the European Union and those outside the European Union to ensure that Germany's role is absolutely still key in the European response. Furthermore, in the second

half of the year particularly, you will see some tensions where the US expects more out of NATO, and NATO will have to consider quite carefully its response. If we allow the Ukrainians to be forced to sue for a bad peace, that, because of the international ramifications that it would have, would be the very worst thing for world peace. Therefore, this morning's discussion about how we cooperate and make that real was really important.

I was struck by Deputy Morel's contribution yesterday, particularly the whole discussion about labour market inflexibility, which, I think, we will increasingly find to be a challenge. Comments about who you train, what you train them in and what implications that might have for your desire for how your economy is structured will require a lot more, deeper thought. The issue of intergenerational unfairness and the intergenerational issue about who is working and who is not are issues that we should certainly consider in future.

I think that there ought to be a note of optimism. I particularly congratulate my colleague Minister Baker on all the work that various Members here have done and that members of the Government have done on the Windsor Framework. That is hugely important for Northern Ireland, Great Britain, the United Kingdom and, obviously, relations with Ireland. If the UK understands that, as some of my colleagues understand it, this is the chance — if you listen to the diplomatic community in London, a number of whom I see, you will know that they talk about this being the chance — for us in the UK to rebuild trust. I think that that is hugely important for Assemblies like this, where we can work even more closely together, and for the UK's position in the world. I know that Minister Baker will grasp that opportunity, but I hope that all colleagues in our Government will do the same.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

I will now bring in my Co-Chair, Brendan Smith TD.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Karen. Reference was made to the meeting that the Steering Committee

had with the provost and senior colleagues in Ulster University when we had the plenary session in Stormont. One thing that struck me that day was the difficulties that there are in the childcare and preschool education sector. It was really frightening to hear that an updated and new strategy has not been put in place in well over 20 years. If children are not getting an opportunity at that stage, they will struggle later on in life, as we know. Educational attainment for some communities is not near the level that it should be in Northern Ireland nor in other communities right across these islands. We discussed previously the possible themes for further investigations and reports. Maybe educational attainment across the islands is one. It is a very broad subject and one that we could narrow down to have a focus on. It is an issue that we should give some consideration to, because, that night in Ulster University, the message that we got was stark about the lack of investment in our youngest natural resource, our human resources. It is an area that we might consider in the future.

12.00 pm

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you. That is a very good point. Access to education is also important. In Cavan, we heard about the difficulties for students taking A levels to access Trinity College Dublin because Trinity is looking at the International Baccalaureate. Therefore, a high level of qualifications is required for students taking A levels, which will be restrictive. If we do not have educational exchanges and opportunities, we will grow apart rather than growing together, and that simply is not what any of us wants.

Mr Brendan Howlin TD:

I will make a couple of brief remarks. The first is that your Co-Chair talked about focusing on education and educational attainment. Two reports were published by international bodies this morning, looking at literacy and numeracy across 57 countries. I am very glad to say that the Republic of Ireland is second only to Singapore in both literacy and numeracy for primary

school children. We rejoice in that.

This is why I really asked to speak. It is important — I am glad that this point was made by Annabelle — that we have on our agenda and discuss the most difficult issue that will cause a problem for all our peoples. We can talk about cooperation on so many fronts, but the non-functioning of the Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland is the most serious issue, and we should certainly have regard to and make mention of it. It probably is not proper for us, and my first remarks about disparity were not, I hope, made in a boastful way. The ESRI report shows the disparity. We do not rejoice in that. It is a real concern.

You can dismiss it as leprechaun economics, but the Irish economy is doing very well, and our growth last year, in terms of GDP, was 12·2%. Even stripping out international investments, it was 8·2% last year, and we expect it to be about 5·5% this year. The Irish economy is doing well, but we want the all-island economy to do well. A disparity in productivity of 40% is purely an economic measure, but the health stat and life expectancy measures are fundamental and are a cause of concern. All of that disparity between North and South has happened in the past 20 years, and part of that must be due to the continual disruption of proper administration. We need to face that directly, because it is not an abstract point. That is what, I think, Annabelle was saying. It has a social consequence, which we heard about in the presentations in Belfast. That social consequence will continue, and that disparity will continue. I imagine that, if you did an analysis between Northern Ireland and other regions of the United Kingdom — maybe those studies have been done — you would find a similar and growing disparity, caused by the lack of political oversight of social services in Northern Ireland.

I am very glad that you made that point, Annabelle, and I thank you. Not only was it the most important issue to raise, but it was really important that it be raised by somebody who is not from the island of Ireland.

Mr Éamon Ó Cuív TD:

I join in thanking our hosts. We have had a very enjoyable and useful meeting, and how well it was organised is a great tribute to them. It is unfortunate that the fog came down on Sunday, but our hosts had no control over that.

Like everybody else, I totally regret that Stormont is not functioning. The greater concern is that this is not the first time; it has happened repeatedly, going right back to when the Good Friday Agreement was agreed. We have to restore it with its present rules; we cannot change the rules halfway through the game. We have to try to persuade all parties, including the DUP, to take part in the Assembly. However, it is definitely not in anyone's interests that this ever happen again, and I hope that, once the Assembly is restored, everybody — all parties — will get around a table and put structures in place, once and for all, that ensure that the Assembly and a devolved Government work. I do not think that most of us can imagine how you could go ahead without a working assembly, parliament or whatever. Certainly, from our own case, I know that, if you leave it for a certain period, you run out of money. When the social welfare cheques stop, that is a great concentrator of the mind. You have to sort it out and get on with it.

When Stormont is back, there will be an awful temptation to say, "Look, leave it. Everything's fixed", but, this time, we have to say, "No, we can never allow this to happen again". The structures need to be changed, but we cannot do that without all of the parties and everybody agreeing to change. That is key. We need to get it back first and then make changes, but change must happen.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thanks, Éamon. That was a message that we heard in Belfast over and over again: it needs to be back first, and then changes need to be made so that it cannot happen again.

Mr Nigel Mills MP:

I was not going to speak, but we still have some time, so we might as well use it. It has been a

pleasure to be at a BIPA conference for what feels like the first time in a few years when we have not spent half the time squabbling about Brexit. If there is a real success of the Windsor Framework, it is probably that the discussion has moved on to how we make the relationship work between the countries, rather than squabbling about exactly what it ought to look like and having a bit of politics around it. That is probably a testament to the fact that the agreement was the right thing that was done in the right way. I think that we all know that, if we can improve the level of trust and cooperation between all the parties, we can gradually take away the other sharp edges and improve it further. Only by building trust and working together can we focus on the areas that need it.

Sadly, we have not managed to not discuss the Northern Ireland Executive not functioning. That has been a consistent theme of ours. I am a little more negative than I probably would have been in the past because all of the disagreements in the past have, largely, been about things that were in the Executive or Assembly's control, and, if the parties came to an agreement, things could have been made to work. Now, however, we have one party, or a series of parties, that want something different from a negotiation between the EU and the UK that neither the EU nor the UK want to have a negotiation about, so it is not easy to see where any change is going to come from that drives a different outcome, unless the DUP can be given a different soft landing.

I am not entirely sure what that is, other than, presumably, some level of compromise on the DUP's part. If the strongest case that it has is that, effectively, the protocol changed Northern Ireland's constitutional position without the consent of the people, perhaps the only solution is to get the consent of the people. I think that the people of Northern Ireland would vote overwhelmingly for the Northern Ireland protocol as amended by the Windsor Framework. If taking the consent issue off the table is the only way in which to get some progress, maybe that would be a better outcome than a series of elections.

If we cannot find some progress soon, we will have to try something different to move the dynamic; otherwise, we will be here in six months' time and a year's time with the same frustrations. We need to find a soft landing for people, but we cannot wait forever.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

No one else is catching my eye. I must have scared you all into talking quickly and keeping your remarks short. We have finished before time.

I add my thanks to our hosts here in Jersey for all your hospitality, the fantastic organisation and the great time that we have all had. It has been a real treat and honour to visit Jersey and come here together to discuss the things that are so important to all of us and the people whom we represent.

We have heard a different perspective here in Jersey. We have all been able to think slightly differently, perhaps, about our own issues and problems in our parliaments because we have heard from others, including Ministers, who represent a different part of these islands. I am very grateful.

I also pay particular tribute to the Clerks, the secretariat and everybody who makes this possible. As Co-Chair, I assure you that it is a much easier job than it perhaps appears, because there are people who do all of the hard work behind the scenes, which allows my Co-Chair and I to sit at a table and appear to know what we are talking about. Brendan clearly knows what he is talking about, but I find it much easier to be told what I am talking about. Thank you very much to all of you for all of the arrangements and support that you give us.

I now conclude the general debate that we have just had and hand over to Brendan.

ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Karen. As our Co-Chair said, our business is now concluded. On behalf of you all, I would like to thank our guest speakers, the UK secretariat for its support in

organising this plenary session, the staff at the Radisson Blu Waterfront Hotel and everyone else who helped to make this sixty-fourth plenary session such a successful event and meeting. I also want to highlight and give special thanks to Vanessa Page from the local Parliament here in Jersey, the States Assembly. *[Applause.]* She did all the work to put the necessary arrangements in place with very little secretariat support. You deserve great credit. We are very grateful to you, Vanessa. Our thanks must also go to Members of the States Assembly for the wonderful hospitality that we have had since Sunday evening. Their contributions and those of members of the Government have made this plenary event so worthwhile.

I also want to echo Karen's words of thanks to our joint Clerks, Regina and Martyn, and their support staff who are here with us from the different legislatures. We know the huge amount of work that goes into preparing for a plenary meeting, supporting the Committees in their deliberations and arranging for them to meet. That work is done across a number of legislatures. Often, we underestimate the work that is involved in pulling all our Committees together, putting reports together and organising the plenary sittings. We are very appreciative of the work of all who contributed to putting the plenary event in place and of the preparatory work that was carried out in advance.

12.15 pm

It is unfortunate that we lost some Members who were unable to join us today. That was outside anybody's control or arrangements. When we have our plenary meeting in the autumn, I am sure that we will have full attendance. We look forward to welcoming you to Ireland, probably at the end of October. We have to check that. There are different recess times in the different legislatures, and the national party conferences are on at different times. We have limited opportunities with regard to dates and hotel availability. We will let you know the exact dates of that plenary meeting before the summer.

I want to thank my Co-Chair, Karen. It is a pleasure to work with her. We have very much

intensified our work at Steering Committee level. As we make decisions at Steering Committee, we are anxious that Committees continue their good work and, in some instances, intensify that. We are fortunate to have two Deputy Speakers here: from the Welsh Senedd and the Scottish Parliament. Our staff are approaching the Speakers of each of the legislatures about our having an opportunity to discuss our annual reports or whatever and to get the work of our Assembly better known in each legislature. There is no chance of the public at large knowing about our work if our colleagues in Parliament do not know about it. It is an issue that we must address. To engage people in the work that we all do in this Assembly, Karen and I, along with the Steering Committee, are determined to get to as many Houses of Parliament or Committees as possible and to the people with influence in their own Parliaments with their own Speakers, Business Committees and whoever makes decisions.

I now call Alan Farrell TD to move the Adjournment formally.

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

I move that the Assembly be adjourned.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much. I now declare the sixty-fourth plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly closed. We will next meet in full plenary session in Ireland in the autumn. The plenary session now stands adjourned. Lunch will be served in the hotel restaurant. The bus for Irish Members departs at 1.00 pm. The British Members' bus departs at 3.00 pm, so you can have a more leisurely lunch. I wish you all a safe trip home. Thank you all for your contributions. *[Applause.]*

Adjourned at 12.17 pm.