



Paper 1/2: Scottish Parliament Debate: Securing a just transition to a carbon neutral economy

For information

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper provides Commissioners with a summary of the recent Scottish Parliament debate on just transition.

2. Background

2.1 The Scottish Parliament held a debate on the application of just transition principles in Scotland on the 15th January. Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change, Environment and Land Reform put forward the following motion:

"That Parliament supports the application of just transition principles in Scotland, acknowledging the need to plan, invest in and implement a transition to carbon-neutrality in a way that is fair for all."

2.2 The debate demonstrated cross-party support for the application of just transition principles in Scotland. There was also a consensus that action taken to tackle climate change could act as a stimulus for the economy.

2.3 Areas that drew specific focus included: support required for rural communities, the issues facing specific sectors such as agriculture and oil & gas, the Scottish National Investment Bank, fuel poverty, skills development, the circular economy and the importance of using the right economic levers to fully support decarbonisation and economic growth.

2.4 Labour, Conservative and the Green party all tabled amendments to the motion. The motion passed with Labour and Conservative amendments (highlighted red and blue respectively below).

"That the Parliament supports the application of just transition principles in Scotland, acknowledging the need to plan, invest in and implement a transition to carbon-neutrality in a way that is fair for all; believes that implementing a circular economy strategy for Scotland is an effective and sustainable way to bring about this transition [con amendment], and further supports the just transition process through giving further consideration to the establishment of a statutory, long-term just transition commission, which should be well-funded, independent of government and accountable to the Parliament, building on the work of the present non-statutory commission [labour amendment]."

2.5 The Green party amendment which did not pass is included below:



“; recognises that global fossil fuel reserves far exceed the amount which can safely be used without causing catastrophic climate change; agrees therefore that the policy of Maximum Economic Recovery of oil and gas, as advocated by both Scottish and UK Governments, is incompatible with the Paris Agreement or with the goal of a just transition; supports an accelerated rollout of renewable energy and decommissioning projects, creating secure and high-quality employment opportunities; and calls for the principles of a just transition to be embedded across all Government infrastructure policy, planning and projects, including the national investment bank and publicly owned energy company.”

2.6 A selection of quotes are included below, providing an indication of the range of views expressed about Scotland’s Commission. A full transcript is available [here](#).

2.7 Tavish Scott (LD)

“there needs to be a particular focus on those sectors in which emissions levels have barely budged since 1990, which include buildings, agriculture and transport.”

2.8 Joan McAlpine (SNP)

“We also have an obligation to people who are living in poverty in this country—or to those who could be plunged into poverty if their jobs were to be lost as a result of policies that do not consider a just transition”

2.9 Claudia Beamish (Labour)

“This debate on just transition principles is very significant for the fair future of Scotland’s economy and society in the global context. My party will support the Scottish Government motion, which recognises how essential a just transition is as we shift to carbon neutrality and net zero emissions. Just transition principles are fundamental to the international labour movement, and I am pleased to speak today on behalf of Scottish Labour.”

2.10 Angus MacDonald (SNP)

“We must be keenly aware of the potentially disproportionate impact that a badly managed transition could have on, for example, rural areas and on those working in the agricultural industry.”

“CCS enables industry to produce and retain jobs that would otherwise be lost if production was transferred overseas or shut down altogether, which is a risk that we must always keep in mind and is something else for the just transition commission to consider.”

2.11 James Halcro Johnson (Con)

“we must recognise that many of the areas that will have to contribute to climate change targets—in particular, our rural economy and our small businesses—are often already struggling. Costs will fall heavily on them, yet they remain an important thread that ties communities across Scotland together. If the Scottish Government and this Parliament are to be ambitious



about reducing carbon emissions, they should recognise the future challenges that change will present when new sectors have to play catch-up in decarbonisation.”

2.12 Mark Ruskell (Green)

“Jim Skea’s appointment as the commission’s chair is welcome and will give us much confidence that the commission will be driven by the science and the imperative for us to achieve net zero emissions and tackle climate change.”

“... the Scottish Greens support the Scottish Government’s just transition commission, although we will work to ensure that the principles set out by the International Labour Organization are embedded in Scotland. That includes building a strong social consensus on both the goals and pathways of a just transition, getting the dialogue going within and between all levels of policy making, and taking action on the ground.”

2.13 Alex Rowley (Lab)

“I struggle to see where the strategy is for the creation of skills, apprenticeships and jobs in the renewables sector.”

“I conclude by saying that a just transition means investment in skills, training and jobs for local people. None of that is currently happening on the necessary scale.”

2.14 Dean Lockhart (Con)

“more clarity and detail on policy, a whole-of-Government approach needs to be taken to delivery of a carbon-neutral economy.”

“We need Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish National Investment Bank and the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board all to be aligned around the priorities and implementation of policy.”

2.15 Dr Alasdair Allan (SNP)

The Scottish Government—and, I hope, Scotland’s more general political consensus—clearly now wants to ensure that we benefit fully from leading the global transition to low carbon. Therefore, the decision to appoint Professor Jim Skea to chair the commission on how the transition to carbon neutrality can help Scotland to become not just greener but more prosperous is very welcome.