

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 21 October 2025

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Members present: Bob Blackman (Chair); Jess Brown-Fuller; Jonathan Davies; Will Stone.

Questions 1-25

Representations made

[I](#): Mr Alistair Carmichael

[II](#): Catherine West

[III](#): Jim Shannon

[IV](#): Alex Sobel, Johanna Baxter and Dame Caroline Dinenage

[V](#): Lloyd Hatton and Dr Ellie Chowns

[VI](#): Sarah Dyke

Mr Alistair Carmichael made representations.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, where we will be considering applications for debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall. The first application is from Alistair Carmichael on the UK fishing industry.

Mr Carmichael: Thank you, Chair. I will come to the point. As you know, at the end of every year, there is now a range of negotiations between the UK, the EU and Norway in relation to both whitefish stocks and pelagic stocks. It has never been easy in my time, but this is going to be a particularly challenging year. The scientific advice on both whitefish stocks and pelagic stocks is particularly challenging. It is suggested that there would be a zero catch, for example, in North sea cod, which would have serious implications for the industry.

With a new team in DEFRA—a new Secretary of State and a new fishing Minister—I am very keen that we have an opportunity to get as much of this on the record as possible at the earliest possible date. This debate was very well subscribed in the Chamber last year. We have a few extra names on top of the ones that are on the application—I think we have five Labour Back Benchers at the moment. I would hope to make a pitch for Chamber time, but frankly, I will take time anywhere I can find it, as long as it is sooner rather than later, because we really need to be influencing things now ahead of these calls.

Q2 Chair: Thank you for keeping it brief. I had a meeting with the Leader of the House yesterday, and he was pointing out that we should have more debates on the fishing industry.

Mr Carmichael: A man after my own heart.

Q3 Chair: Indeed. You have had a debate in Westminster Hall on the fishing industry already, so you would either need a substantive motion or an alternative title for a debate in the Chamber.

Mr Carmichael: Okay. I could certainly come up with a substantive motion; that would not be a problem. There is precedent for us having done it that way in the distant past.

Q4 Jess Brown-Fuller: If you want a debate in the Chamber as opposed to Westminster Hall, you could do with a couple more Government names.

Mr Carmichael: We have five. Jayne Kirkham is one who has indicated that she would take part. Of the names that I have on the list, I am pretty sure that they would all show. You have probably noticed that there is not always a perfect match between those who support an application and those who turn up to speak on the day. I am reasonably confident that, through the APPG, we would have other Government Members.

Q5 Chair: If you have other Government names, could you supply those to the Clerks, and then we will take that into account?

Mr Carmichael: Yes, I will do that.

Chair: Thank you. The Clerks will be in touch.

Catherine West made representations.

Q6 **Chair:** The next application is from Catherine West and John Glen for a debate in the Chamber on the impact of food inflation on the cost of living.

Catherine West: Thank you, Chair. When I submitted the application, I had 18 Members of Parliament interested in this debate. Since then, the number has risen to 24 Members from all the parties across the House, except maybe one or two of the smaller ones. I have asked for a three-hour debate in the Chamber, given that it is quite topical, with the Budget coming up shortly.

The Trussell Trust's report from September 2025, "Hunger in the UK", makes for sobering reading. In 2024, 14.1 million people in the UK lived in food-insecure households, compared with 11.6 million in 2022, representing 16% of UK households. As Members of Parliament, I think we are all aware of people still attending food banks, despite the fact that we all live for a world where food banks are no longer necessary. At some point in the previous year, those households ran out of food and were unable to afford more.

In terms of our debates in the Chamber and what is talked about in the press, we know that breakfast clubs and school meals for children are very important, as is nutrition for older people in hospitals and prison food. We know that food is not only crucial for households but is also really important in terms of an input into the general economy. This is a really useful debate to have as we all limber up for the Budget in November and as we seek to make our debates in Parliament relevant to everybody.

Q7 **Chair:** Thank you for that application. Given that it is a general debate, would you accept time in Westminster Hall if we were to offer it?

Catherine West: Yes, if that is better for the Committee, but obviously it would be fab to have it in the main Chamber.

Q8 **Chair:** At our current rate of progress, you would probably be waiting for the next Budget before you got a debate in the Chamber—or at least the spring statement.

Catherine West: I understand.

Q9 **Jess Brown-Fuller:** You have the opposite problem to Alistair Carmichael in that you have done very well with Government names, but you could do with a few more from the Opposition if you are hoping for a debate in the Chamber. You said in your opening remarks that you had 24, but we have only got 18 names on our list.

Catherine West: I can update that for you.

Jess Brown-Fuller: That would be fab, if we could see those extra names.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q10 Chair: Next up is our season ticket holder, Jim Shannon, on World COPD Day—obviously like World Asthma Day—in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday.

Jim Shannon: Mr Chairman and fellow Committee members, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to ask for a debate. I chair the APPG for respiratory health, and we always try to have a debate for World COPD Day. I suppose my knowledge of COPD, like probably all elected representatives, is through my constituents. I find that many people suffer from COPD. As an APPG, we are very keen to do something about it on this World COPD Day. There are 3 million people in the UK who are affected, with an estimated 2 million people undiagnosed. Many patients are only diagnosed when their condition is at an advanced stage. Those are the people I see in my office, because I am usually helping with benefits—PIP, DLA or attendance allowance, depending on what their age is.

COPD is the second most common cause of emergency hospital admissions, and a major contributor to winter pressures. So I raise this on behalf of the APPG and on account of the importance of this disease for my constituents, and, I suspect, for every constituent.

The debate will allow Members to explore the shifts in more detail and include other important issues such as incidental findings from the lung cancer screening programme in England. It is very important to relate everything back to your constituency, and everyone can relate it back to the cancer screening programme. To date, the programme has identified some 100,000 cases of emphysema, one of two components of COPD.

This is an opportunity to have a debate on this issue, which will hopefully highlight some of the things that may not have been explored before: the new evidence; the information that is relevant to all of us as constituency MPs; and how our emergency response can be proactive, with community-based management. That is my request.

Q11 Chair: World COPD Day is on 19 November, so would you want this debate around that day? What is your preference?

Jim Shannon: As close to that as possible. Unfortunately, I have not looked up what day 19 November is, but as close as possible.

Chair: It is a Wednesday. Are there any questions from colleagues? Jess, do you have the same question again?

Jess Brown-Fuller: No, I am quite happy, actually.

Jim Shannon: Oh my goodness, I have passed the test.

Chair: The Clerks will be in touch in due course, Jim.

Alex Sobel, Johanna Baxter and Dame Caroline Dinenage made representations.

Q12 Chair: The next application is from Alex Sobel, and it is for a debate in Westminster Hall on non-recognition of Russian-occupied territories of

Ukraine. Alex, over to you.

Alex Sobel: Thank you, Chair. It is a pleasure to come back in front of the Committee that I served on in the 2017 to 2019 Parliament. As I am sure the Committee knows, last week we had the visit of the Speaker of the Rada, Ruslan Stefanchuk, who made a specific request that we debate this issue. When I met the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Kyiv, he also made this request. President Zelensky is coming on Friday, and we also expect him to raise the matter with the Prime Minister.

The reason why now is an important moment for this is because we are 11 years into the occupation of certain Ukrainian territories—they are under Russian control—and we are three and a half years into the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We are now moving into a phase of negotiations, with the Budapest meeting coming up, where there will be discussion about a ceasefire—effectively a frozen conflict, borders being temporarily settled, and the cessation of hostilities.

It is hugely important that in that process, and following it, no nation—particularly a western nation—recognises any Ukrainian territory as being part of Russia. Crimea is of particular importance, but so is all of the territory that is occupied by Russia. Sovereign territorial integrity is important for every single nation on earth, especially for Ukraine. There is a concern in Kyiv that nations will start to falter on this issue. The United Kingdom is now seen by Ukraine and by Russia to be Ukraine's leading ally, so us having this debate in Parliament will send a very important message directly to the Kremlin about this.

We are bit light on names—you will probably want to ask about that—and that is because of the speed at which we had to do this. It was a quick and dirty ask, just within the APPG, but we expect that it will be a full debate. To conclude, we have flexibility on timing: we have asked for a Thursday, but if a Tuesday were available, we would take that instead.

Q13 **Chair:** Do your colleagues want to say anything?

Johanna Baxter: To add to Alex's comments, the future of the 1.6 million Ukrainian children who are held in the occupied territories is at stake in these negotiations, such as they are. Those children are currently being subjected to a process of militarisation on an almost daily basis. They are being denied their Ukrainian identity and education, so a debate that encompasses that focus and recognises what is currently happening in the occupied territories would be significant to these negotiations, and it would send a strong signal to the rest of the world that we take their future and the future of Ukraine seriously.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: I would only add that we have a huge responsibility to keep the matter in the public's mind. Other global events have rightly dominated the news headlines over the last year or so, meaning that sometimes it is easy to forget all the things that are happening in Ukraine every day—the death and the destruction. Three years on, I still live with a Ukrainian family, so I have a constant reminder, but a lot of people do not have that, and it is sometimes easy to forget



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that the situation is ongoing. We have a role as parliamentarians to keep it at the front of the public's imagination.

Q14 **Chair:** Thank you. Alex, you have put a cross against "substantive motion in the Chamber", but there is no substantive motion.

Alex Sobel: That is a mistake—an administrative error.

Chair: That is fine.

Q15 **Will Stone:** You will not normally hear me say this in this Committee, because normally we are trying to get people out of the Chamber and into Westminster Hall: I appreciate that you have put this together quickly, but given the gravitas of the subject and what it means, have you considered trying to scramble some more names and push for the Chamber? It would give a significantly better signal to the world to have the debate in the Chamber rather than Westminster Hall. There is the challenge of getting people in, but this is a very important subject. In my opinion—I can see Bob frowning—having this debate in the Chamber would be better, although I know that is tough.

Alex Sobel: If there is an opportunity to have the debate in the Chamber, which I know would not be very soon because debates are backing up, I am sure we would find sufficient names—20 people—to speak.

Q16 **Chair:** Is there any time sensitivity from your perspective on when the debate should be held?

Alex Sobel: The summit in Budapest is going to happen in a month or so, and I really want the debate to happen before Putin and Trump meet.

Q17 **Chair:** We will have to think about that. As Will said, if you could supply some more names and possibly a motion, then we can try to get it into the Chamber at some stage. It might be for an end-of-day debate when Government business is light, shall we say, but you may need the flexibility of being able to put the debate on at relatively short notice.

Alex Sobel: We can definitely consider that, and we can probably manage that.

Q18 **Chair:** There are no other questions, so the Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Lloyd Hatton and Dr Ellie Chowns made representations.

Q19 **Chair:** The next application is from Lloyd Hatton on protecting and restoring river habitats. This is an application for a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate on a Tuesday morning.

Lloyd Hatton: It is a pleasure to be before this Committee once again to make the case for such an important debate for parliamentarians. The main reason why we have brought this forward is the Riverscapes Partnership, which is made up of around 40 leading charities and organisations, including the National Trust, the River Trust, the Woodland Trust and the Beaver Trust. They have put forward a campaign called



HOUSE OF COMMONS

“Making Space for Water”, which looks particularly at how we protect and restore our rivers across this country.

The reason why is that sadly only 14% of the rivers in the UK are currently in good ecological health—they are some of the worst in Europe. This campaign looks at how we can have a much more joined-up and co-ordinated approach to improve our rivers, particularly their water quality and the biodiversity. We know that a more co-ordinated approach—one that looks at riparian tree planting, a buffer between farmland and riverways and how we restore and promote wetlands—is how we achieve this. That is the ask of the campaign.

I think this is a really important debate, because we can talk about the difference we would make if we made space for water. Also, there is a really important practical piece of work that we need to start discussing in this place, which is how we achieve that. That looks at what Government need to do in relation to farmers and landowners to make this possible. At the moment—I am sure Dr Chowns would attest to this in her constituency—farmers and landowners would say that to do the right thing in protecting our rivers is often incredibly complicated, incredibly slow and incredibly expensive. The other thing that this debate and campaign are looking at is how we can support getting access to finance to do the right thing more quickly and simply, and in a more financially viable way. Those are very much the campaign’s asks.

I think there is broad cross-party support for this, and it is not something that has really had any significant debate time. I think the campaign only launched earlier in the spring, so it is not something that we have been able to discuss in a great deal of detail, and we would be very keen to hear from the Minister as well.

Q20 **Chair:** Ellie, do you want to add anything?

Dr Chowns: Yes. I am hugely supportive of this debate application, and Lloyd has outlined the background really well. We know that river water quality and seawater quality are of huge concern to the general public. We have had conversations about the problem in the Chamber. The attention has often been focused on the sewage part of the issues, but of course half the problem of water pollution in this country is related to agricultural run-off and how we manage land. That is a topic that has not had anywhere close to enough attention, in my view, from Government. It was a shame that the Cunliffe review did not actively include that in its terms of reference.

This debate would provide a really positive, constructive opportunity to debate practical ways in which we could support that. My constituency of North Herefordshire is rural, and it is hugely impacted by water pollution that is agriculturally related. There has been a huge impact on the construction industry; nobody has been able to build anything for five years. We know that this is fundamentally important to our economy. Farmers have been doing absolutely fantastic work, but they need more Government support.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There is a real opportunity here for synergy between what is needed for nature, for human health and for thriving rural livelihoods, as well as amazing opportunities to learn internationally. I was on an Environmental Audit Committee visit to the Netherlands earlier this year, where they literally have a programme called “Room for the River”, which is all about how we can work effectively with our rivers. I think there would be an immense amount of positive and constructive debate opportunity within the framework of this proposal.

Q21 Chair: Can I alert you to a slight conundrum? You have a substantive motion, which can only be heard in the Chamber, and your request is for Westminster Hall on a Tuesday morning. We cannot have votes in Westminster Hall.

Lloyd Hatton: Apologies—I think that was a mistake on my part. The preference was to do it in the Chamber, but we appreciated that that is very hard to do, so we were happy to go with Westminster Hall.

Q22 Chair: You have enough names and the balance is right for a Chamber application, if you were minded to do that. The other thing I would warn you is that, when I led a debate this morning in Westminster Hall, we ended up with 18 speakers, and they had two minutes each. That is quite a challenge, but it is your application. Which would be the answering Department, if you are granted the debate for a Tuesday?

Lloyd Hatton: It would be DEFRA and the Minister for Water.

Chair: Okay. That is fine.

Dr Chowns: It would be great to have this in the Chamber, because it is a topic of sufficient public and MP interest.

Chair: There is also a long queue for the Chamber.

Lloyd Hatton: That is why although we would like the Chamber, we are pragmatists, and we would gratefully accept Westminster Hall.

Chair: Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Sarah Dyke made representations.

Chair: The final application today is from Sarah Dyke and Dan Aldridge on the future of UK carnivals. This is an application for either the Chamber or Westminster Hall for a general debate.

Sarah Dyke: Unfortunately, Dan has been unavoidably held up, so he will not be joining me today, but thank you for considering this application. The carnival season is upon us. It runs from August through to mid-November. It is a significant contributor to our national economy, injecting over £40 million every year. I am sure you know very well that the carnival season in Somerset is a very important part of the year. They are widely regarded as among the largest—if not the largest—illuminated processions in the world, and have origins in the county dating back to the

17th century.

We have a very strong heritage of carnival in our area, but many carnivals are suffering at the moment. There is a series of threats that are really challenging the tradition's long-term viability, including rising costs in putting these events on and the number of volunteers out there participating in and making them up. I am sure you are aware that this is a full-on yearly activity. There are fewer and fewer people taking up that role.

The expenditure to maintain that stage presence is huge. It often costs up to £30,000 or more to put on a major procession. Carnivals have such an integral part to play in tackling issues in rural communities around social isolation and in contributing to the economy. Given the economic, social, cultural and charitable importance of carnivals nationwide, it would be a great opportunity for Members to debate this and recognise the important contribution that UK carnivals make to rural areas.

Q23 Chair: Thank you very much for the application. I notice that you have applied for both Tuesday and Thursday in Westminster Hall, as well as the Chamber. If the debate is allocated for a Tuesday, which would be the answering Department?

Sarah Dyke: I believe it would probably be Culture, Media and Sport.

Q24 Chair: Okay. We have to schedule Tuesday debates for when we have the relevant answering Department. You have enough signatories for a 90-minute debate. If you wanted a Chamber debate, we would probably look for another three or four names, which you could supply to the Clerks. We will look at this for a Westminster Hall debate as it stands.

Sarah Dyke: Thank you, Chair. Surprisingly enough, I have gleaned one in the form of Jim Shannon as we sat down.

Q25 Chair: Frankly, if it is in Westminster Hall, he will turn up anyway.

Sarah Dyke: I know! I would be quite happy with a Westminster Hall debate because it is time sensitive, and it would be lovely to hold the debate during the carnival season.

Chair: Fine. Thank you very much for your attendance. The Clerks will let you know as soon as possible. That concludes the public business for the Committee today. The Committee will now go into private session to determine the applications.