

Letter from Scotland

The Scottish Parliament has wheezed up its bagpipes and blasted out a warning to Westminster – we don't want Theresa's deal and we don't want a no-deal. All the parties, except the Conservatives, voted on Wednesday for a motion which calls on MPs to come up with a "better alternative."



Weary winter coming fast and a chilly Brexit blast.

Of course, each party has their own idea of that better alternative. The SNP suggest a compromise – keeping Britain in the Customs Union and the Single Market. Labour want a general election. The Greens and the Liberal Democrats want a second referendum. And every party, including most

Conservatives, would rather we forget the whole thing and stay in the European Union.

To this effect, a cross-party group of Scottish politicians have taken a legal case to the European Court of Justice asking if it's possible for Britain to pull out of the whole Brexit process, even at this late stage. And in an interim judgement, on Tuesday, the court's [advocate general](#) recommended that Article 50 can indeed be revoked unilaterally by the Westminster parliament, which would give MPs a quick way out of the quagmire. A full judgement is expected in the next few weeks.

The First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was in London on Monday to urge MPs of all parties to accept her least-worst option of staying in the Customs Union and the Single Market. If Theresa May's deal fails to win a majority in Tuesday's so-called "meaningful vote" then this looks like one of the two most likely results. The other is a second referendum, an idea attracting more and more support among MPs and around half of the public, according to the latest opinion polls.

There are, of course, bigger issues than Brexit...like "the end of civilisation and much of the natural world" as Sir David Attenborough told the UN conference in Poland on climate change. Ms Sturgeon was there to hear him and to remind the delegates that Scotland was doing its bit to cut greenhouse gases. In fact, she suggested Scotland's target of cutting carbon emissions by 90 per cent by 2050 was more ambitious than any other nation...and unlike other countries, we are including shipping and aircraft emissions. (Why would you not ?)

Strangely, we are still spending money on new roads. The Aberdeen by-pass, for instance is costing £1bn. This week we learnt it is 25 per cent over-budget and nine months late and there's a rush to open it before Christmas.

Meanwhile, the switch to rail has not gone altogether smoothly this week. On Monday commuters were facing some 40 service cancellations as staff were taken off the rota to be prepared for a new timetable to be introduced this weekend. Let's hope it's not as chaotic as the one in England earlier this year. A strike over pay differentials was narrowly averted but there are continuing disputes over manning levels and overtime.

Even the Edinburgh trams were threatened with disruption over Christmas and New Year but fortunately that dispute – apparently over “management bullying” – was quickly resolved.

There was better news for the environment from the Moray Firth on Wednesday when the local ports authority announced it was giving up its plan for ship-to-ship oil transfers. It follows a three year long campaign by environmentalists to protect the famous Moray Firth dolphins, not to mention the shoreline if there was an oil spill.

And care for our fish went further when we learned that salmon from a fish farm near Ullapool are being individually blessed before they are slaughtered and sold as “halal” fish. Hatim Ameen from the Dawoodi Bohra branch of Shia Islam has been travelling up from Manchester to Loch Canaird for the past seven years to perform the ceremony. He touches each salmon and says a prayer over it before it is placed in the stunning machine and killed. The batch of about 400 salmon are then sent to Dingwall for processing and then on to suppliers in Manchester, Leicester, London and far away Detroit.

Such care for our fellow creatures – before we eat them (sustainably of course) – is indeed touching. Would that we cared for the planet in such fine detail.