

Letter from Scotland

It's not been a good week for the environment. Climate change has been playing with us, mild and dry, then misty and cool, as if deciding whether to give us a winter or not.

We've learned that our car usage is rising by 3 per cent a year and bus journeys are falling by 1.5 cent. We are flying more – 6 per cent a year more. There's even a new Loganair service starting between London Southend and Stornoway. And we are pumping another £1bn into the oil industry.



Grangemouth – the burning question.

Sir Jim Ratcliffe, the owner of Ineos, the giant petro-chemical works at Grangemouth, has announced he is going to spend £500m upgrading the oil pipeline from the North Sea and another £350m on a new power plant at Grangemouth and a further £150m on a chemical works in Hull. As a leading Brexiteer he is keen

to show that investment will not be harmed by leaving the EU. He also maintains that his up-grades will make oil and chemical production greener.

But on the whole, I side with Friends of the Earth who say we should be investing in renewable energy, not oil and gas, if we are serious about tackling climate change. We need to leave 80 per cent of the world's oil in the ground and only use the rest to produce essential chemicals.



Ineos at Grangemouth Photo John Preece

On Thursday, the fires of antisemitism inside the Labour Party spread to Scotland. The leader of the Jewish community here, Ephraim Borowski, accused the party of failing to tackle “institutional racism.” It’s a charge the Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard has strongly denied, pointing to the fact that two Labour councillors have been suspended for antisemitic remarks they are alleged to have made.

It comes as the police published figures showing that of the

6,736 "hate crimes" reported last year, 67 per cent were related to race and 7 per to religion.

Sectarianism, of one sort or another, continues to stalk our streets and football terraces. In the words of Sheriff Andrew Cubie in Glasgow this week: "The courts in Scotland still deal all too frequently with cases of sectarian abuse which serve to harden and perpetuate divisions in society."

He was sentencing a man to 10 months in jail for spitting on a Catholic priest during an Orange march in July last year. And in recent days there's been much discussion in the media on whether football clubs should be held responsible for the behaviour of their supporters, perhaps with fines or point reductions, if they are guilty of racial or sectarian singing or cat-calling.

The Scottish Parliament has followed the lead of England and Wales and voted to introduce a system of "presumed consent" for organ donation. The current system of registering your agreement to have your organs removed after death will be changed to an opt-out system, in the hope that more patients can be given transplanted organs in the future. There are over 500 people on the waiting list for transplants in Scotland.



This week the BBC launched a new TV channel specially dedicated to Scotland. It runs from 7pm till midnight each evening, providing a mix of factual programmes, drama, comedy, sport and, of course news and current affairs. There's a one hour programme of news, covering both domestic and international news. It opened on Sunday night and attracted a respectable audience of 700,000 viewers, the third-most watched

channel after BBC One and ITV. It's costing the licence payer £32m a year, which is not a lot by TV standards. So much of it will be repeats and "reality TV" aimed at a young audience. I'm not sure what I think of it yet but these days you don't really quality as a nation unless you have a TV channel.



Scottish wildcat and kitten

Figures from the heritage agency, Historic Environment Scotland, show there's been a surge in visitors at such unlikely places as Glasgow Cathedral, Doune Castle, Blackness Castle and Linlithgow Palace. Apparently, it's all due to the TV series Outlander which sees its characters travel through time to these old-stone sites. Overall, HES reports a 5 per cent rise in visitor numbers last year, which brings it to the 5 million mark, worth an estimated £620m to the general economy.

One thing our visitors won't see much of is the Scottish wildcat. No one quite knows how many "Highland tigers" are left. One estimate puts the number at just 35. But we do know, thanks to the latest survey by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, that the remaining population is not viable and after at least 7,000 years, the wild cat will be extinct unless something is done pretty urgently. The government is exploring "every possible action" to save this native species – ranging from reintroduction, to sterilising all feral cats in Highland areas to prevent them from cross-

breeding. How many lives does a wild cat have ?

Finally, regular readers will remember how sorry I felt for Neil Lennon, the manager of Hibernian Football Club, who was forced out of his job because of a couple of bad results on the pitch. Well, within a month he has found another job, sliding into the boots of the Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers who left suddenly on Tuesday for Leicester City.

So Lennon is back at his old club and I'm left asking how many lives does a football manager have ?