

Letter from Scotland

We've just had a week of gloriously sunny weather.

On Wednesday, the Deeside town of Aboyne recorded a temperature of 24.4C, making it the hottest day of the year so far. Of course, it didn't last and Thursday was decidedly cooler. That's the trouble with climate change, it's changeable, which makes us doubt it's happening at all, or at least that we don't need to do much about it.

But science is relentless. This week the Independent Committee on Climate Change declared that our preparations for the effects of droughts and floods and storms was "too slow, or stalled, or heading in the wrong direction." We've fallen into a slough of despair on climate, rowing back on our commitments to cut carbon emissions. It's all too difficult.



Lazing on a sunny afternoon. The Meadows, Edinburgh.

The Scottish Government has given up its annual target on cutting greenhouse gases. It followed England in postponing the switch to electric cars and household boilers. It's cut its tree-planting programme. It's dropped its "presumption" against new oil and gas developments. An opinion poll among SNP voters has found that 52 per cent would like to see the party drop its opposition to nuclear power, such is the growing doubt about renewables.

Even conservation groups are losing heart in the switch to wind and wave. This week five of them, including the RSPB and The National Trust, have spoken out against plans for a large wind-farm (307 turbines) off the Berwickshire coast. They say thousands of seabirds would be killed by flying into the turning blades.

Yet the evidence is mounting that climate change is coming to Scotland. Last month's wild fire on the Island of Arran

destroyed 15,000 newly planted trees, just one of over 100 wild fires reported to the fire service. This week, we've had unusually warm spring weather and we've had mosquitos found as far north as Shetland for the first time.

You would think that climate fear may have persuaded us that the ending of oil refining at Grangemouth this week was a welcome step along the "transition" from fossil fuels to renewables. You would think that both governments would be ready with a plan to convert the site into the promised "renewables hub". But so far Project Willow has only outlined nine possible ideas – including hydrogen production, and clean aviation fuel – and they've had tentative inquiries from only 66 firms. None of these will be ready for the 400 workers who will be laid off over the next year. Both governments, of course, are blaming each other.

Last month, I thought the culture war between sex and gender was over with the ruling from the Supreme Court that sex meant biological sex not chosen gender. Since then though, we've had interim guidance from the Equality Commission that trans-women should not be allowed into female toilets and changing rooms, causing schools, hospitals, sports clubs, restaurants etc to wonder how they should provide for trans-women.

The Green MSP Maggie Chapman landed herself in trouble when she hit back at The Supreme Court, accusing it of "bigotry, prejudice and hatred." She was very nearly expelled from the parliament's equalities committee but was saved by the three SNP members.



Maggie Chapman in the centre supporting fellow MSP Mark Ruskell in his campaign to end greyhound racing

The battle of the sexes took a delightful turn when it was announced that the Glenurquhart Highland Games this summer will stage “the first ever heavy events” for women, including throwing the weight, hammer and shot and tossing the caber. The Royal Highland Games Association may be disputing that “first ever” claim, since it ran women’s heavy events at Airth last summer. But clearly the traditional belief that only a biological man can toss a caber is being overtaken by events.

A couple of woman from England, Miriam Payne and Jess Rowe, have just set out to row across the Pacific Ocean from Peru to Australia. But I wonder if it’s bigoted or prejudiced to wonder if they will be overtaken by three brothers from Edinburgh who have embarked on the same journey. Ewan, Jamie and Lachlan Maclean hope to complete the voyage in 120 days, arriving in Sydney at the beginning of August. Both teams are completely unsupported, carrying their own supplies and catching what they can on the way, including rain-water.

The Maclean brothers are raising funds for clean water projects in Madagascar, an island often devastated by droughts and floods. There is no doubt in countries like Madagascar that climate change is under way and that we in the west should be doing more about it.



Lachlan, Ewan and Jamie Maclean