

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 13 March 2007

Session 2

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

4th Meeting 2007, Session 2

CONVENER

*Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind)
*Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
*Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)
*Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
*John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab)
*Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
*Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con)
Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Mr Tom McCabe (Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform)
Lynne Vallance (Scottish Executive Finance and Central Services Department)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jim Johnston

ASSISTANT CLERK

Emma Berry
Alun Davidson

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 13 March 2007

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:02*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Linda Fabiani): I welcome everyone to the European and External Relations Committee's fourth meeting in 2007. Item 1 is to decide whether to take in private items 6 to 9, which are the committee's draft response to the European Commission's green paper on a maritime policy, the committee's draft report on the inquiry into the transposition and implementation of European Union directives in Scotland, our draft legacy paper and our draft annual report.

I suggest that we take those items in private as they relate to draft reports. The committee has not had an opportunity to consider them, so it was not appropriate to make the drafts public before the meeting. Do members agree?

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I agree to taking in private all the items except the response to the maritime policy. That does not constitute a report; it is a response. I go along with discussing draft reports in private, which has kind of become a tradition, but the response to the maritime policy is well worth discussing in public. If others feel similarly, that is fine; if not, I will let the matter go.

The Convener: The document is a draft response that the committee has not yet agreed.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I think that, technically, the document is a committee report. Members may well want to amend it.

The Convener: The response contains recommendations.

Phil Gallie: Will we discuss the final outcome at another meeting?

The Convener: The intention is that this will be our last meeting of the session.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): Hear, hear.

The Convener: Of course, that is entirely up to members, and depends on how the meeting

progresses. Does Phil Gallie wish to press his point?

Phil Gallie: No, I do not.

The Convener: Thank you. The committee agrees to take those items in private.

Scottish Executive European Union Priorities 2007

14:04

The Convener: Our second item is to take evidence from the Scottish Executive on its European Union priorities. I have pleasure in welcoming Tom McCabe MSP, the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform, who has come along to present the Executive's priorities. He is supported by Lynne Vallance and David Ferguson from the EU strategy and co-ordination unit in the Executive's Europe division. I thank them for attending. I ask the minister to make an opening statement, and then we will move to questions from members.

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): Thank you, convener, and good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to come along, share our thoughts and discuss some of the key European issues that we have identified for 2007.

It has become something of a regular occurrence for me to come along and have an exchange with the committee.

The Convener: Can I interrupt you? I am aware that you are facing sunlight, which must be difficult. Are you okay? Do you want to move?

Mr McCabe: I am okay.

The Convener: The end blind is not working, so we cannot close it.

Mr McCabe: It is fine, convener, but thanks anyway.

As I said, it has become a bit of a regular occurrence for me, on behalf of the Executive, to come along and discuss the key European issues with the committee. We think that the exchange has been useful and I hope that the committee, too, has found it useful. It seems to me a good way to continue the necessary dialogue between the Executive and the Parliament.

As the committee will know, in the six-month review of the key issues Executive officials and ministers identify current and forthcoming EU issues of importance to Scotland. Some issues are removed during the review process and others are added. Issues can be removed, for example, because we think that, over a period, their importance to Scotland has been minimised and other issues are taking over. Given that the EU is a moveable feast, other issues come into play at times.

The list that members have before them is a result of Cabinet consideration of the issues in

February this year. As the committee will be aware, we have removed seven issues and added nine. The majority of the issues that we removed were removed simply because negotiations in Brussels had ended. Specifically, on the working time directive, the Germans made it clear that they will not put a great emphasis on that during their presidency, so we removed it. That is not to say that the issue could not come back to prominence at some point in the future.

I will not go through in detail each of the nine issues that have been added to the list, but it is worth stressing that we have introduced dossiers on health, agriculture and financial services. EU institutional reform has also been included because the Germans have made it clear that, during their presidency, they want to progress that issue at the European Council in June, at which we want to ensure that our interests are covered.

The list of key issues was well received by Parliament and our external stakeholders. We have gone slightly further on this occasion than simply identifying the key issues; we decided to try to identify what we regard as the main priorities at this time. Obviously, those are judged against the priorities of the presidency. We have said that climate change, the strategic energy review, structural funds, sea fisheries and the spirit drinks regulation would be of particular importance to us. However, that in no way diminishes the importance of the other issues in the 24 dossiers.

It is pleasing to see that the committee's EU work programme for 2007 largely complements the list of dossiers. It is important that a range of voices puts across Scotland's point on issues that could have an impact on life in Scotland and our interests here. The more that the Executive, the Parliament and external stakeholders work together, the more value and weight we will add to what we say we believe are our main interests in Europe.

I will say no more at the moment, convener. I will try to answer any questions that members have. If there are detailed questions about a specific portfolio that we cannot answer, I will get the relevant portfolio colleague to write to the committee on the specific point.

The Convener: Thank you, minister. I will go first to Dennis Canavan, who told me that he has a specific question.

Dennis Canavan: Thank you, minister, for your opening statement. One of the Executive's key dossiers relates to structural funds, and the Executive states in that dossier that

"all that remains is the submission and negotiation of the individual Operational Programmes with the Commission."

Can you update us on the Executive's response to our committee's report on the potential for tripartite co-operation under the EU's structural funds co-operation objective? I am talking in particular about the potential for tripartite co-operation between Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr McCabe: I ask Lynne Vallance to give you more detail on that.

Lynne Vallance (Scottish Executive Finance and Central Services Department): I have been working on that issue with our structural funds colleagues in the Executive. I can confirm that we are working closely with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on getting together programmes that we are considering. We have engaged with Scottish, Irish and Northern Irish stakeholders on looking at potential programmes for the future.

Dennis Canavan: In relation to co-operation, can you give us an idea of which stakeholders in Scotland have expressed an interest, and the areas in which they are interested?

Lynne Vallance: It is fair to say that matters are still at an early stage. The Executive's structural funds division organised an event with the main stakeholders towards the end of last year, so they are being involved. That was their first opportunity to put down their blue-skies ideas for future work. Matters are at an early stage, but all three parties are working together to get something more concrete.

Mr McCabe: It is fair to say, too, that the evolving situation in Northern Ireland will perhaps have an impact as elected politicians in Northern Ireland start to have more of a say in the future direction of the work.

Phil Gallie: I have three points to make, convener, but you may want to limit me to a couple initially.

The Convener: Do you intend to take overlong with any of them?

Phil Gallie: Well, we will see.

My first point, minister, concerns comments in the sea fisheries dossiers. To be honest, they are fairly depressing in light of the fishing talks that will go ahead in, I think, December. Given the concerns about cod, what scientific information has been gathered on changes in temperature, and particularly in sea temperatures? We have heard that warm-water fish are moving into west coast fishing areas, so it could follow that cod are moving north out of our waters for similar reasons. There is a reference in the Executive's documents to the marine climate change and impact assessment scorecard. In what way have we

drawn the European Union's attention to those issues?

Mr McCabe: An awful lot of scientific investigation is going on into the way in which the ecosystem is changing. There is much focus on that issue. It makes perfect sense to us to review the cod recovery plan continually, given the science behind the assessment of the level of stocks and the great concern about the changes taking place in our ecosystem over a particular period. We have focused our attention on that to try to reassure ourselves that the science on which decisions are based is as sound as it can be. It depends on where people are in the argument—some people pose more questions about the science than others do—but there is a growing consensus about how changes in our ecosystem and climate change in general are starting to impact on cod stocks.

Phil Gallie: I welcome the emphasis on the science, but I understand that the haddock and prawn fisheries in the North sea in particular are reasonably healthy at present—the problem is with the cod stock. Do you agree that, if the science indicated that sea temperatures were rising and that cod were moving northwards, it would be unfortunate if further restrictions in relation to cod stocks were put on our fishermen?

Mr McCabe: I certainly agree that it is important that, as we represent Scotland's case in Europe, every set of circumstances is properly taken account of. If Scotland was further disadvantaged because of the circumstances that you describe—I do not know the exact thinking behind them—I am sure that that would form part of our arguments about what represented, in the light of changing circumstances, the best possible deal for Scottish fishermen.

14:15

Phil Gallie: Thank you. I will change the topic, if that is all right.

You referred to institutional reform and to the key issues of energy and climate change. However, energy does not fall within the competence of Europe at the present time, although it would if constitutional reform led to the introduction of a European constitution. Do you agree that the co-operative way in which Europe seems to have made progress on energy and climate change suggests that there is no need for any constitutional reform in respect of energy?

Mr McCabe: I would not necessarily make such a direct link. It is highly encouraging that the European Union has, for a number of reasons, taken a co-operative approach to energy and, in particular, to energy efficiency. As you know, at the spring Council meeting, a target was set to

reduce the EU's energy consumption by 20 per cent by 2020. In general, it is helpful that a far more co-operative approach is being adopted.

However, given the changing nature of the demands that we will place on energy resources in the future, I would not necessarily want to rule anything out. It is in the interests of the Scottish public for us to ensure that there is a stable and sustainable supply of energy. If that means co-operating much more closely with our partners across Europe, I do not think that many people would object to that.

Phil Gallie: I will leave my third point until other members have had a chance to question the minister.

The Convener: I will let you back in later.

Irene Oldfather: Thank you, minister, for your opening comments. I endorse what you said about the value of partnership working between the Executive and the committee. I put on record my view that the EU dossiers paper is extremely helpful to the committee.

I have a general question about the process of exerting influence and ensuring that the Scottish case is made, both at United Kingdom level and in the European Commission. How does the Scottish Executive go about doing that? When we took evidence from your deputy, he said:

"The UK is the member state, therefore submissions are made, by and large, on a UK basis. The arguments about what the UK position will be occur within the UK. That is our constitutional position."—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 13 February 2007; c 2421.]

I cannot but think that, when commissioners such as Commissioner Hübner come here, we take the opportunity to articulate interests of particular relevance to Scotland and, in doing so, ensure that our voice is heard. How do you ensure that you have influence when it comes to getting the Scottish case heard at UK level and in the Commission?

Mr McCabe: We do that in two main ways. You are right to highlight that we have been fortunate in having some quite high-profile European visitors recently; I think that six or seven commissioners have visited us over the past year. Such visits do not come about by accident and, clearly, the opportunity is always taken to put forward issues that we believe it would be in the best interests of Scotland to pursue. You would expect that to be the case; the commissioners expect that, too. When people with a specific interest or responsibility come to Scotland, they have items that they wish to discuss. We try to ensure that Scottish interests are represented to the full in the discussions that take place. It is necessary to ensure not only that we maximise those

opportunities, but that we create them in the first place. We work quite hard at that.

The other way in which we go about ensuring that we have influence is through participation in the joint ministerial committee on Europe, which is convened regularly down south. I do not think that I have missed a JMC meeting for quite some time now. When there are specific issues in relation to which we think that emphasis must be placed on the Scottish interests, we always seek to ensure that that point is made to ministers. There is continuing dialogue at different levels and I think that we have made quite a good fist of maximising the opportunities.

That is not to say that we should stop thinking about the issue—we should always seek ways of increasing our influence and of ensuring that our presence is felt in Brussels. Sometimes we do that through ministerial visits. When I go to Brussels, I am always impressed by the fact that we punch above our weight. We have an effective office in Brussels that links well with the United Kingdom permanent representation to the European Union. There are a variety of strands to the work. We are never complacent, but we are doing our best to take the opportunities that present themselves and to create others.

Irene Oldfather: Are there opportunities through the JMC on Europe for some of the issues that are raised in the dossiers with which you have provided us today to be presented at UK level? If there is a difference of opinion about priorities, how do you go about pursuing the Scottish interest?

Mr McCabe: We intend to go about matters in exactly the way that you described. I am not saying that we have not done that to date, but we have been giving thought to how we can structure better our input to the JMCs. In future we will try to base any items that we put on the agenda on the key issues that we have already identified. There are also opportunities to air the Scottish perspective on the general items that are placed on the agenda, to ensure that people are aware of it.

The Convener: I would like to pursue the issue of the JMC on Europe. A recent parliamentary question suggested that it had not met for quite some time, although I cannot remember the answer that was given.

Mr McCabe: No. The joint ministerial committee on Europe is probably the JMC that meets most regularly. I stand to be corrected, but I think that I have attended about three meetings of the JMC on Europe in the past four months. We always try to ensure that we attend the JMC's meetings. If I cannot make it and there are points that we want

to make about items on the agenda, another minister is invited to attend.

The Convener: Is there a mechanism by which this committee and members of the Parliament can learn about some of the outcomes of the JMC's meetings?

Mr McCabe: That is not in my gift, as the JMC meets at Westminster. It is a committee of ministerial discussion, and I do not think that the minutes are published. Without overstepping the mark or crossing quite proper lines, I will explain to the committee our input to the JMC, when I have the opportunity to do so. However, the JMC is convened in another place and natural courtesies, apart from anything else, mean that it is for the Westminster Government, rather than for me, to decide exactly how meetings should take place and which outcomes should be put into the public domain. The JMC on Europe is a high-profile meeting of ministers from a range of portfolios in Whitehall. It is also attended by Northern Ireland ministers and by my Welsh counterpart.

The Convener: For various reasons, there has been a concern, especially over the past couple of months, that the Scottish case is not being presented as strongly as it might be. If the Executive disagrees with the UK position, how, within the existing settlement, does it go about arguing Scotland's case?

Mr McCabe: We do so predominantly through direct portfolio-to-portfolio ministerial contact. There are regular, on-going discussions and exchanges between Executive ministers with different portfolios to hammer out a position. We have already discussed the joint ministerial committee. We also have a representative office in Brussels, which is there for a purpose. The office feeds into and works very closely with UKREP. I think that it does a good job of ensuring that people are aware of Scotland, its concerns and its interests within the wider United Kingdom.

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): Can you highlight any examples from the dossiers that you have given us as good illustrations of relatively early Scottish input?

Mr McCabe: The spirit drinks regulation provides an example. The Scottish interest in vodka production is strong. I do not want to go too far, but I think that we are making good progress on that. The points that we have made, and how we have made our representations, have had an impact that will benefit considerably an important industry in Scotland. I could sit here all day and give examples, but that is probably one of the most recent instances of a high-profile concern that shows where progress is being made.

Mr Wallace: You said in your introduction that seven items that are not in the current list were in

the 2006 list. Will you say for the record what they are and explain why they were dropped? Are they no longer seen as pressing priorities because they provide examples of progress on which you can report?

Mr McCabe: The items are the aquaculture health directive, the groundwater daughter directive, the framework on mutual recognition of bail decisions, the services directive, the working time directive, public service obligations in land transport and the European Community regulation that governs airport slot allocation.

Those items have been removed for a variety of reasons. Some were dropped because negotiations have concluded. As I said, the Germans have made it clear that they will not emphasise or push the working time directive during their presidency, so we have decided to step back, but the issue is not resolved and might come to prominence again. Negotiations on the services directive have largely concluded. A good compromise on that was found. Such reasons apply to most of the items.

Mr Wallace: In your reply to Mr Gallie about energy, you referred to the spring European Council meeting last weekend. Do you have anything to add usefully to the dossiers, which we received before that meeting took place? Will you bring us up to date on energy and on better regulation, the 25 per cent target for which was up for discussion?

Mr McCabe: Regulation is pertinent and will become even more so in the next few weeks. We wholly endorse the target of a 25 per cent cut by 2012 and we would like a European Union approach to governance that is more concise and imposes less of a burden, without necessarily removing proper emphasis from matters that need to be considered, governed and subject to some regulation. We were pleased by the spring Council meeting's outcomes on regulation, which chime well with what we are doing in Scotland—as members know, the Crerar review is considering regulation and inspection. As I have said, the proportionality of regulation and the burdens that it places on business will be discussed in the weeks before the election.

As for energy efficiency, the target is to reduce energy consumption by 20 per cent by 2020. That chimes well with targets that we have set ourselves, so we endorse that approach. We hope to go further if possible.

It was pleasing that the main issues that were focused on—energy efficiency, climate change and better regulation—are at the forefront of the debate in Scotland. As much as we can, we are leading in Europe. We are prepared to be part of a wider effort but we are also showing that we are

not just paying lip service to these matters. We are interested in making serious progress of our own accord as well as in conjunction with Europe.

Mr Wallace: I might ask about specifics later, but I will let others speak first.

14:30

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I return to a matter that the convener and Irene Oldfather explored with the minister. A few weeks ago, we heard about the Aron report, which I have heard described as a number of things, such as a mature draft and an early draft. It has been said that the report will be published and that it will not be published. Will the minister confirm the status of that document?

On a more important matter for the future, how can we improve Scotland's impact and ensure that its relationship with the European Union is as positive as it can be so that we get what we require from it? Regardless of the make-up of the Government after 3 May, would it be useful for the future minister and the European and External Relations Committee to have a discussion—in private, if necessary—so that there is more understanding of the complexities that are involved in negotiations? It might be useful to discuss how the committee might be able to add helpfully to the process after 3 May.

Mr McCabe: I will deal with your final point first. I have said that having a range of stakeholders adding to the overall Scottish voice is always in our interests. The more discussions that take place between the Executive and our colleagues in the Parliament, the more we will be aware of the difficulties that are encountered, what will and will not be in Scotland's best interests and whether having a particular approach to lobbying could be in our interests. On the other hand, it may not be in our interests to have people popping up when sensitive negotiations are taking place in Europe. There is never any harm in having mature—I stress the word “mature”—discussions about the best approach to our engagement with the European Union. We are all politicians here. There are times for political point scoring and there are times when people need to have a long, hard think about what is in our longer-term interests. If a private discussion between the Executive and the committee can aid our longer-term interests, I would be the last to say that such a discussion would not be useful.

Members will expect me to say that we do not comment on leaked or draft reports. I have penned many letters in my life, decided to sleep on them and substantially changed them the next morning—I am sure that many people have done the same. From what I have read in the press

reports, I think that the issue is not mature drafts or whatever, but something that is simply inaccurate and that does not reflect my experience over the past two years.

Bruce Crawford: Are you saying that the leaked report does not reflect your experience?

Mr McCabe: Definitely, if what I have read in the press reflects what is in the leaked report. What I have read in the press does not reflect my experience, and I assume that, in its wisdom, the press accurately reports such matters, although that may be a triumph of optimism over experience. I do not know.

The Convener: I thank you for responding to Bruce Crawford's question, which was on something that you are not here to talk about. Your answer is much appreciated.

Do you have anything further to ask, Bruce?

Bruce Crawford: In the light of the caveat that has just been given, probably not.

The Convener: Do you want to probe anything else with the minister?

Bruce Crawford: I will return to other issues once other members have had the chance to ask questions.

Phil Gallie: We talked about seven items that were removed from the Executive's list of priorities. When I became a member of the committee some three to four years ago, the Executive exerted pressure on bodies such as health service trusts around the country to prepare for the euro. All the ideas about adopting the euro have now been dropped. What did that exercise cost the Government? Perhaps you will not be able to answer that question now; if you cannot, perhaps you can drop me a line about it.

Mr McCabe: You are right—I cannot answer your question right now. Furthermore, given that considerable investigation would be required in order to answer it, I would not want Phil Gallie to hold his breath while he waits for a note from me. However, we can see what we can do for him. We are talking about on-going governance, and I do not know whether anybody has costed what he has asked about. However, if there is any information that can be supplied, I would be happy to supply it.

Phil Gallie: Is there any on-going activity to prepare for the euro, or has the matter simply been passed to the back? Is that not a priority any more?

Mr McCabe: That is ultimately a decision for our colleagues in Westminster. It is not for me to say what their priorities are at any given time.

Phil Gallie: I am asking about the Executive's priority with respect to preparation because it was a requirement of the Executive that various bodies made preparations.

Mr McCabe: We have indicated 24 areas in Europe on which we want to focus and, within those areas, we have indicated our top priorities for the next six months. That should answer your question.

Phil Gallie: I am quite happy that you have top priorities.

The Convener: What is the difference between priorities and very top priorities? How do you decide what are top priorities?

Mr McCabe: A wide range of issues impact on Scotland. I appreciate that question; I have commented on the point myself in the past. However, it is just a reflection of, for example, the different six-month presidencies setting their priorities and deciding what will be their focus. That is why I said what I did about the working time directive. That could have a major impact on huge parts of our society, but the German presidency will not emphasise it during the next six months, so it would not be the best use of our time to prioritise it now. It will certainly come back, however.

Mr Wallace: I was pleased to hear what the minister had to say about the better regulation agenda and what was agreed at the weekend. The "Implications for Scotland" section of the better regulation agenda dossier says:

"the UK Government is concerned that any target is clear and credible, leaving no room for subsequent argument about responsibilities".

I concur. However, it then goes on to say:

"On subsidiarity grounds the Executive also believe that Member States should be allowed to set their own targets for reducing administrative burdens deriving from purely national legislation."

Does the Scottish Executive have a target in mind, or is work being done to quantify that?

Mr McCabe: I do not know if we will get to setting a target, but work is in progress. I said earlier that we are very happy to play our part in a wider European initiative, whether it be on better regulation or anything else. We would also like to set ourselves challenges that go beyond what has been set elsewhere.

Jim Wallace will know as well as anyone that whenever we talk to business it puts great emphasis on the regulatory burden. There is some pretty convincing evidence that, despite the best of intentions, business entrepreneurship and expansion can be stifled. We are interested in ensuring that we have appropriate regulation, but that is not to say that we want to walk away and

allow things to develop in their own way. We are increasingly conscious that, even though our intentions are good, we can put burdens on business that cause a bit of a stranglehold. As we have said many times, growing the Scottish economy is our number 1 priority. The way in which we frame our regulation and the proportionality that we achieve in that will be a very important part of any progress that we can make. Our own ambitions will sit beside, and perhaps on top of, any other European ambitions.

Mr Wallace: I have one final detailed point, and I accept that if the minister cannot answer it, he might pass it on to Mr Finnie. It relates to the anti-dumping measures against Norwegian farmed salmon. There is an indication that the anti-dumping committee undertook a consultation to determine whether there was sufficient justification for the measures to be suspended—I think that five member states requested a suspension—and that a decision was expected at last month's meeting. Is there an update on that?

Mr McCabe: We are waiting for a report from the World Trade Organization. That will be a strong determining factor in the decision about whether the measures should be suspended. It goes without saying that the issue is tremendously important to us in Scotland because of the number of people employed in the industry and in processing. It has a big impact on us and I know that Mr Finnie is very much alive to the issue. We will pay considerable attention to ensure that our interests are protected.

Bruce Crawford: I am sorry that I missed the first 20 minutes of the meeting—I explained why I could not be here—so I am sorry if this question has already been asked, although I am sure that the minister will tell me if it has been.

Thank you for the briefing papers, minister. They were helpful in enabling me to understand some of the things that are on-going in the Executive and the Executive's position.

First, with regard to the Scotch whisky industry, the

"clarification of the definition of whisky and enhanced protection of geographical indications"

are a significant step forward. However, there are on-going negotiations with the Poles with regard to vodka, and we do not know what the outcome might be. Given that those negotiations are on-going, is the situation regarding whisky cemented or is there a danger that, if the Poles do not get what they want and do not agree with the other member states, the whole agreement might be unpicked?

Secondly, your paper on the draft policy statement on the annual internal and external EU fisheries negotiations states:

"As in previous years, the Executive will ensure that the EU Commission is fully aware of what is at stake in Scotland."

You might not be able to tell us about that today, but I would like to understand that process a bit better with regard to negotiations with Norway.

Mr McCabe: We are comfortable with the situation regarding whisky, and we feel that we have got that agreement settled. We are comfortable with the enhanced protection of geographical indications, and we feel a lot safer about that than we ever have before. As I said before you arrived, we have made considerable progress with regard to vodka. We are not there yet, but we are much more hopeful of reaching a position that safeguards the interests of vodka producers in Scotland.

The Convener: Phil Gallie wishes to come in.

Bruce Crawford: There was another question.

The Convener: Sorry, Bruce. I thought that you had finished.

Mr McCabe: We impact most heavily on the fisheries negotiations through the provision of scientific expertise. Depending on what position they take on the subject, some people raise questions about the science. We want to ensure that decisions are made on the basis of the most robust scientific evidence that is available, and we think that, given Scotland's position, our history and the facilities that we have here, we can play a large part in ensuring that decisions are based on sound science.

Bruce Crawford: That has been the Executive's position all along. However, the paper states that the Executive

"will ensure that the EU Commission is fully aware of what is at stake in Scotland."

It is the process of that, as much as the science, that I am interested in, especially with regard to our relationship with Norway.

Mr McCabe: We have direct meetings with the Commission. That is, if you like, the short route in. Also, as I explained earlier, strong portfolio-to-portfolio discussions take place between Mr Finnie and his counterpart. There are a range of other mechanisms, such as the joint ministerial committee in Europe and our Scotland office, through which a concerted effort is being made.

Bruce Crawford: It is useful to know about the direct negotiations with Europe. At a later stage, perhaps you can give us some detail on those negotiations, such as how often they have taken place, so that we can better understand the area, which is important in the relationship between the EU and Scotland.

Mr McCabe: As I said earlier, six or seven commissioners have visited Scotland this year.

During such visits, various discussions take place—they are not here just to see the castle.

Bruce Crawford: I am sure that they would enjoy seeing that as well.

The Convener: It is a rather nice castle.

I have inadvertently been awfully hard on Bruce Crawford this afternoon. Is that you definitely finished, Bruce, or do you want to ask about something else?

Bruce Crawford: I am fine, thanks.

Phil Gallie: You have been awfully good to me today, convener. This is the third time that I have been allowed to ask a question.

The Convener: Something is seriously wrong.

Phil Gallie: You will agree, minister, that fishing tends to attract the greatest interest in European matters, especially when December is approaching. The current discards system and the waste that is associated with it is very emotive. Has the Executive examined any means of reducing the waste from that system? Have you had any new ideas about how to stop the dumping and, at the same time, control the amount of fish that fishermen take?

Mr McCabe: That is definitely an issue on which I will ask Mr Finnie to write to you directly. You are going into details of which I have no knowledge.

Phil Gallie: I acknowledge that that is not your area of expertise, but I thought that the Cabinet might have discussed the matter. However, I am happy for Mr Finnie to respond.

The Convener: As we have no more questions, I thank the minister and Lynne Vallance for the depth and graciousness of their answers, and David Ferguson.

Mr McCabe: As this is my final appearance before the committee in this session of Parliament, I want to say how much I have enjoyed our engagement and the way in which we have gone about our business. Thank you, too, for the courtesies that I have been shown.

The Convener: My goodness—what is going on? Thank you, minister.

14:45

Meeting suspended.

14:48

On resuming—

Transposition and Implementation of European Directives Inquiry

The Convener: The inquiry is on the agenda to allow us to consider related correspondence. Members will recall that John Home Robertson raised a concern following the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's evidence to the committee on 16 January and that the committee wrote to SEPA seeking clarification. We have now received a response. I ask members whether we should follow up the matter and, if so, how. I know that John Home Robertson has a view, so I ask him to speak first.

John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I am grateful, convener. I apologise for being a sort of semi-detached committee member today. I am also a member of the Communities Committee, which is meeting upstairs, so I am trying to be in two meetings at once.

I am perplexed by the reply from the chairman of SEPA. I should probably defer to Jim Wallace, as he raised the subject when the SEPA representative gave evidence but, from the *Official Report*, it seems to me that Jim Wallace raised a specific question about road planings. The witness sought to justify the fact that the use of road planings is regulated in Scotland but not, as far as I know, anywhere else in the European Union by saying that the regulation results from a petition to the Parliament and recommendations of the Public Petitions Committee. Understandably, Jim Wallace left the matter at that.

Later, I made inquiries and established that the petition was to do with spreading sewage on land, which is a rather different issue. I raised the issue in the committee and then wrote directly to Sir Ken Collins, the chairman of SEPA, to suggest that the evidence that the SEPA witness had given might have been misleading and that he might want to reflect on that. As I said at the outset, I am perplexed by the reply. I expected Sir Ken Collins to apologise for the misunderstanding and clarify the matter. However, he seems to rebut us rather strongly and suggest that what happened did not happen. It might be more appropriate to hear what Jim Wallace thinks, given that he asked the specific question. However, it seems that we were given rather misleading evidence.

That is the procedural point. There is also the bigger point about how we have got into a tartan-plated situation in which Scotland, uniquely in Europe, has a licensing system for the reuse of

planings from public roads to repair people's farmyards and tracks, which seems odd.

Mr Wallace: I am grateful that John Home Robertson did the initial spadework in following up the matter with SEPA. The clerks have helpfully provided an extract from the *Official Report* of the meeting of 16 January, which confirms my recollection that I asked specifically about road planings. I am in no doubt that I did not pursue the line of questioning because the reply was that the Parliament had asked for the measures. It may have been Mr Gordon, whom I was sitting next to that day, who said to me that that was a bit of a show-stopper of an answer. There was no suggestion that the petition was on sewage sludge. Therefore, we did not try to identify why, if the use of sewage sludge triggered the measure, it is wide enough to embrace road planings.

John Home Robertson is right that there are two issues. One is that it seems that we were not given a frank and accurate answer. I am disappointed that Ken Collins did not simply admit that. The second is the issue that relates to road planings, which the committee did not explore because of the answers that were given to us.

Dennis Canavan: SEPA's reply does not clarify the matter much at all, as it seems to confuse two issues. It would be more honest if SEPA had just admitted that the person who gave evidence made a mistake. By the way, there is also a mistake in SEPA's letter, unless there has been a misprint. The third last sentence does not make sense. It states:

"The Report was also references as one of the drivers",

but I think that it should state, "The report was also referenced as one of the drivers". Anyway, the reply is unsatisfactory. We have put it on the record that we feel that SEPA should be more honest and admit it if the witness made a mistake.

The Convener: There are two issues. The first is the obvious disappointment that the committee feels at SEPA's response. It seems to me that SEPA either misunderstood or deliberately misunderstood the questions that we asked following the meeting. The response is certainly not adequate, given the issues that John Home Robertson and Jim Wallace have raised. I suggest that we send to SEPA a copy of the *Official Report* of today's discussion asking for its comments, with a covering letter saying that SEPA has not really addressed the issue on which we wrote earlier.

The second issue is the substantive one, which Jim Wallace was not allowed to follow up, on the licensing of the use of road planings. We have run out of time to investigate the matter, so I suggest that we ask either the Environment and Rural Development Committee or the committee that

has responsibility for the environment in the next session of Parliament to deal with the matter.

John Home Robertson: Clearly, we have run out of time and the committee can do nothing further. On the substantive point, a strong case can be made for asking the future environment committee to consider the issue, with a view to making changes so that a uniquely Scottish burden is lifted from industry.

On the procedural point, I honestly feel that the reply from Sir Ken Collins makes the situation worse. I am prepared to accept that there was an honest misunderstanding and that a mistake was made when the evidence was given in committee, but I cannot understand our getting a letter suggesting that that was not so and that everything was entirely appropriate. I hope that a pretty strongly worded letter will go back to SEPA—perhaps copied to the agency's sponsoring minister—to emphasise the point. Perhaps our successors could look at it, too.

We are in danger of making a mountain out of a molehill, but there is a significant procedural point and, among it, there is also a substantive point about an unnecessary restriction on industry.

The Convener: I suggest that, in writing the letter in the terms that John Home Robertson stated, we ask for a response before dissolution so that we can make it public. I hate the idea of this procedural issue being taken into another parliamentary session. It would be far better to knock it on the head before the end of March.

Mr Wallace: I agree, and John Home Robertson's point about copying the letter to the sponsoring minister is good. Indeed, were it not for the fact that we are reaching the end of the session, I would be minded to suggest that we ask Ken Collins to appear before the committee to answer our questions. However, that option is not really open to us.

The Convener: Does the committee agree to write the letter?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Do you have to leave us, John?

John Home Robertson: I am afraid so.

The Convener: Thank you for coming for that item; it was important.

Finland Study Trip

14:56

The Convener: Item 4 is a report back to the full committee on the European Commission-funded study trip that Bruce Crawford, Phil Gallie, Dennis Canavan and I took part in on Monday and Tuesday last week.

The clerk will draft a report on the outcomes of the trip, but I thought that it would be good to give the members who went on the trip the opportunity to speak about our experiences and discuss the visit with the rest of the committee. Some of you may have read Douglas Fraser's piece in *The Herald* yesterday—he was on the trip with us.

I thank the Commission and particularly Neil Mitchison, the Commission's representative in Scotland, for the organised way in which the study trip was carried out.

Dennis Canavan: I found it an interesting and informative visit and I would like to give some of my general impressions.

Finland is an interesting country in that it manages to combine a high level of social investment in, for example, education and health with a strong emphasis on business development and, particularly, the use of information and communication technology in business development.

I also found the attitudes that were expressed—and, if there is such a thing, the national attitude—interesting. For example, there seems to be an attitude of trust to teachers. I do not think that teachers get paid any more in Finland than they do here, but they have greater status. Not just the pupils but the parents look up to and trust the teachers. Finland does not even have a national inspection system, yet the educational system seems to be doing well. Within it, there also seems to be a healthy attitude to technical and vocational training, which is not seen as second rate or inferior but is on a par with a more academic education. The economy benefits as a result.

There also seems to be a healthy attitude towards physical activity. Some years ago, the Finns had a problem similar to the current Scottish problem of obesity, lack of activity, bad diet and alcohol abuse. They would not claim to have solved all the problems—some still exist—but they are making huge efforts and there have been huge improvements, particularly in getting children to be more physically active and to eat more nutritious meals at school.

15:00

There seems to be a national plan to tackle many of those problems. Finland is able to implement that plan despite the fact that the delivery of many things is in the hands of 300 to 400 municipalities. That is a huge number of local authorities for a country with a population about the same size as ours. I would love to have met some of the people who are involved in the municipalities. That was perhaps a notable omission. I would like to know how the municipalities deliver services, given that there is a huge number of them.

Finland places great emphasis on future planning. We met a parliamentary committee that specialises in that, and we also heard about the work of the Finland futures research centre. Great emphasis is placed on forward strategic thinking that leads to forward strategic planning. Instead of waiting to see what hits them, the Finns look ahead and try to predict the problems and challenges that will face them in the years to come. Their forward thinking helps them with the national planning on the matters that I mentioned earlier.

Bruce Crawford: I, too, thank the European Commission for setting up what was a very useful trip, although it was a bit packed. By the end of it, a bit of overload was going on. There was probably too much information in the short time that was available. Nevertheless, the trip was worth while.

I am fascinated by Finland's geography and history, which have led to the Finns being a self-reliant, self-sacrificing and innovative people. That is the impression that I was left with of the people of Finland. After we met members of the Finnish Committee for the Future, which Dennis Canavan mentioned, we had a useful session with the directors of the Confederation of Finnish Industries. They described how the national consensus builds in co-operation between themselves and the trade unions; how the trade unions are involved in their society and the decision-making process before they negotiate; and the way in which they dealt with the Finnish presidency of the EU and its outcomes. Some 130 important European meetings were held in Finland during the six months of the presidency.

For me, the most fascinating aspect is Finland's policies on innovation. We visited TEKES, which is the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation. The Finns push forward with risk taking and research and try to ensure that their economy is at the leading edge. They always recognise that they have the huge influence and impact of Nokia, but they are doing as much as they can to try to diversify their economy away from that base. They have to do that, but I guess

that it will be some time before they are not reliant on Nokia. That brings me back to their geography and history and their self-reliance. In particular, they explained the turnaround in their economy since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. They managed to reposition Finland as one of the most successful countries in the world, at least in terms of gross domestic product. Switzerland and Finland are at the top of all the graphs on GDP and economic growth.

In addition to having discussions with the Government agencies, we met the marketing company Otaniemi Marketing, which told us about its incubator project for small companies that are involved in ICT. I had not heard of that before. Under one roof, the company provides support, training and help with business plans to innovative small companies that want to get on. That was fascinating.

We have masses to learn from the way in which business is done in Finland, although we have still to get to the bottom of whether the Finns are genuinely staying within the European Union's rules—it went quiet when we asked about that.

Dennis Canavan covered some of the issues relating to education. I was fascinated by the fact that there is no inspectorate in Finland and that it is left to local officials and monitoring to ensure that educational standards are attained. The figures that we were given for educational attainment and for outputs for literacy and so on indicated that Finland is ahead of Scotland in that area. I do not know whether that is the result of Finland not having an inspectorate, but the issue deserves examination. Perhaps we are overburdening people with ticking boxes, instead of allowing them to get on with the job. I am not saying that we should throw away the inspectorate tomorrow, but there are points from which Scotland can learn.

Equally, Finland has some fundamental structural problems that it must tackle and that will be significant in the future. Those problems relate not just to the health of the nation but to the economy and how Finland will deal with globalisation. However, the way in which the Finns are connected with the rest of the world will give them at least a chance of success. That comes back to the fact that they are a self-reliant, self-sacrificing and innovative people. I think that they will get through the challenges that they will face in the future.

Phil Gallie: Dennis Canavan and Bruce Crawford have covered many of the points that I wanted to make, so I will add just one or two.

One reason why we went to Finland was to look at the research situation there. We saw that the level of spending on research in Finland is high,

and that a high proportion of that investment comes from private industry. As the committee suspected when discussing the issue, Nokia provides a substantial amount of the research.

I do not often thank the European Commission, but I have written to Neil Mitchison to make the point that the trip was very worth while—it was certainly an eye-opener. After our deliberations, I was left with the impression that the term high-tech Finland registered not just in the activities of the companies but in the minds of the people—the Finns see themselves as a high-tech nation that is right at the forefront and is pressing ahead. That is tremendous in a nation such as the Finns, especially when we consider that no one else in the world speaks their language but they have become world leaders, to an extent, in high technology.

My next point is controversial, and I promise Bruce Crawford that I am not making it as a political point. The emphasis that the Finns put on energy and the fact that they have decided, irrespective of the controversy surrounding the issue, to press ahead with a nuclear energy programme says a lot about them and about the situation in Europe with respect to security of energy supply. One report that we picked up from the Committee for the Future outlined three scenarios for Russia in 2017. I have looked at the report, and two of the options are quite scary. We must hope like hell that the third scenario turns out to be right and that Russia moves towards the European Union—members may be surprised to hear me say that—and adopts the EU approach towards co-operation with its neighbours. I like to think that the report will be valuable in the future.

Reference has been made in the Parliament to the Committee for the Future. Initially I was impressed by the committee but, when we talked to the planners at the Prime Minister's office, they seemed to have forgotten about it in their deliberations. Although the committee is a good idea, I would like to explore further whether it is as valuable as it seemed to be on first impression.

At Otaniemi Marketing, we talked about the incubator companies. One must be impressed by the huge number of small companies there, but the UK ambassador pointed out to us that once the incubator companies had got through the Otaniemi experience, they were left to sink or swim. She seemed to think that it might be advantageous for us to have a quiet look at that and to consider attracting some of those companies over to Scotland to develop at the stage after incubation. That would be valuable; it would not be doing down our neighbours in Finland because they very much welcome the idea of Finnish people with expertise going abroad to spread the word on Finland and continuing their

relationships with Finland at the same time as helping other countries to meet their targets on economic development and progression.

The Convener: I will not say much because most of the issues have been covered. My overriding impression was that there was a lot that we could learn but that we should not be so naive as to think that we could just transplant the Finnish model in Scotland, because there are quite a few fundamental differences between the two countries.

In his article—which I hope everyone will read—Douglas Fraser concentrated on the level of trust that exists in Finland, which goes further than the trust that exists between teachers, pupils and parents, for example. There is a degree of trust between the population and the Government, which I found astounding. If the Finnish Government says that something should be done, it is not questioned in any significant way. In general, the population believe that if the Government and the Parliament have said that a particular measure should be taken, that must be the best way forward. There is much in the country's fairly recent history that suggests why that might be the case. I found that to be an important factor in Finland's ability to move forward in certain regards.

An example of that is Finland's knowledge economy which, as Phil Gallie said, is about more than just business—it embraces the population as a whole. People do all sorts of things online, including direct interaction with the Government. We know that if such a proposal were made here, people would not trust what the information that they were asked to provide would be used for.

Like Phil Gallie, I was impressed by the Finnish Committee for the Future at the outset, but then I began to wonder whether it was as relevant as we first thought. Later on, I picked up that when we asked questions about it, there was sometimes no understanding of why we felt it necessary to ask such questions because of course things would be that way. Perhaps that goes back to the issue of trust that I mentioned.

That led me to think about our futures forum, which has roots in the Finnish model, and whether it is possible for such a forum to make an impact on futures thinking if it is not mainstreamed in such a way that it is insisted that the findings are considered consensually. Our futures forum is not like that—its considerations take place outside the Parliament. When its reports come to parliamentarians and decision makers, we tend to look at them and think that their recommendations sound quite good, but then we put them aside because there is no impetus to push matters forward.

Phil Gallie: An important aspect of that committee is its emphasis on the long term rather than the short term.

The Convener: In my opinion, long-term thinking is something that we lack in politics in our country.

My final point about what I learned is worth putting on the record because I would like a future Education Committee to consider it. I was astounded to learn that in the Finnish education system, the attainment of looked-after children is higher than that of children who live with their families and go to school. I would love to understand how that astounding feat has been achieved and to try to emulate it.

I look forward to the report's publication, because it will contain a lot of information. As a result, I suggest that it be sent not only to committee members but to relevant subject committees and the futures forum for future consideration.

15:15

Phil Gallie: Will ex-members get a copy?

The Convener: Phil, I would never dream of not asking you to comment on the report before it is published. I ask Jim Johnston to make a note of that.

Irene Oldfather: I thank members for a very interesting update on their visit. I was sorry that I was not able to join you, but I had accepted a speaking engagement in Ayrshire some months earlier and, under the circumstances, it would have been inappropriate for me to have withdrawn from it.

I have found all this very interesting, and I hope that we will be able to continue the work at some level, especially on the issue of looked-after children, which the convener touched on. Given that expenditure per schoolchild is higher in Scotland than it is in Finland, it would be interesting to find out how the Finnish have managed to reach such levels of attainment.

I have also been amazed at how the Finns have turned round the public health agenda. Indeed, in the very early days of the Parliament, the Health and Community Care Committee took a lot of evidence on the Finnish experience. I like to think that that work has contributed to and informed some of what has gone on in Scotland. I hope that we are beginning to make some inroads in that respect.

From my limited knowledge, I believe that the Finns coped incredibly well when their economy more or less collapsed after the break-up of the Soviet Union. However, they are still struggling

with high unemployment levels. Of course, we can always learn from sharing and discussing such experiences and I welcome any moves in that direction. Although some of the members on that trip will soon not be with us, I am sure that the committee will still be able to learn more things in future.

The Convener: On that sombre note, are members content with the course of action that has been outlined?

Members indicated agreement.

Sift

15:17

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is the sift. I see that we are 10 or 15 minutes ahead of the very loose timings suggested in the convener's brief so, in honour of Phil Gallie, we can spend a bit more time on this item.

Do members have any comments on the sift of European documents and draft legislation?

Irene Oldfather: I was going to agree it in Phil Gallie's honour.

The Convener: Phil, the floor is yours.

Phil Gallie: You have caught me on the hop, convener. Given the number of documents that we receive under this item, it is always interesting to pick out a few and look at them. However, reading some of the comments that have been made about the documents, I think that it would take a Philadelphia lawyer to ascertain—

The Convener: There is a lawyer sitting beside you.

Phil Gallie: Aye, but he is not from Philadelphia.

I have to say that there were so many items in the sift that I did not spend a great deal of time on it this month. That said, I like this item, because it tends to highlight the issues that are going through the system. Indeed, another document that the committee will consider a little later refers to the fact that 1,000 EU documents will pass through this committee, many of which, I suspect, are contained in the sift. I make a plea that if we are putting such a figure into our annual report, we should also be able to say something about those documents. I suppose that that is the purpose of the sift.

In any case, I certainly found the sift useful last month when we questioned the minister—although I have to say that he did not particularly appreciate it.

The Convener: Is that your swan song, Phil?

Phil Gallie: On the sift, yes, it is.

Dennis Canavan: Hear, hear.

The Convener: If members have no other comments, do we agree to refer the documents to the committees indicated?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: As that concludes what is likely to be our final item in public in this parliamentary session, I thank members very much for their attendance at and participation in committee meetings. I have been convener for a relatively

short time—a year and a half, if I am correct—and I thank in particular Phil Gallie, Dennis Canavan, Jim Wallace and John Home Robertson, who has had to dash off to another committee, for serving this committee very well and for a longer time than I have. As we all know, they are not standing for the Scottish Parliament again, so we can definitely say that they will not be back to serve on the committee. I thank them very much for their input and assistance.

Irene Oldfather: I have been on the committee since 1999, so I am one of the longest-serving members. So is Dennis Canavan, whom I will be sorry to lose. Despite many changes in the committee, Dennis and I have been the two constants.

The Convener: The dynamic duo.

Irene Oldfather: I thank Dennis Canavan for the work that he put into the committee. I also thank John Home Robertson, who was deputy convener when I was convener. John was always a source of support during that time, and I appreciate the efforts that he has put into the committee over a number of years.

The committee just will not be the same without Phil Gallie. It will not be nearly as interesting. I do not know who the future committee will get to replace Phil. I do not even know whether I will be here, but I have really enjoyed working with both Phil Gallie and Jim Wallace. The committee has produced a lot of good work, and I echo the convener's thanks to other members.

Dennis Canavan: As the joint longest-serving member of the committee, I thank the convener for her excellent convenership. I also thank the deputy convener who, like me, was an original member of the European Committee away back in 1999. The convener and the deputy convener have done an excellent job together. I wish all my colleagues who are not standing for re-election all the best for the future, and I thank the other members of the committee, too, for their comradeship.

Phil Gallie: The most unenjoyable period that I spent on the European and External Relations Committee was the time when I was also on the Edinburgh Tram (Line One) Bill Committee. Because of the nature of that committee, I was required to miss quite a number of this committee's meetings. Otherwise, I could hardly be held back from coming along.

I have enjoyed every minute of my participation, and I have enjoyed working with all committee members, despite our various altercations. I have particularly enjoyed arguing with Irene Oldfather, who holds some views on Europe that are diametrically opposed to mine, although we do hold one view in common, as I certainly would not

advocate our coming out of Europe. That is a different argument from the one that divides us, which is about what we do within the European Union.

Quite honestly, I think that the committee has had a lot to put up with because of my contributions at times. I have tended to extend meetings and I have often heard Gordon Jackson and Charlie Gordon saying, "Oh, not him again." I have enjoyed every minute of it. Like Dennis Canavan, I wish those colleagues who will not be back all the best for whatever they do when they leave the Parliament.

The Convener: You have to say something now, Jim.

Mr Wallace: I was going to give Gordon Jackson a chance. I thank members for their kind words. I also thank you, convener. This is the only committee of the Parliament that I have served on and I therefore have a particular affinity towards it. One of the features of the committee that I have particularly valued is that, with one or two exceptions, our business has proceeded on a non-partisan basis. Because of that, our work carries more weight when we are presenting arguments to the Parliament and the Executive.

Who knows what the next parliamentary session will bring, but the committee has taken a view on matters covering the whole range of the Executive's activities. It is important that we have been able to proceed in such a non-partisan way, with members valuing one another's company and point of view, even when we do not necessarily agree with the views that are expressed by others.

Convener, I thank you for your convenership and I wish those colleagues who will not be returning all the very best. Without being political, I hope that colleagues who may or may not be returning have their wishes granted—in one way or another.

The Convener: Thank you for that. I am sure that John Home Robertson would have liked to say something at this point, too, but he cannot. On his behalf, therefore, I will say that he thinks that you are all wonderful—I am sure that he will forgive me for that.

I now invite members of the public to leave the meeting.

15:25

Meeting continued in private until 16:17.

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