

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 22 September 1999
(*Afternoon*)

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 22 September 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Teachers' Pay

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The first item of business is a statement by Mr Sam Galbraith on teachers' pay. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions during it.

14:30

The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith): I would like to set out for Parliament the decision that I have taken relating to future professional conditions of teachers and give further details of the independent inquiry that I am establishing.

My first priority is the quality of education received by our children. I recognise that that priority is shared by teachers. I have paid tribute to the outstanding quality and commitment of teachers and I do so again.

It is one of my objectives to raise the professional status of teachers. There is a need for a fresh look at conditions of employment as part of a broader approach to restore teachers to their proper place in society. In order to achieve that, teachers must be willing to accept a degree of change. It is reasonable to expect similar flexibility and openness to change to that which has been shown by other professions and other local authority groups.

Local authority employers have recognised for some time the need for change in teachers' conditions. Many in the teaching profession have acknowledged that the present approach to hours of work and duties is a barrier to change and improvement. Despite this, the arrangements for discussing these issues have produced stagnation rather than progress.

Negotiations designed to lead to change failed in the early 1990s. Discussions on possible changes began again with the millennium review set up under the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education in May 1997. The present negotiations started after the millennium review reported in September 1998. With the Educational Institute of Scotland ballot

result announced last Friday the negotiations have reached an impasse.

I must emphasise that this offer did not come from the Executive. We did not formulate the offer; we did not put it on the table. It was the product of discussions between the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the teaching unions. I am here neither to support it nor to reject it.

It has been suggested that more money would automatically lead to a solution. I do not believe that money is the real issue. The local authority offer would have given the 18,000 teachers at the top of the unpromoted scale an increase of 17.3 per cent by 1 April 2001. The average increase across all grades would have been 14 per cent; no teacher would have got less than 11 per cent. The biggest increases would have come next year, not in 2001. All this is against the background of low inflation; inflation fell to 1.1 per cent in August.

Let me emphasise that the Executive was prepared to play its part in helping authorities to fund the settlement. The total cost of the deal would have increased the pay bill by £180 million by 2001-02. Given the level of inflation, there was generous provision for teachers' pay in the financial settlement for local government. However, we had told COSLA that we were prepared to be flexible beyond that to help the authorities. We had guaranteed an additional £8 million to COSLA prior to the last stages of their negotiations to help achieve a settlement. Money was available for the genuine modernisation of teachers' pay and conditions, on top of the additional resources that are already going into our schools.

Teachers have voted comprehensively against those proposals. They have every right to do that. My responsibility now is to find another way forward in order to deliver greater professionalism and flexibility, higher standards and better education for our children. Despite two years of discussion, for the second time this decade the current mechanism has failed to deliver a suitable package that is acceptable to teachers and that recognises their professional status and commitment. Clearly, the current arrangements do not work.

That is why I have decided that—to break the logjam—I will do two things. The first is to bring forward proposals to remove the statutory basis of the SJNC. That should come as no surprise. I made it clear to both sides at the outset that, should the discussions fail, the SJNC could not continue. It is an archaic piece of bargaining machinery that has demonstrably failed to address the need for change. It is inflexible because its agreements have the force of law and cannot be changed without further agreement. It has also established a wide-ranging remit over matters

which properly belong either to local management or, as in the case of class sizes, to this Parliament. I take the view that the laws of the land should be made here in Parliament, not in a negotiating committee. I believe that it is necessary to make this change to allow the proper consideration of terms of employment for the teaching profession.

At the same time, I am establishing an independent committee of inquiry. It will be asked to advise on what changes to the structure of teachers' conditions of employment, including pay, are required to meet the needs of the new millennium, and also to recommend a future approach to determining further changes to those conditions of employment. Its remit—a copy of which I have placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre—is wide and will allow all the issues that have arisen in the recent negotiations to be considered objectively on the basis of evidence.

I emphasise that I have no preconceived view of what the inquiry should recommend. I expect it to be fair, balanced and impartial. I believe that this is the way to address the very difficult issues that have arisen. I have asked the inquiry to report by May next year so that its conclusions can influence next year's negotiations. However, I consider that it is right that the SJNC is left with the final task of resolving the question of any pay agreement for 1999. That is its responsibility and I call on both sides to work out a realistic approach that will avoid any disruption in the classroom.

Finally, I turn to the chairmanship and membership of the inquiry. Today I will place in the information centre details of those who have agreed to serve.

The chairman will be Professor Gavin McCrone. He will bring to this inquiry long experience of economics, management and public administration. Although he has considerable university teaching experience, I have deliberately chosen someone who has no involvement in the school system in order to underline the objectivity with which this task should be approached.

Members will include a secondary and a primary head teacher, a local authority chief executive, a personnel director from a major business based in Scotland, the chairman of the Scottish School Boards Association and an academic with wide experience of pay and employment issues. One further member with a private sector or professional background will be appointed after discussions with the chairman. The inquiry has access to advice from a director of education and from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools and it will be supported by a well-resourced secretariat.

I am confident that with this mix of skills and experience the inquiry will be able to bring fresh

thinking to these problems and to recommend solutions that will command general support. It is in everyone's interest to see the inquiry succeed, and I invite this Parliament to wish it well. I commend it to this Parliament.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I begin by expressing my regret that the minister has not opted to bring these proposals for proper debate and decision by this Parliament, but has instead opted to hide behind a ministerial statement, giving little opportunity for scrutiny. It is for that reason that I give notice that the SNP intends to use its Opposition debate, next Thursday, to give this Parliament the opportunity to hold the Executive to account for its handling of this issue.

I ask the minister to address the following points. First, given that there is a parliamentary committee structure that includes an education committee, how can he justify the additional and substantial cost to the taxpayer of setting up another so-called independent committee? Why does the minister prefer a hand-picked committee to our own parliamentary committee?

Secondly, how can the minister argue, as he has done in his statement, that the proposed committee will be independent, when he has already said that he is prepared to predetermine its conclusions? He said in his statement that he has decided to remove the statutory basis from the SJNC. What if—and let me hypothesise—the committee decides, after an inquiry, that the current impasse is not the result of defective negotiating machinery but, as the majority of people in Scotland believe, the result of a defective offer? It was an offer that, I note with interest, he was not prepared to support, even though he expected teachers to vote for it in the recent ballots.

My final point relates to resources. Notwithstanding the minister's comments about resources, no one in Scotland doubts that it was a lack of money that was responsible for a pay offer that barely preserves the current position of teachers over a three-year period, that does nothing to tackle the problem of pay erosion, that led to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities finessing the proposals for structural change to a point at which they were unworkable, and that led to a proposal that would put 100,000 children in Scotland into bigger classes. Given that the proposed committee will be bound by the same financial constraints as COSLA, will we not end up in the same position in May that we are in now: faced with the hard fact that the only way to break the logjam—to use the minister's words—is by providing additional resources?

Finally—

The Presiding Officer: I think that makes two

finallys.

Nicola Sturgeon: Is it not the case that today's proposal has little to do with solving this dispute and everything to do with the short-term objective of getting this problem off the minister's desk?

Mr Galbraith: I am sorry that Miss Sturgeon was once again unable to show any generosity in her response to my statement. I am also surprised that she objects to the fact that I have brought a statement to this Parliament. I would have thought that that was part of the normal democratic process. I hope that she will become accustomed to the normal process of democracy. She is perfectly entitled, in her own time, to have a debate on this matter, and we would welcome that.

She asked why we could not leave all this to the committee on which she sits. This is an extremely complex and difficult matter, which will take up a considerable amount of time and a great deal of expertise. I do not think that it is the role of parliamentary committees to carry out that scrutiny.

I was also asked why I abolished the SJNC. It is important to recognise that I am abolishing the statutory basis of the SJNC. The reason I am doing that is that the current system simply has not worked. It is no good saying, "Well, if the offer had been better, the machinery would have worked." The problem with the machinery is that it has never brought an offer that could be acceptable—that would recognise teachers' professionalism and that would allow us to enhance that professionalism. There are all those teachers in Scotland who are doing a great job, working more than their contracted hours, but we do not have a system that allows us to reward them. The SJNC has singularly failed teachers, and I think that it is a good idea to get rid of it.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP) rose—

Mr Galbraith: Sorry, Margo, much as I love you, you will have to ask me a question—and make it a nice one, please.

The Presiding Officer: We cannot have interventions in the middle of answers.

Mr Galbraith: Miss Sturgeon talked about the money—I wish she would listen to what I say before she writes out the questions that she is going to ask me. I explained the offer in some detail: it is an across-the-board 15 per cent over three years; inflation is currently 1.1 per cent. I am not here to get into the rights and wrongs of it, but is Nicola saying that that is an unreasonable offer?

She raised the old chestnut of class sizes. I think class sizes should be decided here and not by the SJNC. I am not here to justify the offer, but one thing Nicola forgot to mention is that part of it,

along with the composite class sizes, is that next year the reduction of all classes up to S2 to classes of 30 or less would begin. Nicola either did not know that—so she has not read the offer—or she conveniently forgot it. Either way it shows her in a bad light.

The Presiding Officer: As members will have heard, the issue is going to be debated next week. We have only 15 minutes left for short questions and answers.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I see myself as a generous chap so I welcome the minister telling us officially, at last, what he intends to do. There have been a number of other opportunities to do so, not least at the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

He is Labour's third education minister in two years. Is he aware of his predecessors' criticisms of the possible abolition of the SJNC? Since he is adopting a policy that the Conservatives have put forward for more than two years, I would be happy to share a poke of chips with him so that he can hear and adopt more of our policies.

The Cubie committee has a budget of some £700,000 over six months and the McCrone committee—as no doubt it will be called—will take eight months to report. How much will it cost? Surely it would be better to use the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, which would be at no cost to the Scottish taxpayer and could bring forward a settlement that the minister would still be an arbiter for and could still bring to the Parliament. Since that is currently in the statute he could act immediately.

Mr Galbraith: Mr Monteith makes great play of Conservative policies—I see one of their front bench spokesmen, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, is in favour of strike action. That is a policy that Mr Monteith might want to endorse. It is interesting that Tories are now in favour of strikes. I will expect them to be behind every worker, manning the barricades, at the picket lines, secondary picketing.

I see Mr Monteith has not risen to support that. He asked me how much the committee will cost. I do not know the answer, but it will have a well-resourced secretariat; I will write to him about that. It will be money well spent if it produces a solution. The purpose of the long-term independent committee of inquiry is not to find a solution to the current dispute, which has to go back to the SJNC to be resolved, but to do two things: to come up with the ideal terms and conditions for teachers and with a mechanism that prevents us getting into this problem year in, year out.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): A friend of mine used to have a poster for a film on the wall. The film starred a

rather wild dog that turned out to be a good thing in the end and its name was Savage Sam. Is Savage Sam happy that his recent statements have been portrayed by the press as Galbraith taking on the teachers, as no doubt the statement today will be, as if he were engaged in a power struggle against teachers for the soul of Scottish education? Or does he agree with me that his aim is to create and work with a well-motivated, well-paid profession that feels it has a genuine opportunity to influence its own future and the direction of Scottish education?

I am worried that, when the offer was given, teachers were absolutely right to throw it out. The restructuring proposals—I am not talking about the money—would have ripped the heart out of Scottish education and out of current schools management structures, and would have replaced them with something untried, untested, half-baked, nebulous and deeply demotivating to the majority of middle management in our schools.

The Presiding Officer: Order. We must have a question, Ian.

Ian Jenkins: The question is, "Does he agree with me?" [*Laughter.*] As I was going to say, there was never the slightest suggestion of real consultation with the people involved: the senior teachers, principal teachers and even head teachers, whose organisation also threw the proposal out, where it belonged.

Mr Galbraith: Ian Jenkins is quickly learning how to make a statement while turning it into a question. You and I, Presiding Officer, are ourselves skilled in those methods.

I am genuinely sad about the way in which the dispute has been portrayed. It has never been my intention to take on teachers. In fact, I went out of my way, right from the start of my period as minister, to change the language and what was to be included in documents, and to offer the olive branch. I did that for a simple reason: without teachers, we cannot deliver our high-quality education. I genuinely believe that the vast majority of teachers do an outstanding job, and I thank them for that.

I am trying to find a solution, and I am just sorry that that has been portrayed otherwise. The problem that I have with the current arrangement is that it has failed to deliver for teachers. Once again, we have had three years of negotiations and have come up with an unacceptable package. How can we allow a system which results in that to persist? I want a system which recognises teachers and which values the high-quality work that they do. I hope that what I am doing is portrayed as that.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I wish to endorse the minister's hope that there will be a

settlement this year, to avoid any disruption to our children's education. Does the minister agree that any settlement under the present system is likely to leave teachers in Scotland worse off than their counterparts elsewhere, and that some method is needed to ensure that the worth of Scottish teachers in our society is properly recognised? Will the minister, in his deliberations on the negotiating committee's eventual recommendations, consider a future for collective bargaining—albeit, as he has said, without a statutory basis—that is available to workers in the public sector?

Mr Galbraith: I do not prejudge what the negotiating committee may come up with. They might propose a system of collective bargaining. That cannot be on a statutory basis in the common sense: my view is that the laws of this land should be made here and not by a negotiating committee. It is a matter for the SJNC, and I do not want to give it any steer on that line.

Hugh Henry is right. The SJNC has allowed teachers to fall behind their English counterparts—its members should think about that.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I wish to address the membership of the new committee. On the list are a local authority chief executive—

The Presiding Officer: Let us have a question straight away, please.

Fiona McLeod: Fine. Can the minister give an assurance that the vacant post will be filled by a representative from the unions, or is the Labour party now as hostile to the unions as the Tories are?

Mr Galbraith: I understand that the Tories are now on the union side. They want them to go on strike. I would point out that the Confederation of British Industry is not represented either. We tried to get a balanced committee, representing everyone. The other member will be decided by the chairman, in consultation with myself.

The Presiding Officer: I call Helen Eadie.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I withdraw my question, because Hugh Henry asked it.

The Presiding Officer: Wonderful. I will take Dennis Canavan's question.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Does the minister seriously think that he knows better than 98 per cent of Scottish teachers? Does he not realise that his mishandling of the issue is a recipe for conflict? What is not required is the setting up of another so-called independent inquiry that could go on for many months; rather, a fair negotiated settlement within the SJNC system is urgently

required, one that would be in the best interests of teachers and of the children in our schools. They deserve much better than the mixture of arrogance and intransigence emanating from the minister.

Mr Galbraith: Thank you, Dennis, for your usual comradely language.

Once again, Dennis gets the matter confused. I am not arguing about the rights and wrongs of the offer. After three years, we have again come up with an offer that is completely and utterly unacceptable to teachers. How did we get into that position? What on earth are we doing, upholding a system that, after three years, produces an offer that is unacceptable to teachers and does not recognise their position? Surely the system simply does not work. What we need is a change to a system that produces a settlement that is fair, that recognises teachers and that teachers want. The current system does not deliver that. Dennis should recognise that and stop hanging on to the past.

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): Irrespective of what the committee of inquiry may or may not recommend, will my comrade the minister reassure the Parliament that the Executive will stand by the principle of a national agreement on pay and conditions for teachers? The agreement should apply evenly across Scotland and should be achieved through collective bargaining by, on the one hand, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which is the employer, and, on the other, the teachers' unions.

Mr Galbraith: Without giving the committee a steer, my answer is an unequivocal yes.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister said that he had no preconceived idea of what the outcome of the inquiry should be, while some dubiety has arisen recently over the outcome of the Cubie inquiry and whether its recommendations will be implemented. Will he give members a guarantee that, whatever the outcome of the inquiry, he will honour it—in particular, if that outcome is in line with or exceeds teachers' current demands?

Mr Galbraith: May I explain again that the committee is charged with two tasks. The first is the consideration of a suitable package of terms and conditions for teachers. The dispute will have to be settled this year, within the SJNC system, but we will certainly recommend that the committee consider the correct structure for pay and conditions for teachers. The second task is the consideration of formal arrangements for progress in future years.

We will examine the committee's recommendations when they are passed to us. I am sure that all members will have a view on

those arrangements and will wish to discuss the matter at that time.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Does the minister agree that everyone in education recognises that there is a need for change, as the debate has been going on for a long time? They welcome the opportunity that the committee gives to all parties—to political parties in the chamber and to everyone in education—to contribute constructively to a satisfactory outcome.

Mr Galbraith: I agree with Des McNulty's comments. I wish to re-emphasise that I am trying to deliver a system that recognises teachers' professionalism and rewards them for the job that they do. I hope that the committee will recommend solutions that will address that.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I suspect that the reality is that the Executive was relieved that the teachers voted the pay deal down. We should examine the figures. We are told that the pay bill was £180 million and that the minister had offered an additional £8 million. The reality is that the gap was £14 million. Would the Executive have come up with the extra £6 million to finance the pay deal, had it been accepted, or would classroom assistants have been sacrificed instead?

Mr Galbraith: I hope that the member was listening to what I said as I went through my statement. The cost of the pay deal was £187 million. We put in £8 million simply to deal with the immediate position. Mr Crawford was in COSLA and knows the reality of the situation. While I know his views on the settlement, I suspect that they are not what he expressed today. Mr Crawford should be very careful what he says on this. He has been heard around the corridors of power in local government.

We always made it clear that we were willing to be flexible in the future and to help fill the gap. The local authorities would have to find some efficiencies, but we were certainly prepared to be flexible. On that subject, I hear that Mr Crawford's party leader now plans to find tuition fees from efficiencies. Splendid. There we are then.

Beef on the Bone

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next ministerial statement is on beef on the bone. The Minister for Health and Community Care will take questions at the end of her statement. I remind members that we have only a short time for this item and that we prefer questions to statements disguised as questions.

15:01

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): I am grateful for the opportunity to make this statement to the chamber today. Members will recall that in last week's food safety debate, I touched on the Executive's position on beef on the bone. Since then, there has been considerable press coverage of the issue and we have received requests from a number of members to clarify the Scottish position. We considered it important that we take the opportunity to do just that. The purpose of my statement is to set out, fully and clearly, the Scottish Executive's position and to answer questions that members may have about it.

It may be useful for members if, briefly by way of background, I touch on the history of the issue. The beef-on-the-bone ban was introduced on 16 December 1997, following consideration of the issue by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, or SEAC—the Government's scientific advisers in this field—and advice from the then chief medical officer in England. That advice was fully endorsed by the Scottish CMO and was also accepted by the then Scottish Office ministers.

A review of the ban was undertaken by the present CMO in England in January 1999. His advice, again fully endorsed by the Scottish CMO, was that a lifting of the ban at that time would result in the reintroduction of an unacceptable degree of risk that had been eliminated by the imposition of the ban.

While progress had been made in the measures to reduce the incidence of BSE and the risk of transmission of the disease to humans, the recommendation was for a continuation of the ban with a review to be undertaken after six months. The outcome of further work by the Wellcome Trust Centre at the University of Oxford was to be part of that further consideration. That was the position in January this year.

Since then, the CMOs in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK have continued to keep the position under review and to consider the relevant evidence that has emerged during the intervening period.

There is at present a difference of professional

view between the English CMO and the CMOs for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the evidence available. I refer here to information that has been in the public domain over the past few days: the English CMO advises that the additional risk to human health created by lifting the bone-in beef ban, on visible cuts of beef, is tiny and unquantifiable in any meaningful way. However, he also advises that the retention of the ban on the use of bones for manufacturing food products, including infant foods, would be a sensible and very precautionary approach. I must emphasise to members that all the CMOs are united on that last point—that the ban should not be lifted on manufactured beef products.

The Scottish CMO, in common with the Welsh and Northern Irish CMOs, remains concerned that there is insufficient evidence available to underpin a decision to lift the ban on visible cuts of beef now. He has advised specifically that:

"the evidence has not changed sufficiently to justify a lifting of the ban at this time. The history of the BSE epidemic underlines the advisability of continuing to err on the side of caution. The Scottish CMO does not consider that we yet have enough scientific certainty to depart from the precautionary principle and would recommend that the ban stays in place, subject to review on receipt of the definitive estimates from the Oxford Group and to re-appraisal in January 2000 if the ban has not been lifted by that time".

The Oxford group is considering the risks associated with maternal transmission—cow-to-calf infection—of BSE. Updates of its analysis, which informed the earlier review and, indeed, the original ban, will not be available until November.

Some of the Scottish CMO's key concerns are as follows. For the whole of 1999, we can expect more than 2,200 BSE cases in Great Britain. Dorsal root ganglia are the tissues that are connected to the spinal cord and have been shown to carry BSE. They are in part removed by deboning, they are known to be highly infective and they contain infectivity before the disease becomes clinically apparent. There is also uncertainty about possible infectivity in bone marrow. There remains uncertainty about the number of cattle acquiring BSE by cow-to-calf maternal transmission: the Oxford study results will assist with that. Finally, there is still considerable uncertainty about the eventual size of the variant CJD epidemic.

In short, there is a difference of professional view, but there is no difference in policy outcome. It is well recognised in all parts of the UK that uniform action throughout the UK is highly desirable, and that is what has transpired. Equally, as I have said on many occasions in this chamber and will repeat today, it is recognised that this is a public health matter and that a precautionary approach is essential if we are to safeguard public health in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK.

Variant CJD is a particularly distressing disease, and so far it has always been fatal. By the end of June 1999, 43 people had developed vCJD. More cases are awaiting diagnostic confirmation. We cannot ignore or underestimate the human suffering and loss that results from vCJD. Given the long incubation period, it is too early to make confident predictions about the eventual scale of infection: estimates range from a few hundred to several million cases. There is, therefore, considerable uncertainty and no room for complacency in our handling of this issue.

The Scottish Executive's policy is clear on this matter: public health must come first, and we must listen to the medical advice that is given to us. We all want to lift the beef-on-the-bone ban, but only when the medical advice indicates that it is safe to do so. The advice is that it is not yet safe to do so, hence the ban will remain for the time being. That is in everyone's interest—producers as well as consumers.

We will, of course, continue to keep the position under review and, as indicated, the ban will be lifted as soon as the medical advice suggests that it is safe to do so. I hope that that clarifies the Executive's position. I would be pleased to answer any questions that members may have.

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): Will the minister explain why she told me in a written answer of 17 August that

"When considering the Beef Bones Regulations it would . . . not be sensible to ignore the position in the rest of the United Kingdom."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 17 August 1999; Vol 1, p 207.]—

but she is happy to do that now?

The key concerns of the chief medical officer, which the minister outlined in her statement, clearly apply across the whole of the United Kingdom. Will she publish in detail why and how those concerns have led the various medical officers to come to different conclusions?

Can the minister explain what she means by a definitive estimate? I would have thought that a figure was either definitive or an estimate, but not both.

Can the minister explain why the six-months review promised on 1 February is now so late? Why, when Professor Donaldson's previous report said that

"the review should pay particular attention to the incidence of BSE infected cattle"

and when there have been only 25 cases of BSE in Scotland this year—less than 2 per cent of the Great Britain figure—did a Scottish Executive source say yesterday:

"There is no new evidence so why we should change our position now?"

Does the minister agree that Scottish agriculture—and, indeed, the Scottish consumer—deserve better than the lack of urgency that was shown in today's statement and that the research and the six-months review that was promised on 1 February should be brought forward?

Does the minister agree now more than ever with the statement that the beef-on-the-bone ban is "a ludicrous policy"? That is not my statement, but a statement made on 1 March this year by Charles Kennedy, then the Liberal Democrat agriculture spokesman and now the leader of the party to which the Minister for Rural Affairs belongs.

Susan Deacon: Alasdair Morgan put a number of questions—I lost count at eight—but I will attempt to answer them in turn.

I was quoted as having said previously that we should pay attention to what was happening in the rest of the UK. Absolutely—I repeated that in my statement today, and ministers in other parts of the UK have said the same thing this week. We recognise that it is in the best interests of all parts of the UK for us to co-operate and have an agreed UK policy position on this issue. We have constantly striven for that and continue to have it.

As I said in last week's debate, we have remained in contact with colleagues across the UK on this matter because we recognise that there is considerable cross-border traffic in beef and beef products. A Scottish isolationist position, or any political posturing on this issue by us in Scotland, would be wholly inappropriate and detrimental to public health. There is no contradiction in the position that we have adopted—quite the opposite.

In a spirit of openness and in the interests of clarity, we are more than happy to make publicly available the current advice that Scottish ministers have received from Sir David Carter, the Scottish chief medical officer. That advice will be—if it is not already—available through the Scottish Parliament information centre and on the Scottish Parliament website for those who wish to examine it in detail. I encourage all members to do that. As we have said consistently, the action we take will be appropriate, based on medical advice.

There are a large number of technical and practical reasons for the Oxford data's not yet being available. It is unlikely to be available to us until November. That is simply a statement of fact. The Scottish CMO has stated that he wants to be in possession of that evidence before he issues further advice to us on this matter. That is the sensible thing to do.

In response to Mr Morgan's questions, we must return to the purpose, validity and sense of the ban. I repeat the information that I gave in my statement: more than 43 people have developed

variant CJD. I appeal to all members—of all parties—to cast their minds back to some of the pictures that we saw on our television screens when the BSE crisis first emerged and when the existence of variant CJD was identified. Remember the pain and the suffering of those infected by this terrible disease; remember the pain, suffering and loss of their relatives. That is why the ban is in place. That is why we are taking advice from the Scottish CMO and that is why we will continue to act on the basis of medical advice in the best health interest of the people of Scotland.

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):

The Conservative group has always considered the ban to be unjustified. I have a few questions—the few left to me after those of Mr Morgan—that I would like to be answered. First, is the Executive prepared to accept the statement by the English chief medical officer that the health risk

“created by lifting the bone-in beef ban on visible cuts of beef, is tiny and unquantifiable in any meaningful way”?

Does the Executive accept or reject that view?

Secondly, the minister quoted the Scottish CMO as saying that he

“does not consider that we yet have enough scientific certainty”

and that he suggested that evidence be

“subject to review on receipt of the definitive estimates from the Oxford Group and to re-appraisal in January 2000 if the ban has not been lifted by that time”.

Can she explain the difference in meaning between “review” and “re-appraisal”?

Could she also explain why, when we are talking about differences of opinion between the English CMO and his Scottish equivalent, she was happy to quote BSE figures for the United Kingdom as a whole, rather than to consider the position of the industry in Scotland and its commendable record in the eradication of BSE so far?

The minister said that:

“there is a difference of professional view, but there is no difference in policy outcome.”

How does that correlate with the story in yesterday's papers, which suggested that Nick Brown and his colleagues in England intend to follow a very different policy if the opportunity is available?

After all is said and done, can the minister justify a situation in which, at some time in the future, it may be possible for Tony Blair to tuck in to roast beef in Downing Street, while in Bute House Donald Dewar has to dae without?

Susan Deacon: I have repeatedly argued that matters such as this should not be reduced to

party political debate and I am going to try to adhere to my own advice, but I must remind Mr Johnstone, and other members, that the Executive and the UK Government adopted a precautionary approach on the issue—it is why we have had to take such widespread measures to reduce the incidence of BSE in cattle and in turn reduce the risk of infection of variant CJD in humans—because of the crisis that arose because the previous, Conservative, Government failed to act.

We are not prepared to make those same mistakes. We are not prepared to keep the information that is available to us—the medical advice about the health risks—from the public. I have stated clearly and plainly, as openly and accurately as I am able, the basis on which we made our decision.

Someone asked what the distinction was between a professional view and a policy view. I have made it clear that a distinction can be made between the views of the CMO's on this issue. However, precisely because a United Kingdom position is essential, there is no distinction between the policy positions of different ministers and different Governments across the UK. That is in the best interests of public health throughout the UK.

In the spirit of openness—lest I should miss the opportunity to say that—may I point out to members that the Scottish CMO's advice is available not only from the Scottish Parliament information centre, but from the reference point at the back of the chamber. I urge members to read it in detail. It is also available on the Scottish Executive website—not on the Scottish Parliament website as I said earlier.

We should do what the Scottish people expect of us on this issue, which is to be open, responsible and to exercise sensible political judgment based on sound medical and scientific advice. That is in the best interests of the Scottish people and of the Scottish industry. The best way in which we can achieve long-term confidence in the Scottish beef industry is to ensure that we take sensible precautionary measures in the interests of public health and to ensure that we have safe beef and beef products on the market.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Everyone I have come across in the beef industry agrees that the Executive's policy must put public health first.

My question focuses on the medical advice that is available. If the scientific evidence of the Oxford group is not available to ministers until, we are now told, January, on what specific scientific basis does Professor Donaldson say that visible cuts of beef on the bone are now safe to eat—a statement with which Sir David Carter is in such

disagreement? What has changed in the medical evidence? We need more details.

Susan Deacon: On a small point of clarification, the Oxford group's scientific advice will be available in November. The CMO for Scotland has suggested that a further review may be conducted in January 2000.

It is not unreasonable for me to say that it is not for me to comment on the basis on which Professor Donaldson, the English CMO—or, indeed, the Scottish CMO—has reached his view. It is for the Government's medical advisers to issue their advice to us on the basis that they consider to be correct. I stress that not one of the CMOs is advocating a total lift of the ban. There is considerable agreement on this issue, which members who examine Professor Liam Donaldson's advice will see. As was quoted in the press today, Professor Donaldson has also reiterated the fact that no accurate idea of how many people will die from CJD after eating BSE-infected beef can be given.

As I said, there is significant agreement among the CMOs. The basis for their conclusions is a matter for them, as medical advisers. Again, I urge members to examine that advice more closely if they are minded to do so.

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): Will the minister confirm that the number of cases of new-variant CJD and the number of deaths are still rising? Does she agree that were the Oxford study report in November on transmission from cow to calf to show that such transmission is far more common than has been believed to date, a premature total lifting of the ban could lead to further increases in the number of deaths among young people? Does she further agree that we need to review the situation carefully once the report that has been commissioned is out, rather than to prejudge it?

Susan Deacon: I agree with Dr Simpson that considerable uncertainty remains about the eventual size of the variant CJD epidemic. It is difficult to say with certainty how many cases of variant CJD there are—that is one of the great problems with this disease. We can say for definite how many deaths there have been. I think that I am right in saying that one death occurred as recently as last month, and there was another in July.

We know that variant CJD is a reality and that there is a health risk. I agree that it would be quite wrong of us, as the Government, to ignore that risk. That is why we have taken these decisions on this issue.

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister openly and rightly drew attention to the fact that the Scottish CMO expects there to be

more than 2,200 cases of BSE in Great Britain this year. However, as Alasdair Morgan said, only 25 cases have been confirmed in Scotland so far this year, all of which have been in the dairy herd, which does not go into the food chain. Given that fact and the current advice of the English CMO, does the Scottish Executive agree that the Scottish public should be given a free choice to buy beef on the bone, as was originally proposed by SEAC?

Susan Deacon: I repeat that either this Executive acts on the basis of the medical advice that it is given, or it does not. I recall Alasdair Morgan asking a week ago, in this chamber, whether we would act on the basis of the Scottish CMO's advice or would just listen to the English CMO. The clear inference was that we should listen to the Scottish CMO. I have made it clear this afternoon that that is precisely what we are doing. The advice of the Scottish CMO has been clear. I repeat that this decision arises from a discussion that has taken place among the CMOs. Therefore, the UK Parliaments agree that we should not lift, or partially lift, the ban at this time.

Finally, on Mr Fergusson's point, one of the great uncertainties about variant CJD is that no one yet knows the precise degree and nature of human-to-human infection of variant CJD. Therefore, the argument that this is about individual choice is fallacious. If one person is infected by variant CJD, we do not know what risk there is of their infecting another person. As a Government, we have a responsibility to act on that basis.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I would like to explore the difference in view a bit further.

Will the minister publish the criteria by which the judgment on lifting the ban will eventually be made? As she has said, it will be made on medical and scientific evidence. Normally, such things are quantifiable. Will she tell us today, or in the near future, what figure for cases of BSE will be required before the ban can be lifted? Will there have to be no new cases of BSE? Will a figure be required that represents a risk that is

"tiny and unquantifiable in any meaningful way"?

There is a difference of view between advisers north and south of the border. We, too, can make a judgment on the basis of the figures. Let us have the figures—this is all about openness.

Is the minister actively considering a partial lifting of the ban? Will she draw a distinction between what most people would regard as beef on the bone and the manufactured product?

Susan Deacon: The only thing that we, as the Government, will continue actively to consider,

and have actively considered since the Scottish Executive came into being, is to listen carefully to, and act on, the medical advice that is given to us.

I suggest that it is not for politicians—however knowledgeable some of us may be on the science of this matter—to kick the number of cases around this chamber. From his professional background, Mr Adam knows that there is no one definitive number that can be the trigger for lifting the ban. As I said earlier, a complex range of data are being worked on at Oxford. Our medical advisers will look carefully at that data and then give us advice; and that is the advice that we will act upon.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to members who were not called, but I remind members that long questions simply cut out colleagues. That is what has happened today.

Tourism

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We now move on to motion S1M-160, in the name of Alasdair Morrison, which is on tourism. I have also selected an amendment.

15:31

The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison): I welcome this opportunity—as I am sure everyone in the chamber does—to discuss tourism. As the motion indicates, tourism is one of our most important industries and is vital to our economy. It is worth around £2.5 billion annually and employs around 177,000 people.

Tourism is growing worldwide at an estimated rate of more than 4 per cent annually. It is, of course, an increasingly competitive industry, so although there are great opportunities for Scotland, there are also many challenges. This Government is determined to assist our industry to meet those challenges successfully.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Morrison, do you mind if I interrupt you just for a second? I should have said at the beginning that this debate has been cut short because of the two ministerial statements. We have only one and a half hours instead of two and a half hours. We will not be able to call all the members whose names have been put forward by the business managers, so we would like some names to be withdrawn. I recommend that everyone sticks to a limit of four minutes for their speeches. I apologise for interrupting.

Mr Morrison: Sir David, if it would be of assistance, may I just plough through the speech without taking interventions? That would allow more time.

The Presiding Officer: It is entirely up to you whether you take interventions, but please do not plough—let us listen to it with some joy and excitement.

Mr Morrison: I am obliged to you, Sir David.

The challenges will be met through a partnership involving the industry, the Scottish Tourist Board and the area tourist boards, the enterprise networks, the local authorities and the many other organisations that provide both direct and indirect support.

I should like to pay tribute to the industry and to put on record some of its achievements in recent times. The industry has embraced the ethos of quality. More than 9,100 accommodation providers are now members of the STB quality assurance scheme, which is known as the star scheme; when

the scheme was launched in 1985, only 800 businesses were members. A new grading scheme for the rapidly growing hostels and bunkhouses sector has been introduced this year and is being well supported. The STB estimates that £138 million of investment in accommodation facilities since 1990 can be attributed to quality assurance. Of that total, £35 million was invested in 1998 alone. A similar scheme also applies in the visitor attraction sector and the STB is considering whether it might be extended further—to restaurants, for example.

Our scheme has been used as a model for the development of quality grading schemes elsewhere—in Iceland and in South Africa, for example. That is very encouraging.

Many people in the industry have recognised the benefits of training. The industry has come together with the public sector to determine what its training needs are and to do something about them. High service standards and quality customer care are priorities; the result has been the successful development of service quality programmes such as “Welcome Host” and “Scotland’s Best”. To date, there have been more than 50,000 participants in such tourism training programmes. Around 214 tourism businesses, employing a total of more than 15,000 employees, have achieved Investors in People recognition. That is around 15 per cent of all Scottish IIP awards and means that tourism is one of the best sectors in terms of IIP achievement in Scotland.

We want to build on that success and to increase participation in training activities within the industry. The adoption of a lifelong learning culture within tourism will result in improved service standards throughout Scotland. The continued need to upgrade skills is particularly important if tourism businesses are to remain competitive. Consumer tastes are changing, customer expectations are rising and developments in information and communication technology will become an important factor in attracting and retaining good calibre staff.

A major difficulty for our tourism industry has been that we have traditionally had a short season. Scotland has been seen as a summer destination. That problem has by no means been fully solved but progress has been made. With encouragement from the STB and ATB marketing campaigns such as “Spring into Summer”, “Autumn Gold”—which was launched a few weeks ago—and others that promote winter breaks, an increasing number of businesses are staying open for much longer periods of the year. That commitment by those businesses has led to additional direct spending by tourists totalling more than £40 million since 1995.

The marketing of Scotland as a tourist

destination is primarily a task for the STB. In recent years, the STB has particularly targeted the English market, which, although our biggest market, has shown signs of decline. Those efforts were successful; in real terms, spend by visitors from England has increased from £703 million in 1994 to £1.1 billion in 1998.

In targeting overseas markets, the STB works in close partnership with the British Tourist Authority, whose chairman and chief executive I was fortunate to meet last week. Scotland is promoted in all 27 overseas markets that are targeted by the BTA because of their considerable potential for British tourism. Scottish holiday activities such as golf, walking and city holidays are promoted by the BTA to identified markets and segments. Scotland features strongly in travel trade visits, business conference activity and press trips that are organised by the BTA. The BTA does sterling work and readily concedes that its two most marketable products are London and Scotland.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

The minister spoke about the overseas promotion that is being done in conjunction with the BTA, but the STB has the right to promote Scotland independently of the BTA. Will the minister talk about the budget for that? I ask because spending per head by overseas visitors to Scotland is much higher than spending per head by UK visitors.

Mr Morrison: Marketing of Scotland is most important and the BTA has some £36 million at its disposal. Scotland enjoys roughly a sixth share of that. The BTA does fantastic work.

The STB could, of course, work unilaterally but that would not be in Scotland’s interests. The STB is on a concession, but the BTA readily concedes that the two products that are instantly marketable anywhere in the world are London—the UK’s best and biggest tourist attraction—and Scotland.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)
rose—

Mr Morrison: I will press on.

The Government is satisfied that the partnership between the STB and the BTA works well to the benefit of Scottish tourism. Spend by overseas visitors to Scotland has risen consistently during this decade. We expect that trend to continue; we have no reason to suspect otherwise.

The tourism industry appears to have had more than its fair share of adverse publicity recently. Much of that has been unwarranted. Considerable attention was paid to comments made in the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee report on tourism about bad experiences that committee members had encountered on their travels. We do not need reminding about the comments, which related to sticky linoleum and so on.

Less attention was paid to the committee's conclusion. It said that it was

"generally impressed with the overall level of improvement which had clearly been made throughout the industry."

It noted examples of that improvement, mentioning informative and entertaining visitor attractions such as Discovery Point in Dundee, the Stirling old town jail, Abbotsford House in the Borders and Loudoun Hall in Ayrshire among others. Committee members also noted that they had experienced welcoming and friendly staff and, in some places, a refreshingly adaptable attitude to meal requirements outside regular eating hours. That is one of the things that is given explicit consideration in our strategy.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): rose—

Mr Morrison: I am going to press on.

To the many industry success stories, I can add another two. The European Union of Tourist Officers convention is being held next month in Maastricht. Representatives from Scotland have been asked to make a presentation on the development and operation of the tourist information centre network in Scotland. Our European colleagues believe that our TIC network is a world leader and they want to learn from us.

Many members will have attended the reception that was given by the STB last week at which Henry McLeish presented an award to Edinburgh for being the best UK city. That is a magnificent achievement, which is made better by the fact that Glasgow secured second place.

The industry has generally enjoyed growth in recent years. In 1994, it generated £2.2 billion in real terms—that is, at 1998 prices. The following year, that figure increased to £2.5 billion, which was a record annual sum. In 1996, income rose again to £2.6 billion, which was another record for the industry. However, in 1998, the figure fell back to just under £2.5 billion, which, although disappointing, was still the third best year ever recorded.

It is, of course, still too early to make firm predictions for 1999. In the period from January to June, overseas trips have been running at about the same level as in 1998 and, although the number of trips to Scotland from within the UK is slightly down, spend has gone up by 7 per cent. There are clear signs that the severe downturn in spend in 1998 in terms of Scots holidaying in Scotland will be reversed, which is very encouraging. Scots once again are seeing the benefits of taking holidays in their own country, for obvious reasons.

I accept that those figures are for the early part of the year and include only a small part of the

main season. Although the figures are encouraging, we should be cautious. There are also regional variations which will be of interest to many members.

Brian Adam: Will the minister give way?

Mr Morrison: If Mr Adam does not mind, I will press on; I am just about to wind up.

The evidence is that cities, particularly Edinburgh and Glasgow, have performed better than some of the remoter areas, especially in the north of the country. I have been getting mixed reactions in my constituency in the Western Isles—which, as everyone knows, is a fair place. Although things are going well in some parts with some modest growth, people in other parts are not so content. We will, of course, have definitive figures. It will be a few weeks yet before the first firm information about the performance of the industry in individual ATB areas is available.

In view of the volatility of the Scots market—which was the only market to show a substantial decline last year—and the heavy dependence of remoter rural areas on Scottish short-break business, I have asked the STB and the ATBs to recommend how they could encourage Scots to take more breaks at home.

The Parliament should warmly welcome the progress that the industry has recently made. However, as our motion recognises, the industry faces a number of challenges if it is to become—as we all want—truly world-class.

I will mention only a few areas that we need to tackle. We need to boost tourism in remoter areas. Although the economy of many of those areas is highly dependent on tourism, the season in such areas tends to be particularly short. We need to examine how we market Scotland to focus better on the strengths of those areas.

The number of overseas visitors holidaying in Scotland is increasing year on year and the number of visitors from England, which remains our biggest market, has recently grown, reversing a previously downward trend. However, we face a major challenge in persuading our own people that Scotland is an ideal place for a short holiday. We must meet that challenge while continuing to grow the overseas market and the English market.

The tourism industry needs to improve still further training and skills standards. Tourism must be able to demonstrate that it can provide a first-choice career. People are the industry's most important asset and staff and business practices must be developed to challenge the best in the world.

The industry down to and including the small business level must embrace the benefits of IT, which can be utilised to provide quickly the

information that businesses need to improve performance. Project Ossian, which is being developed by the STB, will provide substantial benefits for businesses and their customers. The increasing number of internet users worldwide will expect to be able to research their holiday—and to book and to pay for it—without leaving the comfort of their homes. If they cannot do that with Scotland, there will be a greater incentive to holiday elsewhere.

As the Government is determined to help the industry to meet those challenges, it has committed itself to publishing a new strategy around the turn of the year. We intend the document to be action-oriented; it will identify what needs to be done and how that will be done.

We want the preparation of that strategy to be as open and as inclusive as possible and to hear from everyone with a contribution to make. The industry clearly has views that it wants us to consider, which we shall do. In response to a request from the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, we have extended the period during which we will take comments until the end of the month. At the last count, we had received more than 520 responses.

Henry and I have been out and about talking to industry businesses and to representatives of ATBs and local marketing consortia to hear their views at first hand. That has been of immense value. Between us, we have visited areas as far apart as Shetland and Dumfries and Galloway. Those visits will continue, although members will understand that it will not be possible to accept every invitation that we receive in the time available before we publish the strategy.

Last week, I met all the chairs and chief executives of all Scotland's ATBs together, the first time that such a meeting had been held. The ATBs, with around 15,000 trade members, will be key players if the strategy is to be implemented successfully. We are, of course, considering the method of their funding. ATBs have made strong representations that they need greater funding stability and we shall certainly consider whether anything can be done in that respect. We have asked for responses on funding and will endeavour to reach a conclusion as soon as we can, although there are sharply conflicting views as to the way ahead.

Tourism can have a beneficial effect on many other aspects of life in Scotland, which, conversely, can also benefit tourism. My colleague Rhona Brankin, who is beside me today to answer this debate, is responsible for culture and sport. Scotland's wonderful culture, heritage and language and its sporting achievements can and must be used to attract additional tourism to Scotland.

A perfect example is golf. The Open championship was held at Carnoustie in July and the Walker cup was held earlier this month at Nairn, in the Highlands. Both those events attracted massive media coverage worldwide. We must use that to benefit tourism in the long term. I can tell members today that proposals to develop golf tourism will feature in our new strategy.

Government can do only so much. The industry must take ownership of the new strategy and individual businesses must adapt its conclusions to the best benefit for themselves. I am sure that they will rise to the challenge.

As I said, the Government is in no doubt about the importance of Scotland's tourism industry. We are listening to the industry and we are examining what needs to be done. We will produce our new strategy early in the new year. I look forward to hearing members' views about the challenges that Scotland's tourism industry faces and about how those can best be tackled. I am convinced that we can not only match our competitors, but beat them.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the importance of the tourism industry to the economy of Scotland, agrees that the industry faces a number of challenges and notes that the Government intends to publish in the new year a new strategy for the industry that will address these challenges.

15:47

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): I welcome this debate, which is of major importance to Scotland. However, I am disappointed in the Executive's motion, which does not grasp the major issues that concern the industry. The minister gave the industry a litany of compliments, which is fine, but the industry wants to look forward—looking back all the time is not enough. I am disappointed that the debate is being cut short, as tourism is an important issue. The industry will be looking closely at us today.

On 1 September, Henry McLeish, in elaborating on his statement of his department's priorities to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, said that tourism was a particular priority. However, despite the fact that the House of Commons select committee inquiry into tourism stated that there should be a minister with responsibility for tourism, the minister told us that he did not believe that having a separate minister would benefit the industry.

We agree that tourism is a major industry in Scotland and we have heard the figures. However, the minister did not talk about the potential for growth. We have a unique product with quality and diversity—that product is Scotland. Despite that, the Executive puts tourism in a bag with other

issues for a minister to look after. With 23 ministers—in addition to those in the Scotland Office—surely the Executive can spare someone to give leadership to this industry.

I am not happy with the way in which the Executive is handling this issue. I was concerned to see *The Scotsman* today quoting Henry McLeish as saying:

“It’s about time Scots believed in themselves”.

We need a clear signal that the Executive believes in the industry and accords it the importance that it deserves. We must ensure that our communities in rural areas can benefit from tourism. We know what the problems in those areas are—many of them relate to the damage that has been done to the agriculture sector, much of which has been caused by this Government’s policies.

We have heard time and again, from the industry and others, that we must streamline the structure and stabilise the funding. The minister gave us a hint that that will be looked at, but I would have liked to hear a little bit more about how it would be possible.

In 1992, the Conservative Government conducted a review that led, in 1994, to the Scottish Tourist Board being given responsibility for tourism, marketing and sponsorship of the area tourist boards. At the same time, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise were made responsible for business development and training.

In 1996, the Conservative Government consolidated the ATBs to provide critical mass and greater focus. Today, we must move to the next rational stage. We believe that, to sponsor ATBs effectively, the Scottish Tourist Board must manage core-funding support and deliver it directly to the ATBs. No longer should area boards continue to suffer from the inherent instability of the allocation of public sector funding through local authorities. Budgets cannot be planned effectively while councils chop and change their short-term political agendas, giving little notice of funding stream changes.

Rivalries and disagreements over tourism priorities between councils within ATB areas deflect the boards away from long-term planning and strategy implementation and waste time and manpower in the attempt to secure resources. The Conservatives would rather that boards focused on raising standards, on widening choice and on selling their product. The tourism industry is too important for this muddle to continue. Direct funding would give the area boards more independence and would allow for three-year budgeting, which would assist in long-term planning. In return, the STB would be better able to monitor performance and co-ordinate support

for the industry, including dialogue with the enterprise network.

The area boards must be encouraged to participate in partnerships with local authorities and local enterprise companies to develop local initiatives. Local authorities have an important responsibility in planning. That, too, must be reviewed to modernise the process, which is costly and slow. Planning must better consider the needs of the industry without losing control of the quality of our environment. Before the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities gets too excited, I will add that we also believe that the input of councillors at board level should be retained to ensure accountability to communities.

Many small businesses in the industry are struggling under the bureaucratic burdens that the Labour Government has imposed. More than 2,500 pieces of legislation have been introduced since Labour came to power. The Government does not seem to understand enterprise. Business contributes a large portion of ATB resources. If we include the commercial activities of the boards, the contribution amounts to almost half of some boards’ incomes. Unlike the SNP, we believe that the private sector must play a larger part in the development of the industry. In particular, there have to be better links between tourism and many of our speciality Scottish businesses. Membership schemes must be modernised and must not become a barrier.

I know that the minister was a town planner in a former life, but I hope that he is prepared to take on a new profession. I would like him to become an advocate of Scottish business at Westminster and fight for the reduction in bureaucracy that Tony Blair promised before the election. One has to wonder what went wrong. If devolution is to mean anything, this Parliament must take that message south.

Tourism outside the central belt is a greater relative contributor to the local economy, but is dependent on the use of the motor car. In Grampian, more than 60 per cent of tourists use cars. This Government’s fuel taxation policy must be the greatest danger to the sustainability and the development of the industry. If we impose road tolls and entry charges and increase parking charges, tourists will not drive about in Scotland. Is the minister aware that more bed nights are spent in caravan parks and camp sites than in hotels? That sector is dependent on the motor car.

The Parliament must recognise that taxation and over-regulation are brakes on an industry that must compete in a global market. Business can drive down cost through flair and training, but it desperately needs a Government that is prepared to establish an enterprise-friendly environment for ultimate success. I will not list the evidence, but

suffice it to say that many potential entrants are deterred by the bureaucracy before they even start to trade. I hope that the minister will pass on to his colleagues the fact that Chancellor Brown would do well to recognise the effects of the weak euro and the variance of tax rates in other parts of Europe.

Luckily, the industry has not had to face the pre-election threats of what used to be the Liberal party, whose proposals for turnover tax, payroll tax and their ludicrous caravan tax have gone. I suppose that we must thank the minister for that, as well as for throwing out Keith Geddes's proposal for a bed tax.

I recall Liberals talking about paid days away for training. How can a small business that trades seven days a week with two or three staff afford to have people away? The minister talked about the use of the internet. Why cannot further education colleges and local enterprise trusts be involved in delivering on-the-job training, whether as distance learning packages, as videos or in some other form? I am sure that most people would be quite happy to give their staff an hour a day for training if they could not afford to send them away for a day, especially when public transport in some areas is just not up to it.

I agree with the minister that commerce needs to use the internet, but it needs to learn how to use it. That, again, is a role for the minister to direct. If he was happy enough to get involved in discussions with the ATBs this week, he will know that what I have said has been repeated several times in different parts of the country.

The Conservatives propose that the STB should not be totally tied in to everything that the British Tourist Authority says and does. Yes, the BTA has a supporting role and there are many shared areas of responsibility. However, we think that the STB must not be tied in too tightly when we are competing in a world market even against our neighbours.

The STB is not only the national face of the industry, it is the correct conduit for core public sector funding, ensuring a uniform roll-out of standards and support through the ATB network and eliminating unhelpful interference from local government decision making.

On behalf of the industry and Scotland, we ask this Parliament to agree that there should be a distinct minister for tourism, with responsibility for overseeing on our behalf the modernisation of the industry structure and the creation of the correct culture for the industry to become sustainable and grow to its full potential. I beg the minister and his colleagues in the Executive to recognise that the taxation and bureaucratic burdens faced by Scottish business, and by tourism in particular,

must be reduced to allow Scotland to take her rightful place in world tourism.

I move, as an amendment to motion S1M-160 in the name of Alasdair Morrison, to leave out from "and notes" to end and insert:

" , including additional taxation and regulation, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to use its influence to reduce such burdens and radically review the structure and funding of tourism in Scotland."

15:58

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): We in the SNP welcome the fact that there is to be a strategy on the tourism industry in Scotland, not only because the first mention of the strategy was made in response to one of the questions that I asked on 17 June, but because the industry is vital to everyone in Scotland. We believe that our country has tourism potential that is unmatched in any other country, and the minister's comments reflected that opinion.

Perhaps we should begin by considering the very word tourist. When somebody comes to our house to stay, do we call that person a tourist? Or do we call that person a guest or a visitor? The word tourist has pejorative connotations; it is something that we put up with or thole, but about which we are not very enthusiastic. Perhaps we should be talking about visitors and guests.

If we extend that argument, whatever we may decide about the structures—and I hope that they will be considered in the review—we should think about the name of the Scottish Tourist Board. Is not that old-fashioned? Should not it sum up what we want to achieve for Scotland? Should not it be called Welcome to Scotland, especially for our friends from south of the border? Whether they consider themselves English, British, Scottish, Scandinavian or whatever, they are all welcome here in Scotland as our visitors and our friends.

I understand that the Scottish Tourist Board defines a tourist as someone who spends one night in Scotland away from home. I suppose that I will be a tourist when I visit Hamilton tomorrow evening. Perhaps we have 129 tourists here; perhaps everyone in the chamber is a tourist. By the way in which we treat visitors and guests from other countries, everyone in Scotland is an ambassador. As Annabel Goldie said in a committee recently, how we comport ourselves is important, because it sends a message to Scotland about the image that we wish to convey to the wider world.

We welcome the review. We believe—and this is my view following an extensive 17-week surgery tour during the infamous holidays that we are supposed to have had—that there is an appetite

for a minister for tourism. There is an appetite for one individual, not three—estimable though we know Henry McLeish, Rhona Brankin and Alasdair Morrison to be—so that the buck stops with one person. One person would be responsible; one person would be accountable—one person has to do the job that is so important for Scotland over the next few years. It is vital that we get that strategy right, and I ask in a non-partisan way that the decision not to appoint one dedicated minister for tourism be revisited. It is not a political point—it is one of substance—and I hope that it is considered.

The review that was announced on 3 August mentioned some important aspects that we need to address, such as identifying our future markets, both domestic and overseas. Surely we have to look at the performance of the Scottish Tourist Board and the area tourist boards. It is wrong for Lord Gordon to say that it is not the function of the review to consider structures—we must consider that to get the strategy right. Strategy is most important, but of necessity it entails looking at structures. Will Alasdair Morrison revisit that decision, so that we can look at the structures as well?

I hope that a thousand flowers will bloom as a result of the responses to the review and that there will be more excellent suggestions such as those in the considered piece by Trevor Grundy and Robert Dawson Scott in *The Scotsman* today. I think that we will get that positive response.

There are a number of challenges—the minister's word, which I admit is a Hebridean euphemism. We cannot remain competitive because we are not competitive. Scotland is too expensive; it is not just the Scottish National party that is saying that. In a letter to me dated 8 September, Tom Buncle of the Scottish Tourist Board said, on fuel tax, that

"there is clearly a correlation between the cost of fuel and the propensity of visitors to travel widely throughout Scotland."

Will Alasdair join us in supporting the campaign run by the *Sunday Post* to scrap the fuel escalator? I am happy to accept an intervention from any Labour member—I have the application forms here. No takers? That is a shame, because the *Sunday Post* is doing a grand job.

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): I am not sure what point Fergus is making, but is he prepared to rewrite his economic strategy for independence? He included the fuel tax levy in the figures that he used to fight the election.

Fergus Ewing: As Allan knows, since the election the chancellor, Gordon Brown, has increased the fuel tax by 22 per cent. The Highlands and Islands has the highest fuel tax in

the world. I am surprised that Allan chooses to make that the subject of his intervention.

As Tom Buncle said, it is clear that business rates represent a significant burden on marginal tourism. We have the power to slash business rates for small businesses in the hotel trade. We can do that in a cost-neutral way—that will probably appeal to Allan—by shifting the burden to big businesses, for which business rates are a much smaller proportion of their turnover.

The high pound is a crippling cost to many—again, that is the responsibility of Mr Brown. We have the second highest VAT rate in Europe. Our tourism industry is being taxed out of existence by Gordon Brown.

I say to Labour members, in all seriousness, that if Scotland is to become competitive, those matters must be addressed—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps that is Gordon Brown on the phone. One way in which we can address those matters is by slashing business rates. I hope that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee will display a little more enthusiasm for those ideas, which I recently expressed to Allan and others.

I believe that we can make this Parliament work as we want it to by using its power to help small businesses throughout Scotland, especially those in the rural areas, which have been hammered this summer. Alasdair Morrison mentioned no figures for that whatever. I hope in all sincerity—it is about time—that we get some answers from the Executive about the effect that reserved matters are having on our economy. The Executive cannot duck and dive for ever. One of these days, people in Scotland will say, "They have nothing to say because they will not stand up to Gordon Brown, they will not say a word against Millbank and they will not do anything in case Tony Blair says that it is the wrong thing." One can get away with that only for so long.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD) rose—

Fergus Ewing: I am just winding up, George.

George Lyon: Just a very short one.

Fergus Ewing: I am a decent bloke, as you know.

George Lyon: How many times have SNP members been at Westminster, lobbying hard on this subject? I take it that their attendance has been 100 per cent.

Fergus Ewing: I do not intend to join the behoochie tendency. It is what we say, when we are here and when we are down there, that matters. And what has the Executive to say about fuel tax, VAT, the high pound and business rates? That is what Scotland wants to know. That is what my constituents want to know.

It is not all about money. Lurking between the boundaries of my constituency and of John Farquhar Munro's is one of the most cost-effective tourist attractions—the Loch Ness monster. He did not cost £758 million; he was not sponsored by Sainsbury's, nor by any other of Tony's crony companies. Long after Scottish folk have not paid their 58 quid to go down to the dome, people will still be travelling to my constituency to watch out for Nessie. With those words, I wish Alasdair well in the strategy ahead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): In opening the debate, Sir David indicated that a large number of members wished to speak, but that because of the reduction in time, it would not be possible to accommodate everyone. I reiterate that point. Members will be allowed four minutes each to speak; in an effort to assist members to keep to time, I will indicate when you have one minute left and encourage you to wind up. In that way, we will accommodate as many members as possible.

16:08

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I am tempted to ask whether Fergus is one of the lucky few who have sighted the Loch Ness monster, and whether he has done so recently. He might answer that one outside the chamber.

I welcome the debate. It sends a strong signal to the Scottish tourism industry of how much we in the Parliament value its contribution to the Scottish economy. That is an important statement to make. I will reiterate some of the key indicators of the importance of the industry to the Scottish economy. It brings in £2.5 billion per year and directly employs 180,000 people. In the tourist board area that covers my constituency, tourism accounts for 14,400 jobs—nearly 10 per cent of all employment in Argyll and Bute. Those are important figures. They demonstrate that the tourism industry is vital to much of rural Scotland, especially in areas where there are no alternative industries offering such employment.

The tourism industry has enormous potential for growth in Scotland, although we are experiencing a slight downturn because of the failure of overseas visitors to come and because Scotland's own people are not spending as much in Scotland. Nevertheless, the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee's report, which was published earlier this year, highlighted one of the key issues that face our industry: quality of facilities and standards of service. It is a fundamental prerequisite for all markets and sectors that we deliver a quality product. Consistent quality must be one of the Scottish tourism industry's key objectives.

Many members spend a lot of time travelling

round the country. When we stay in a hotel or boarding house, we know that if one star is displayed outside the accommodation, we can expect four-star accommodation to be of better quality. The question that we must ask ourselves is: what exactly are our expectations of four-star accommodation? What does it mean? What kind of benchmarks do we expect? Do four stars mean that the accommodation simply has more fixtures and fittings? Or do they describe the quality of service that we should expect? Does anyone know? Has the customer been informed of what the benchmarks are?

Another question that we must ask concerns whom we should complain to if we have had a bad experience or if the four stars did not deliver what we had expected. Is it the tourist board, or the hotelier? If we complain, what action is likely to be taken? I suggest that we should continue improving the quality of the product in Scotland. If we want to continue to compete against worldwide competition, we must drive up the quality of the product. That quality must be consistent for every tourist.

To eliminate bad experiences that can do much to damage Scotland's reputation for quality, the Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that we need a classification and grading system, whereby the customer will understand exactly what the benchmarks are for determining the different star ratings.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you wind up, please?

George Lyon: Our customers must have a clear understanding of those benchmarks and know exactly what to expect and to whom they should complain if their expectations have not been satisfied. Most important, sanctions must be in place if benchmarks are not met regularly.

With those easily understood and rigorously applied quality standards in place, bad experiences should be eliminated. That will allow Scotland to build on and expand its share of the global tourism market.

16:13

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I represent a constituency that is highly dependent on tourism. In 1995, 4,400 jobs in Dumfries and Galloway, constituting 8.9 per cent of all employment, were related to tourism. Tourism brought in an average of £521 per head in 1996, although controversy has surrounded the regional tourist board in recent times—not that I want to dwell on that during the debate. I am pleased that the importance of the tourist trade is being debated today, and I hope that this is the beginning of a process that will stabilise and promote that important industry.

The minister identified as one of the problems the decline in spending by Scottish tourists in their own country. I am afraid that I am as guilty as anyone else of chasing the sun during the summer vacation, and I do not think that we will change the desire of many Scots for a couple of weeks of climatic reliability during the year. However, people no longer take only one holiday. We need to improve the way in which we market short breaks in Scotland to Scottish and UK residents. That impinges on three of the Scottish Tourist Board's corporate objectives: to increase visitor expenditure, to extend the tourist season and to develop tourism outwith the main tourist areas. That means recognising not only that leisure and tourism are inextricably linked, but that there are different leisure markets that need to be exploited effectively.

On Monday this week, a major shopping development opened in Gretna. Gretna is better known for other tourist attractions, but it now also has a factory village outlet. It aims to attract shoppers from within two hours' driving distance—from Carlisle, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow and possibly further afield.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I had pleasure in joining Dr Murray at Gretna—

Dr Murray: People might misunderstand that.

David Mundell: —and in taking away the goodie bag provided. Does Dr Murray agree that one of the things that puts Scottish tourists off visiting Dumfries and Galloway is the cost of petrol, and that the single most significant thing that we could do to encourage tourists to visit Dumfries and Galloway and to tour in the traditional way would be to reduce the cost of petrol by reducing fuel tax?

Dr Murray: That is not the most off-putting thing, as Dumfries and Galloway are rather nearer other parts of the UK than other parts of Scotland are. I agree that petrol prices are a problem, but much of that is to do with the oil companies, not the Government.

We need to persuade shoppers not just to drive to Gretna and back, but to make a weekend break of it. We need to persuade them to turn off down the A75, book a room for a night or two and enjoy some of the other leisure pursuits available—sporting and cultural pursuits, the Burns connection, the scenery, the wildlife and the natural heritage of the area. That would turn shoppers into tourists. Fergus referred to the STB's definition of tourism. It would not be difficult to make that connection for people. Those activities can also be promoted to business visitors—even businessmen do not work all the time.

I do not want to anticipate the results of a

tourism strategy debate nor discussions that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee might have about the structure of the industry. It is inappropriate for the Parliament to decide those things when there will be ample opportunity for the committee to do so. I very much hope that time and effort will go into improving the way in which we sell what we have to offer to ourselves and to others. We are far too negative and apologetic about ourselves—Henry McLeish was right about that—and if we do not believe that this country has a lot to offer, how can we expect others to do so?

16:17

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): I hope that Alasdair Morrison will correct me if I am wrong, but I think he said—and I was horrified to hear him say it—that the Scottish tourist boards will be meeting in Maastricht shortly. As someone who is wary of all things European, I pray that there will not be another Maastricht agreement in my lifetime.

Rural Scotland today relies on an economy generated from the traditional sources of agriculture and fishing and the more recent sources of forestry and tourism. As the input of the traditional wealth creators diminishes annually, the input of the modern economic generators rises in importance. For some years, because of a multiplicity of factors, manufacturing industry has tended to polarise away from rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, which I know best. As a result of that shift, tourism is becoming the major if not the only area of potentially massive growth for rural Scotland.

As the world becomes more accessible to an increasingly large percentage of its population, tourism should be the jewel in our Scottish crown, given the magnificent raw materials in our history, culture and scenery. I agree with Fergus Ewing that it is a combination matched by few other countries. However, tourism is not the jewel in our crown—it is on a downward trend and not the great success story that it should be. We must ask ourselves why.

To that end, I commend the Executive on its consultation exercise, because it is right to try to pinpoint both the way ahead and the problems faced by an increasingly vital industry. I beg the Executive to listen to all the submissions, and in particular to pay attention to the grass roots of the industry: the bed-and-breakfast landladies, hoteliers, shopkeepers, caravan site owners and filling station owners, who provide the real barometer for trends in the tourism trade.

If the Executive listens to those people, it will discover several key pointers towards reversing the downward trend. The first, I am sure, will be to

cut the red tape that so bedevils all today's society, which I keep coming up against in Galloway. For instance, one landlady I met is limited to having six guests. That is not unreasonable for three double bedrooms, but if a couple with a small baby—for whom she would not charge—arrive at that guest house, she instantly loses not only the use of one of the four remaining beds, but up to £2,000 per annum because of that petty bureaucratic regulation.

The second key pointer will be the cost of travelling in Scotland, a matter that has already been raised today. It is a simple problem to solve. If the Labour Government and the Scottish Executive are serious about increasing tourism throughout Scotland, they must get Gordon Brown's foot off the fuel escalator and cut the cost of petrol. That would bring many other benefits and would do more than anything else to boost the tourism industry.

Thirdly, we must take a long hard look at the operation of the area tourist boards, and particularly at how they are financed. In Dumfries and Galloway and, no doubt, in several other areas, the area tourist board has to prepare its budget without knowing the contribution that will come from the local authority. Funding must come directly through the Scottish Tourist Board, and the local authorities must be removed from the equation. The tourist board network must focus its attention increasingly on promotion and decreasingly on the red tape and bureaucracy that I have described.

We must become more flexible in allowing seasonal tourism-related businesses to advertise themselves in a reasonable manner. Far too often, facilities are prevented from promoting themselves by an overzealous authority, which will allow only those awful dull brown notices for tourists, which suggest a field of mud rather than a field of dreams.

If the Executive is serious, I beg it to examine the key points that I mentioned. If it does so, and if they are properly addressed, the future of Scotland's tourism industry will be bright indeed. I commend the amendment.

16:22

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I shall concentrate on the structural and financial challenges facing the public sector of the tourism industry. I have been fortunate enough to have had a unique insight into the challenges and difficulty that the public sector faces. From May 1996 to May this year, I was not only leader of a local authority, but served on the boards of an area tourist board and a local enterprise company.

On the structure of the public sector, we have

inherited a situation in which the lines of responsibility are, to say the least, confused, and in which transparency of policy formation and of delivery mechanisms is severely lacking. That has created an environment in the private arm of the industry where innovation and investment are stifled, and where ownership of strategic direction is low or non-existent.

The public sector players are at national level: the Scottish Tourist Board and Scottish Enterprise. At a local level, there are the area tourist boards, the local enterprise companies and the local authorities. All those bodies, to a greater or lesser extent, are trying to ensure that we have a tourism product that we can be proud of. They all mean well and attempt to do their bit through various partnership arrangements. The unfortunate reality is that, if we look beneath the veneer of partnership working well, we find territorial disputes, suspicion, considerable frustration, slow decision-making processes and perceptions of a lack of support among other partners. In short, the public sector of tourism is fragmented. It is unable to form a common position for direction or delivery and it is in dire need of realignment, refocusing and integration.

I will now refer to financial support and the sustainable funding of ATBs. Area tourist boards find themselves in the incongruous and unenviable position of being creatures of statute but without statutory obligation to raise funds themselves or to be supported by other public bodies. That unsatisfactory situation has left eight ATBs struggling financially since their inception. Many of them are also currently reliant on EU structural funds, and when that picture changes soon, many ATBs will go out of business.

From the local authority perspective, with further swingeing cuts inevitable again this year, the area tourist boards are in a no-win situation. In the competition for resources with the likes of education, social work and police, they do not stand a snowball's chance of receiving a sustainable funding package. Instead of being fed on a diet of uncertainty with, at best, standstill budgets, which means cuts in real terms, area tourist boards should be nourished with the certainty that they are funded on a sustainable basis through three-year funding packages. It would be useful if the Tories at least apologised for the fuel escalator and for the damage to area tourist boards caused by the cuts that they made in previous years. In all likelihood, the review of tourism will be the last chance in a generation for Scotland to get it right. We have a chance to become a world-class tourist destination with a world-class product.

I would like to say well done to the Executive for undertaking the consultation process to develop a

new strategy for tourism. That is an important first step, but at the end of the day, the Executive's actions will speak louder than words. For Scotland's sake, we must get this right. The tourism industry and the minister have been heard to say "service, service, service". However, the public service requires funding, funding, funding to ensure that it can deliver.

16:26

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): More than any other part of Scotland, the Highlands and Islands relies on the tourist industry, as members have said already. About one person in seven depends, ultimately, on tourism for their livelihood. Some parts of the Highlands have sustained their level of visitors this year—particularly Skye, despite fuel crises and the Skye bridge tolls. Rather than simply saying that numbers of visitors are down because of the fuel crisis, we should recognise that there is something else at work.

I was a tourist in Sutherland last weekend. The hotelier where I stayed said that fuel prices were not an issue. The amount of salmon coming up the river was an issue for him. Some people think that the dearth of salmon is a direct result of global warming and that global warming is a result of fuel emissions. Please could we have some joined-up thinking on this matter?

The bed and breakfast market in the Highlands has done particularly well this year, although other areas and sectors have seen a drop in numbers. However, the drop is not disastrous and we should remember that we are speaking of small fluctuations, not enormous drops. There has been very bad publicity over the summer and our faults have been blazoned across the newspapers and reinforced by anecdotes throughout the Highlands. There is nothing that Highlanders love more than telling terrible stories about their own tourist industry. We must stop doing that. We seem to take a delight in putting ourselves down. We must stop being so negative, because we have a very high-quality tourist experience in the Highlands and we must stop denying that. We must work on that attitude.

Our challenge is to continue to raise the quality and to market ourselves more effectively. We must target particular niche markets, such as wildlife—and I do not just mean ceilidhs—and culture, particularly in more remote areas. For example, only 2 per cent of our visitors come for golfing holidays, yet Scotland is the home of golf. I am glad to hear that there are plans to redress that situation.

Our marketing must be more focused, modern and up to date. We are already developing Project

Ossian, as Alasdair mentioned, which will allow us to access information on the website. The challenge to improve our marketing and quality must continue. Some people have said that compulsory registration is the way forward, with training, sanctions and inspectors. At the moment, registration and quality control are voluntary. I am a bit wary of compulsion, as it might drive away that sector of the Highland industry that is most attractive—the small B and B in remote areas. Ultimately, compulsory registration may be appropriate for hotels and restaurants, but I favour the carrot rather than the stick. We should be careful not to drive away the small B and B.

Training is crucial, but college courses in hospitality must be backed by good management practices and that does not always happen. We need a well-paid and well-motivated work force in the tourist industry. In the past, the industry has had a bad image and we must get away from the idea that service is somehow servile; it is not, although part of our history makes us feel that it is.

Fergus Ewing: Maureen mentioned the importance of training, which I am sure we all endorse. In relation to shortages, does she accept that the single biggest problem in hotels in the Highlands is the shortage of skilled chefs that has arisen since the closure of Duncraig college? If so, what should be done about it?

Maureen Macmillan: The shortage of skilled chefs has existed for a long time, not just since the closure of Duncraig. Careers education in schools has a lot to do with that shortage and I would like careers in tourism—particularly for chefs and in cookery—to be promoted more in schools. We want an attractive career structure.

We also have infrastructure problems such as the lack of a Heathrow to Inverness air link; we have campaigned for a long time to have that link restored. I look forward to the benefits of an integrated transport system, which will encourage more visitors to come to the Highlands.

We must maximise our efforts. The Scottish Tourist Board and the area tourist boards must have clearly defined roles and not trip over each other. Area tourist boards must be properly funded—people have discussed that already—and if they are losing members, they must take steps to redress the situation. Boards must represent the whole disparate and diverse industry in their area, and individual traders in the industry must sometimes be reminded that a fragmented industry will not prosper.

Let us look at the big picture. Scotland gives people a great holiday. Overseas visitors and visitors from England realise that, and I hope that the Scots are listening to me now.

16:31

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am rather disappointed by some of the contributions today. Maureen Macmillan referred to small fluctuations in the Highlands, but a small fluctuation can mean bankruptcy. The reported drop of 6 per cent this year is an official figure from the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board, not a fabrication of anyone's imagination, and is likely to be an underestimate. That 6 per cent drop must be considered against the background of last year's drop of almost 20 per cent. Please do not insult people by talking about small or minor fluctuations. If the review is to mean anything, it must mean a partnership in which we listen to everyone in the industry.

Now I turn to Alasdair Morrison. A few weeks ago, in response to a Scottish nationalist member's question, Alasdair said that tourist numbers had not changed. I am glad that he acknowledged today that although numbers are up in Edinburgh, they are seriously down in the Highlands and elsewhere. I hope that the Scottish Executive's approach to the review will be similar to that endorsed by Henry McLeish when I met him in Inverness. He acknowledged, examined and discussed the problems in a mature, responsible and professional manner, in contrast to the dismissive comments that have been made today. For example, Elaine Murray said that fuel duty is a minimal part of the price of petrol; in fact, it is 85 per cent of the price. We need a bit of honesty here.

As Maureen and Fergus said, tourism is the crucial industry in the Scottish Highlands. This week the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board announced that tourist numbers for the far north of Scotland have fallen by 16 per cent; that is the most dramatic drop this year. Perhaps Maureen Macmillan's bed and breakfast weekend in Sutherland was all right, but that is not the whole picture. We must look at the problem professionally, rather than having a bit of by-the-bar chat.

Another point for Alasdair Morrison to consider is that Caledonian MacBrayne passenger numbers for this summer have fallen by 20,000 while car numbers are down by 4,000. We must have a proper review and an honest debate.

I am concerned about many aspects of the Scottish Tourist Board, but it exists for one reason: to promote and market Scotland. Any marketing organisation can plan for the future only if it devotes enough of its budget to marketing and knows its current and potential customer base. The Scottish Tourist Board devotes 12 per cent of its budget to marketing while the rest goes on salaries, expenses, buildings and other costs. As of yesterday, the Highlands of Scotland Tourist

Board still did not have breakdown figures for overseas visitors for 1998, as it is planning for 2000.

The Scottish Tourist Board is supposed to be a marketing organisation, but it cannot get the information that it requires from the Department of Trade and Industry. I suggested that it talk to its counterparts, and to Brian Wilson. It is not good enough to be two years behind with figures. The clear message from the industry is that we must promote Scotland. There can be no excuses. Henry McLeish tells us today in *The Scotsman* that Scots should believe in themselves. That is not the issue: we need the Scottish Tourist Board to believe in Scotland.

Finally, I want to mention Project Ossian. It has already cost £5 million. It is funded from the marketing budget. After two years it is still not up and running. It does not sell tourist beds in Scotland: it is simply the yellow pages of the tourist industry. If we are to take it seriously, we must ensure that it moves along in a business-like manner to provide the services that are required.

16:36

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I welcome the minister's statement today, and I welcome the tone of the debate. There is much that we can agree on across the chamber. Having listened to the minister, we can have no doubt that the Executive recognises the tremendous economic importance of tourism throughout Scotland. It is vital that we have a strategy that is robust and practicable. I welcome the consultation process that lies behind this motion.

I want to say three things, some of which have been said already. I find myself in agreement with the Tories—[*Applause.*] I agree with them about the funding of area tourist boards. It is essential that some stability exists for the boards, so that they can plan ahead and not be dependent upon hard-pressed local authorities' annual heart-searching. I do not want to see the removal of democratic oversight, because that does not need to happen. Core funding should come from the Scottish Tourist Board. Of course, European funding is important when objective 2 and objective 3 structural funding is being discussed. I hope that the Government and the Executive have put the case for Scottish tourism with regard to that funding.

The second issue that I wish to address has been spoken about already, so I do not want to labour it. Quality is desperately important. I am not sure that we cannot find some middle way between what Maureen said and what people in the tourist trade have been telling me; that they

must have quality assurance and that they want compulsory registration so that they are not let down by the lowest common denominator. As we have read in *The Scotsman* and in the House of Commons report, anecdotes that rubbish the Scottish Tourist Board and the Scottish tourism industry are powerful, and when people let the industry down it damages its fabric. At least some kind of compulsory registration must be considered.

I am skipping some bits. I, too, welcome Project Ossian and I want to address the issue of winning back the market that has been lost and which seems not be holding up as well as others are. I think that it was Harold Macmillan who, when asked why his policy changed, replied, "Events, dear boy, events". I want to draw attention to the importance of events to tourism; for example, the Thirlestane horse trials, the Highland games and other local festivals in my area. People take day trips to those events.

I was surprised, although I understand the logic, that the figures for tourism do not include day visitors. If we have events, we can turn day visitors into overnight stays. Who would have thought that events such as the Hogmanay celebrations in Edinburgh or the tall ships event in Greenock would attract hundreds of thousands of people? Events attract people. They do not have to be big events. If we offer good value and good packages we can turn day visitors into overnight stays. That would restore the Scottish market and improve the tourist figures.

Finally, I ask all members to spend some time in the Borders, where they will see lovely houses and lovely scenery, where there are tremendous places to walk and where the hospitality is second to none. We want people to come, to stay and to spend their money liberally.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Swinney to wind up on behalf of the Scottish National party.

16:40

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I want to begin by referring to the amendment. Amendments should be put down when a party has something worth while to add to the motion that is before Parliament, but there is nothing in this amendment to make it worthy of support.

The Government is undertaking an important tourism review. My colleague Fergus Ewing signalled our support for the concept of a review. It must set a clear strategic direction for the industry in the years to come, a direction that is sustainable and that can be delivered and supported throughout Scotland and in the wider marketplace.

I am troubled by some of the documents that inform the debate on tourism, particularly the "Pathfinders to the Parliament" report that was produced before the election. It refers to a tourism futures sub-group that was established in 1998. We have an opportunity to make this review meaningful and a landmark in the process of tourism development. Unless we do that, we are in danger of lurching from one review to another and of failing to give a clear direction to the industry.

Input from the tourist boards in the area that I represent—Perthshire Tourist Board and Angus and Dundee Tourist Board—has assisted me in my preparation for this debate. I would like to refer to a number of common themes that they have highlighted.

The first concerns the way in which the industry is often maligned. I agree with what Ian Jenkins said about the danger of the sort of statements that appeared in the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Select Committee report. However, anecdotes can have a positive as well as a negative impact. I represent a county that has benefited hugely from the "Autumn Gold" initiative, because Perthshire happens to look absolutely stunning—even more stunning than usual—in the autumn months. I would encourage all members to visit; it is great to drive home there every night.

I would also like to celebrate Project Ossian. This is a hugely imaginative and exciting project that should transform accessibility to the tourism market in Scotland. I do not understand why it is not being shouted about loudly and clearly enough, and would like to know from the minister in her summing-up what progress has been made on the project and how effectively it is contributing to the marketing and promotion of Scotland overseas.

In response to Keith Raffan's intervention, the minister made a statement that is difficult to sustain: that it would not be in Scotland's interests to be marketed distinctively overseas. That strikes me as a complete contradiction in terms, although that may be because of my politics. I would like to understand what the minister is driving at when she says that it would not be in Scotland's interests for us to take control of marketing our community and our tourism, investment and business development products to a wider audience. There are inherent attractions in promoting Scotland overseas in a unified way. That is the sort of strategic thinking that underpins the initiative Scotland the brand, which not only applies to the marketing of particular products, but has been incorporated into the marketing overseas of companies such as Stagecoach. That is interesting.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I wonder whether Mr Swinney would care to

address, within the context of what he has said about building a successful tourism industry in Scotland, the role of the industry's work force. Does he agree that the introduction of the national minimum wage has made a massive difference to about 175,000 Scots, who have benefited from an increase in wages, and that the poor conditions in the industry are not doing anything to promote it? Will he say what we can do to make the tourism industry more attractive to work in?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Fergus Ewing.

Mr Swinney: Actually, I am John Swinney.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, John.

Mr Swinney: Please do not accuse me of being Fergus Ewing. I have been accused of many things, but that is not one of them.

As Pauline will know, the SNP supports the national minimum wage and, as my colleague said earlier, we want to see a quality working environment for people in the tourism industry. That will create a sustainable work force. We also have to tackle some of the issues surrounding the duration of the tourist season, to guarantee that people can be offered long-term employment within the industry rather than having to take the limited contracts that are more often available.

The funding of area tourist boards is a subject that has been raised many times today, across the Parliament. Fundamental to all the material that I have read—whether it is “Pathfinders to the Parliament” or the select committee report—is the issue surrounding the stability of area tourist board funding. That is important for the area tourist boards, because they are under intense pressure from local authority cuts, which ultimately relate to the proportion of the cake that is being distributed by the Scottish Executive to local organisations. Beyond that, there is a huge voluntary sector that supports initiatives in the Scottish tourism sector, where the lack of resources at the level of area tourist boards means that there is insufficient support for particular projects.

From my experience of the towns and villages that I represent, I know that much good will goes into creating initiatives, such as folk festivals or Victorian festivals, which, as Ian Jenkins said, attract visitors to particular areas. Those projects are worthy of support and the constraints on the area tourist board funding have a severe impact on that.

I will close with a point about the wider dimension. “Pathfinders to the Parliament” highlights the context in which we must consider tourism. It is not just about the promotion of one industry, it is about the linkages to issues such as transport and fuel costs, as well as the exorbitant

cost of plane flights from London to Edinburgh, the stranglehold that market has on access for foreign visitors and the need for direct transport links from Scotland to our European partners. That would help to strengthen our tourism industry, and I hope that the tourism strategy review will create the environment in which those sensible and imaginative issues can be addressed positively, for the benefit of Scotland.

16:47

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): John Swinney's remarks about our amendment were astonishing, considering that every point made by my colleague David Davidson has been mirrored by the SNP. Perhaps SNP members are a little peeved that they did not lodge the amendment—they were probably too busy in-fighting in Inverness.

We have a world-class asset, although not yet a world-class service—that is what Henry McLeish said yesterday. The point about service could apply to the Scottish Executive. I disagree with Alasdair Morrison's opinion that there are many different views about the way in which to reform and improve the tourist industry in Scotland. The one thing that was crystal clear to me when I was the Conservative tourism spokesman was that so many institutions throughout Scotland had a clear idea of what the industry needed. Indeed, Brian Wilson, two years ago, when he was the minister, seemed to be well aware of that—he must have left the details in the in-tray.

The burdens imposed on the tourism industry by the Labour Government, the failure to improve our roads and the increase in fuel tax have all helped to destroy tourism. They have all helped to cut the 6 per cent—

Fergus Ewing: Will Ben Wallace give way?

Ben Wallace: No, I will not.

The minister espoused the report from Westminster and talked about the good things for tourism, but conveniently left out the recommendation for a dedicated minister for tourism to focus on the needs of the Scottish industry. The tourism industry is so big that it deserves that attention.

On 7 July, I wrote to the minister, asking him to visit a constituency event—a pipe band, organised by a tourism community group. The event demonstrated the way in which communities have promoted tourism in Aberdeenshire; that has a direct effect on Highlands and Islands and European funding. When I received the reply on 2 August—as I expected, the minister was busy doing something else—it was interesting to note that it arrived the day after the event. That he

cannot give attention to such events shows the need for an individual minister for tourism.

Because of the loss of European funding—or the changes in the structure of European funding—local authorities are desperately looking round for more money. It is a priority that the review be carried out. I also believe that, before the end of the year, we must solve the way in which we fund our tourist boards; core funding is an important issue.

I ask the Executive to use its influence on Gordon Brown at the Treasury to consider ways in which to cut VAT for tourist outlets. I also ask the Executive to make further representations on the effects of the high fuel tax.

Scotland could be a world leader in tourism. We have the beautiful land, the quality foods and the quality of life to make Scotland competitive on the world market. However, the burdens must be lifted. We need to compete with our colleagues in Ireland, where VAT has been cut, leading to a massive increase in tourism. That is what we need, not regulation and the extra taxes that I talked about earlier. We need the Executive to take the issue seriously. I therefore ask members to back the amendment, which will remove burdens and allow Scottish tourism to flourish.

16:51

The Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport (Rhona Brankin): I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to wind up what I am sure members will agree has been a useful and, at times, almost consensual debate on tourism. In the time available, I will try to respond to some of the points that have been raised. I hope that members will forgive me if time runs out and I do not manage to cover them all.

Tourism is an issue for ministers across the Scottish Executive. As Alasdair Morrison said in opening the debate, tourism has a strong connection to my portfolio. A good way to promote the country and to attract visitors is to encourage them to come to Scotland for a specific activity or purpose. Alasdair mentioned golf and the worldwide attention that Scotland received through hosting the Open and the Walker cup. Scotland will be in the spotlight again next year when the Open returns to St Andrews—indeed, more so because it will be the millennium Open. That is an opportunity which we must not miss.

There is growing interest in staging the Ryder cup in Scotland at the next available opportunity, which is in 2009. The Scottish Executive would be delighted to see a successful Scottish bid for that major event, which attracts worldwide public and media interest. I have recently had discussions with the Professional Golfers Association about

what is involved in mounting a successful bid, and I will be attending the Ryder cup match in Boston this weekend to fly the flag for Scotland.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: I am sorry, but I must press on, as I have a whole load of points that I must get through.

In Boston, I will lend my support to the bid to bring the 2009 Ryder cup match to the country that is the home of golf.

Other examples of sports tourism that attract visitors from the United Kingdom and overseas include walking, fishing and sailing. Scotland has a competitive advantage over other destinations when promoting those activities thanks to our spectacular natural environment. Of course, it is essential that in developing such activities, we take great care not to affect adversely the environment, which is Scotland's greatest tourism asset.

As has been mentioned, one of Scotland's largest niche markets is cultural tourism. Scotland's museums and galleries alone received more than 9.5 million visitors in 1998. Scottish history, culture, arts and of course language are famous throughout the world. Images of Scottish built heritage are instantly recognisable. In fact, Edinburgh Castle has received 1¼ million visitors so far this year.

For some time, the link between culture and tourism has been developed and fostered by a public-private partnership whose remit is to promote closer working relationships among tourism, arts and economic development bodies. Last year, the group reviewed its activities and produced a three-year action plan. Guidelines on developing cultural tourism have been produced for area tourist boards and other local agencies, for use in area tourism strategies. Local groups of arts and tourism organisations have been developed, and the Scottish Tourist Board and the Scottish Arts Council are leading a traditional music initiative. The group also promotes a cultural tourism award, which is sponsored by the Bank of Scotland. Much has been achieved, but we look to see whether we can do more.

Our consultation on a national cultural strategy will seek views on how culture, in its broadest sense, impacts on all aspects of government. If we are to preserve and enhance Scotland's rich diversity of urban areas and natural landscapes, and to continue to attract visitors, we must have proper regard for the quality of our new buildings and of new developments in our towns, cities and countryside. That is why we have made a commitment to develop a policy on architecture for Scotland. The economic benefits of architecture

and its role in promoting tourism are among the issues that are covered by the architecture framework document that I will launch next week.

I have emphasised the link between tourism and sports and culture, as they are my particular remit. However, there are many more examples of cross-cutting issues that relate to tourism. The tourism industry is not self-contained. Like any other industry, if it is continually to improve and to compete, it must address all the factors that determine success, such as skills, training, marketing and, above all, quality of service. All the departments in the Scottish Executive will continue to work together to ensure that the tourism industry in Scotland remains competitive, but the bottom line is that responsibility for success rests with the industry.

Alex Johnstone: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: No. I have too many points to get through. I assure Alex Johnstone that I will respond to some of the points that were raised by the Conservatives.

There have been calls for the Government to invest more public money in the tourism industry. Direct support, through the Scottish Tourist Board, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the British Tourist Authority and local authorities, totals around £60 million annually. The industry also benefits from funding from the European Union and indirectly from support from bodies such as Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.

However, no amount of money guarantees success.

Fergus Ewing: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: No, I am sorry; I want to continue, but I will cover many of Fergus Ewing's points.

We need to get the strategy right. We need to identify the key actions that will improve our tourism industry, and to identify who is responsible for taking them forward. We need to release the ideas, energy and potential of those who work in the tourism industry. The Scottish Executive is committed to a programme of action that will put tourism in the best position to compete and win.

On the matter of a minister for tourism, tourism is at the heart of the Executive's main economic department, which is where it ought to be. Tourism is well placed to benefit from our drive to link enterprise and lifelong learning, which is the key to a prosperous future. Alasdair Morrison has specific responsibility for tourism within the enterprise and lifelong learning department.

As Alasdair Morrison said, funding for area tourist boards must be examined carefully. It is

important that we get this right. We are willing to listen to all the arguments.

We reject the accusation of over-regulation. Area tourist boards are membership organisations, whose policies are dictated by their members. The STB's quality assurance scheme is widely supported, and is the key to improving quality in the industry.

On taxation, it is important to look at the whole picture. The UK VAT threshold—£50,000—is the highest in the EU; that helps many small tourism businesses. UK corporation tax is lower than in most other EU states. Food and travel are zero-rated.

The final flaw in Mr Davidson's speech was the assertion that Alasdair Morrison had been a town planner. Alasdair Morrison is under the impression that he was a BBC journalist.

Mr Davidson: I was referring to the minister, not the deputy minister.

Rhona Brankin: I see—was he not a footballer?

I have covered Fergus Ewing's point about a minister for tourism.

We are willing to listen to views on structures. Fergus Ewing and Mr Swinney welcomed the fact that we are having a review and developing a tourism strategy. However, it is important to find hard evidence that change is needed. It is too easy to fiddle with structures; it is more important to consider the underlying issues.

Despite what has been said about Scotland being too expensive, tourist spending in Scotland has grown strongly in recent years. Last year was disappointing, but the early signs this year are encouraging. Come on—let us not talk Scotland down.

Fergus Ewing: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: I am sorry—I have to wind up now.

Alex Fergusson talked about Maastricht. I know that Alasdair Morrison was speaking in his second language, but what he said was that representatives from Scotland had been asked to make a presentation at the European Union of Tourist Officers convention in Maastricht. Alasdair was involved in a meeting with area tourist board representatives just last week.

There is no downward trend in tourism. The trend was upward until last year. This year might also see an improvement, but it is too soon to tell. Mary Scanlon talked about figures for the Highlands being 6 per cent down. There are no official figures for individual regions yet, and figures for visits to tourist information centres are not reliable. It is too soon to rush to judgment this

season. The figures are modestly encouraging, so again—please do not talk the Highlands down.

John Swinney talked about Project Ossian. All 14 area tourist boards are now linked to a national database. Information on 7,000 accommodation businesses is now available on the internet, and there will be 1,000 more by the end of this month. A pilot booking service scheme will begin in October. All told, significant progress is being made.

I am running over time, so I will conclude by saying that the prospects for tourism in Scotland are good, and that there are real opportunities for further substantial growth in the years ahead. If the public agencies can work with the representative bodies—including the area tourist boards and the Scottish Tourism Forum—we can improve things and we can stop talking Scotland down. I am in no doubt that the Scottish tourism industry can become truly world class. I urge members to support the motion.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The minister started late, which is why I allowed a couple of minutes of injury time.

Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We now move on to motion S1M-168, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, which seeks approval of the two Scottish statutory instruments on food protection in relation to amnesic shellfish poisoning.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the following instruments be approved—

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (Orkney) (No. 2) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/42)

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No. 2) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/50).—[*Mr McCabe.*]

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S1M-160.1, in the name of Mr David Davidson, which seeks to amend motion S1M-160, in the name of Mr Alasdair Morrison, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, there will be a division. Those who wish to support Mr Davidson's amendment should vote yes, those against should vote no. Once you have voted, your lights will go out, which is to reassure you that your vote has been recorded.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Welsh, Ian (Ayr) (Lab)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result is as follows:
For 18, Against 73, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question therefore is, that motion S1M-160, in the name of Mr Alasdair Morrison, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the importance of the tourism industry to the economy of Scotland, agrees that the industry faces a number of challenges and notes that the Government intends to publish in the new year a new strategy for the industry that will address these challenges.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is,

that motion S1M-168, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the following instruments be approved—

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (Orkney) (No. 2) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/42)

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No. 2) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/50).

Stobhill Hospital

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We move now to the final item of today's business, which is motion S1M-126 in the name of Paul Martin, on the subject of Stobhill hospital. The debate is limited to 30 minutes. I ask members who are leaving to do so quietly out of courtesy to the member who has the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament calls upon Greater Glasgow Health Board to enter into full and meaningful consultation with the residents and medical staff who are affected by the proposal to build a Secure Unit on the grounds of Stobhill Hospital and to take action to ensure that local people are included in the membership of the Glasgow North University Hospital Trust

17:04

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): I would like to acknowledge the fact that I am able to raise this issue in the Scottish Parliament. The Parliament is beginning to show how effective it can be for local communities; the fact that we have been able to raise this issue proves that.

I can assure members that the future of Stobhill hospital is a local issue—that has been made clear by the large amount of correspondence and telephone inquiries I have received. It is important that the Parliament is aware of the reasons for my objection to proposals to build a secure unit on a greenfield site of approximately 10 acres adjacent to the hospital.

The site that is earmarked for the secure unit is where we wanted an ambulatory care and diagnostic unit. The ACAD unit site is now a 2 acre hospital car park. That is one of the reasons for my concern. We want the ACAD unit to develop into a state-of-the-art facility that will be a benchmark for other facilities in the UK. It would receive more than a third of a million visits every year. The facility needs an opportunity to develop.

The concern in my constituency is that the facility will not have the opportunity to develop if it is overshadowed by the proposal to build a secure unit. I have been accused of being a NIMBY member of the Scottish Parliament, but I am not alone in my view.

The medical staff association and the widely respected Dr Frank Dunn recognise the importance of the secure unit, but say that they are unable to support the present proposal because it would seriously jeopardise the functioning, development and ultimate success of the ACAD unit. That is the view of the professionals—some with as many as 20 years' experience—at the hospital. It is important that we listen to their views and to the views of patients. I

am concerned that those views have not been taken seriously.

One would expect the first secure unit in Scotland to be the subject of extensive consultation, but there has been no formal consultation on the proposal. The only consultation with the local community will be through the statutory obligation that results from the planning process. That reeks of arrogance and shows contempt for the community and the medical staff.

At a recent meeting, the chief executive said that if the community had been consulted, it would have opposed the secure unit. What right do highly paid officials have to tell me that they know what the community will say? Do they have a monopoly on knowledge of how a community will react to proposals?

Of course the community will have a point of view, but is not it important to listen to the community and to learn from that point of view, rather than take a decision and then speak to the community?

Some of the public meetings have been constructive. It is disappointing that decisions were made beforehand. We should discuss local communities' concerns with those communities. I am sure that the minister will agree that consultation is crucial to the health service and that we should be taking part in consultation.

Government policy is clear—hospital policy should be clinically driven. That view is shared by the former health minister, Sam Galbraith. In March 1998, he told the *Kirkintilloch, Bishopbriggs & Springburn Herald* that changes at Stobhill hospital should be clinically driven and made after consultation with doctors.

I will repeat the question that I have asked on a number of occasions: why were medical staff not consulted on the revised proposals for building a secure unit at Stobhill hospital when there was such clear guidance from the then health minister that medical staff should be consulted on clinical matters?

There is a great myth that local people are NIMBYs. The same accusation has been levelled at me. Some local people might be concerned about any proposal, such as for a new supermarket, that affects the community, but they are entitled to hold and express their opinions. Our great concern about this proposal is that we have not had an opportunity to air our views.

I have had a helpful meeting with the Minister for Health and Community Care, but the Parliament has to take action to make a difference to local people's lives. There are no representatives from the local community on the local NHS trust, which

is an issue that needs to be dealt with.

I want to be constructive in this debate and raise some points to which I want the minister to respond today. This Parliament should not be a talking shop—we need to take prominent action.

First, the proposal should be withdrawn from the planning process to allow for real and meaningful consultation with the local community and the medical staff. I reiterate that the medical staff and the patients are the people who matter. If we want to make progress in hospital care, we need to include those people in discussions about the future of their hospital.

There should be a comprehensive study into the effectiveness of a 2 acre ACAD unit. This is the future of hospital care. Will the unit be given a chance to develop if it is built on a 2 acre car park site where the secure unit might inhibit and overshadow it?

There should also be a comprehensive study of other possible sites for the secure unit. I understand from documents that I have received from the health board that 14 sites were appraised. I can exclusively reveal that some of those sites were being sold when they were being appraised. I want proper appraisals of those sites to be carried out. Organisations such as City of Glasgow Council and East Dunbartonshire Council, which were involved in the appraisal process, were not clear that they were appraising sites for a secure unit, but thought that they were being asked for an opinion on the sites. They did not realise that their opinion counted towards a final decision.

There is no clear medical evidence that a secure unit has to be placed next to a general hospital. That point has to be clinically proven before we place such a facility next to Stobhill hospital.

In question time a couple of weeks ago, I asked the minister to meet the medical staff association in the hospital. Unfortunately, she was not able to do that, but her visit to the hospital on Monday was much appreciated. However, I ask her again to meet the people who matter, such as representatives from the medical staff association, to discuss their concerns about the proposed secure unit. They are concerned that, as Dr Frank Dunn said, the secure unit will inhibit the ACAD unit from developing into a unit that will be able to serve the Glasgow North area.

The minister should also ensure that Glasgow North residents are included on the board of North Glasgow University Hospitals NHS Trust. That serious flaw in the new merger of the hospital trusts needs to be addressed. Local trust officials have advised me that a place on the trust board has been available for some time now and they have asked me to give them some names.

If trusts are serious about having local representation, they should reach out to local communities. They should not have to use me to reach out to local communities. They will make direct links with the community if they are serious about community consultation and representation.

I will finish now as I understand that a number of members want to speak. I live next to Stobhill hospital. I was born there, my wife was born there and almost all my family was born there. We feel a great link to Stobhill hospital. I am not taking this view in a NIMBY way. The leader of East Dunbartonshire Council is also opposed to the proposal. Some of his constituents stay 10 to 15 miles away from the facility. They are concerned about the future of the hospital and that the secure unit will inhibit any possible development of it. Our case is about the future of the hospital and how it will be affected by the proposal to build a secure unit.

The Presiding Officer: I will call the minister to wind up at 5.27 pm, so there is very little time. Five members want to speak, so members should make their own calculations.

17:16

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): I will be brief, because I have an urgent appointment.

I back everything that Mr Martin has said about his fight. I advise him—as a definite non-NIMBY myself—that neither he nor the people who live close to Stobhill hospital should feel embarrassed if they have been forced to feel like NIMBYs. The best of people can be converted into NIMBYs if they are not consulted. The lack of consultation has been shocking.

I am the only Glasgow member on the Health and Community Care Committee—I will try my best to raise this issue there. I am glad that the Minister for Health and Community Care, and her deputy, have remained for this debate. If the unit is to contain paedophiles, that will be an unsuitable type of client to be in that part of Glasgow.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): Is Dorothy-Grace Elder suggesting that there should be some other form of establishment, where individuals who have committed crimes should be?

Dorothy-Grace Elder: I am talking about crimes against children. Most of those people are sent to Peterhead or Carstairs. The community has every right to be fearful. I have been involved in tracking down paedophiles. Those men are the most dangerous in the community to children. We cannot be politically correct at the expense of risking children.

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): It is a

secure unit.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: How secure is secure?

Margaret Jamieson *rose*—

Dr Simpson: It is secure.

The Presiding Officer: We cannot have two people on their feet at once.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: I oppose that type of client going to this unit. Enough is already stacked against the child in the community. The lack of child safety, even right through to the courts, is appalling. Only 5 to 10 per cent of the 1,500 cases of child abuse in Scotland that come to light and get as far as a fiscal, get into court.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Will Dorothy-Grace Elder stop blowing the issue out of proportion by making comments that will frighten the community, and address the debate today. We are here to discuss Stobhill hospital, not to introduce scaremongering tactics.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Those concerns have been expressed to Mr Martin, and expressed by Mr Martin in the press already. The type of client who might be in the secure unit is one of the concerns of the local people.

This development is unsuitable for that area, and I support everything that Mr Martin has said about it.

17:20

Ms Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): I will not take up much time as I realise that other members want in and Paul Martin has already covered much of the ground. Like him, I would like to stick to the terms of the motion. I would particularly like to address the aspects concerning the consultation.

This is not the first suggestion that a secure unit should be sited at Stobhill. Unlike Paul, I do not live near the site, but I have done and I have relatives who do. I have been treated there and have worked there on occasion. I feel strongly about the hospital, which is the local hospital for most people in my constituency.

Only a year ago, the community and mental health trust, which had responsibility for the proposal, announced that it was no longer considering Stobhill as a possible site because it could not accommodate both the ambulatory care unit and the secure care unit without undue design compromise. All of a sudden, within a few months, we find that the size of the ambulatory care unit has been reduced greatly and that it is now to be sited on land that is currently a car park. That rather conveniently leaves a greenfield site for the secure unit.

When the Glasgow MSPs were invited by the health board to attend a briefing on the matter, we were issued with a question and answer note that contained 27 questions and answers. Some of the questions on the note beggared belief, frankly. If the health board is able to have that number of questions and answers prepared to brief MSPs, why can it not meet the community to discuss the questions that they have raised or any other questions that the local residents might have?

Doctors and other staff in the hospital have said that they do not think that Stobhill is the right place for the secure unit. Local residents have been saying the same thing for three or four years, but the health board has decided that the consultation should be conducted through the quasi-judicial framework of the planning application process where only matters relating to planning can be raised.

I know who I would consult if I were the health board—the doctors and staff of the hospital and local residents. I would not make the decision on the basis that I had been able to reduce one unit to accommodate another.

17:23

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I have much pleasure in supporting, in general terms, the content of Paul Martin's speech. It is important to talk about the matter today. It is unfortunate that the debate takes place against the background of the wide-ranging debate that we had a couple of weeks ago regarding the Noel Ruddle case. That debate was evocative and might have spilled over into this debate. People in the Stobhill area sometimes feel that they are under threat.

I know—and we would all agree—that those who will be housed in this secure unit are not likely to be malevolent characters like Norman Bates, but the local population feels that it is under threat. It is clear that the health board has failed to reassure them and that that is because the consultation process failed lamentably. It is worth underlining the fact that every politician, whether at parliamentary level or council level, has to consult those who will be most affected by their decisions.

There is no reason why a secure unit has to be combined with a general hospital facility. There is no clinical necessity for it. Secure units should, by definition, be secure enough to provide the people round about with the necessary degree of confidence, and they should be built away from the main bulk of the population. Local people need to feel relaxed about the fact that those who are affected by mental illness are among them, and their safety must be considered. I am sure that a number of people have raised this issue with Paul

Martin, the member most immediately affected. Others have raised with me the matters of safety, falling property values and the public insecurity that such units inevitably bring about.

It is certainly a matter that must be re-examined and nothing that Paul Martin has said today is at all unreasonable. I support his views and I call on the minister to recognise the public's disquiet about the provision of the facility at that locus.

The Presiding Officer: I call Fiona McLeod. You will have only one minute, I am afraid.

17:26

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I begin by commending—

Paul Martin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it a possibility that we could have more time to address some of the points that have been made?

The Presiding Officer: This is a members' debate and, as time is limited to half an hour, I am not prepared to accept a motion to extend it. We have had a good debate, but there is one minute left for a few quick points from Fiona McLeod.

Fiona McLeod: I have a point of order before I begin. At the domestic violence debate, the time was extended by half an hour.

The Presiding Officer: I am aware of that. However, this afternoon's debate is on a specific subject raised by the constituency member. In such circumstances, a half-hour debate is appropriate. You are eating up your own time, so please press on.

Fiona McLeod: I will be as quick as I can.

The Presiding Officer: I want to give the minister plenty of time to reply, because that is what the debate is about.

Fiona McLeod: And I want to get a couple of questions in.

On behalf of my constituents in Bishopbriggs and Kirkintilloch, I commend Paul for raising the matter. Many of my points have already been mentioned, so I will stick to the question of a full and meaningful consultation. The health board does not have a good track record on consultation so far. Greater Glasgow Health Board's web pages contain a code of practice on openness. The last time that the web pages mention anything about the secure care unit at Stobhill is in June 1998. There has been no other information since then. That does not strike me as full and meaningful consultation.

At the meeting on 31 August at Tom Johnston House in Kirkintilloch, attended by more than 500 of my constituents, the main issue that was raised

was the threat of the secure care unit to the future of Stobhill as a general hospital. More specifically, the unit threatens the ACAD unit, which has now been trimmed and hemmed in to a very small site, almost to the point of non-viability, as Dr Dunn explained and as Paul quoted.

The minister is quoted in the *Kirkintilloch, Bishopbriggs & Springburn Herald* today as saying that

"it is important that local communities are fully involved in consultation".

What will she do when the people in the area say that they have not been fully and meaningfully consulted and are not satisfied with Greater Glasgow Health Board? What will she do when Glasgow City Council refuses the planning application for the secure unit in favour of the ACAD and the future of Stobhill as a general hospital?

17:28

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): I now have less than two and a half minutes to address a range of very important—

The Presiding Officer: No. You can go on until 5.34 pm.

Susan Deacon: I am grateful for that, and will relax slightly in making my response.

I am grateful to all the members who have contributed to the debate for putting on record their views on the subject. I have listened carefully to the points that have been made. I also congratulate Paul Martin, the local constituency member, on securing this debate. As he indicated, we have met previously to discuss the issue. I am pleased to continue to listen to his views as the constituency member, and to those of other members who have constituency interests in the hospital. I note the comments that we have heard from West of Scotland members.

In replying, yes, I will attempt to answer some of the specific questions that have been raised, but I will also explain quite specifically why I will not attempt to answer some of the questions. I want to put in context the development that has taken place at Stobhill and explain how that fits with the Scottish Executive's wider strategy.

I will start with the latter point. I would like to recap briefly on how Glasgow's proposals for a local forensic unit fit in with the Scottish Executive's strategy for providing care for people with mental illness. I stress care for people with mental illness. That is, in essence, what a great deal of the discussion has been about. When the Scottish Office published its guidance on health and social work care for mentally disordered

offenders, it was putting into practice modern thinking on the best way to care for mentally ill people. I hope that these days few people would argue that it is in the best interests of patients—and a modern and civilised society—to keep them shut up in Victorian institutions miles from their families and their homes.

The guidance paper set out a framework under which patients would receive high-quality care, with proper attention given to their needs as individuals. They would be cared for, where possible, in the community rather than in institutions. They would have care that maximised their rehabilitation and gave them the best chance of an independent life. Where necessary, they would receive their care under conditions of appropriate security with due regard for public safety. The phrase appropriate security is important. It sets the context of today's debate on the new local forensic unit for Glasgow.

People whose illness means that they do not need the high level of security provided by the state hospital at Carstairs should not be incarcerated there. I have no difficulty in making that statement. There has been much discussion over recent weeks—some of it well informed, some of it ill informed—about how we treat mentally disordered offenders. I hope that people agree that those who do not require to be incarcerated in the state hospital should not be there. If they can be treated in a local setting, with a lower level of security and without presenting an immediate risk to the public, that is where they should be.

In many cases, such patients are being cared for in temporary facilities around Scotland that are less than ideal. The overall Scottish Executive framework provides an integrated and coherent approach to the care of those people. We must remember that many of the patients who will benefit from the local forensic unit are themselves very vulnerable people who deserve as high a standard of care and treatment from the health service as the rest of us. I hope that we will have the chance to discuss the wider issues in greater detail at a future date.

That, in short, is the Scottish Executive's policy on forensic mental health services. However, a policy is worth nothing unless it is implemented. That is where local health boards and local trusts come in—it now falls to them to make a reality of the framework. That is what health authorities in Glasgow are seeking to do.

We have heard a lot in the debate about the detail of the plans for Glasgow. It is worth giving some thought to whose responsibility it is to take the decisions on the unit. It is a principle firmly held by the Scottish Executive, and by most members of the Parliament, that decisions

affecting local communities are best taken by those close enough to understand those local communities.

The local forensic unit is just such a local service, so the location of the unit in Glasgow is a decision for the Glasgow health authorities. I respect the right of the local member, Mr Martin, to take up the issue in the Parliament. However, I hope that he understands that, as a minister, I cannot take the detailed location decisions that are being discussed today. It would be quite wrong of the Parliament to begin to embroil itself in detailed issues, when it is the job of local health boards, local authorities and other local bodies to take those decisions. It is important that that is done in discussion with local communities. I have said, in this chamber and directly to the health authorities concerned, that I want them to ensure the highest possible degree of engagement and dialogue with local communities.

I also recognise that this is a sensitive issue and that locally there is great concern about it. That is in part—and not least—because of the way in which mental illness has traditionally been portrayed and stigmatised.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Susan Deacon: I do not have time, I am sorry.

That is the backdrop to this local debate. As we address issues of this nature it is important that this chamber, and the Executive in particular, focuses on the strategic context within which we want local development to take place. It is then for local bodies to ensure that that development takes place in line with those strategic priorities.

Paul Martin raised the matter of representation on the trust. I am keen to ensure that trusts are as representative as possible. The North Glasgow University Hospitals NHS Trust has two vacancies at the moment, and I would welcome applications from local representatives. I encourage members to encourage people in their communities to apply for those positions and to participate in the running of trusts. I can give an assurance that those appointments will be made as openly and as fairly as possible. It is, however, important that we get the best people possible involved in local trusts and local boards, and that must be decided on the basis of who they are, not where they are from.

I am conscious, Presiding Officer, that many other issues were raised in this debate. You are looking at me to wind up and I do not have time to deal with them. I hope that we will have an opportunity to return to some of the broader issues raised in this debate and to have a discussion about mental illness. We have touched on mental illness, but we have not dealt with it fully. The Parliament, health boards and trusts have difficult

jobs to do and must make difficult decisions along the way. I hope that we can do that in open discussion and for the benefit of people in local communities across Scotland.

Paul Martin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I made it clear that there were a number of questions that I wanted the minister to address. Is it possible to say that, in future, the questions should be answered first, before any historical piece on the framework of mental health? It is important. If a member puts a number of questions, they should be given priority in the winding-up speech.

The Presiding Officer: It may help the chamber if I say that members' debates are different from general debates. They are in the hands of the member who raises the issue and, primarily, it is for that member to raise a constituency issue and for the minister to reply. We try to get agreement beforehand as to what time is allowed—the minister agreed seven minutes to reply—and other members may speak between if they can.

I would like to make one other point, which is that members who participate in the debate ought to be here to listen to the minister's reply. I regret that that has not happened today.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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