

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 7 December 2000

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 7 December 2000

[The PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

### Local Government Settlement

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The first item of business is a statement by Angus MacKay on the local government settlement.

**Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** On a point of order. This morning I contacted my colleague Kenny Gibson, asking to see a copy of the minister's statement, which he had in his possession at 9 o'clock—but he refused to let me see it. Apparently, Labour back benchers are complaining that they are not seeing statements in advance, whereas spokespersons in other parties are. I am a member of the Local Government Committee and I think that I have a right to see the statement in advance along with my colleague. Can you do something about that?

**The Presiding Officer:** The answer is no, I cannot do anything about that because it is not a point of order for me. I am informed that, as a matter of courtesy, the Executive gives advance copies of statements to the spokespersons of the Opposition parties and it is not expected that they be handed on further. That is an arrangement between the Executive and the parties and has nothing to do with me in the chair.

09:31

**The Minister for Finance and Local Government (Angus MacKay):** With Fergus Ewing's consent, I will steer clear of freedom of information this morning and stick to the local government settlement.

Since devolution, the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening the partnership between local government and central Government, to providing a sound financial platform to support modern and effective public services, and to ensuring that all Scotland's citizens are able to share in those benefits. I am therefore delighted to be able to announce our grant allocations to local government, which will provide record levels of support for every local authority in Scotland.

Local authorities will be notified of their provisional allocations by Executive circular today. Tables showing the settlement allocations for each council will be available from the Scottish Parliament information centre desk at the back of

the chamber following the statement. Copies of the circular will also be available from SPICe. For the first time ever, the allocations cover not just 12 months, but will give councils the certainty of knowing their grant allocations for the next three years. Local authorities will therefore have the stability to plan their budgets and council tax levels, and the resources to achieve real and sustained improvements across the full range of their service responsibilities and to make the necessary investment in local infrastructure. I will also announce today the provisional national non-domestic rate poundage for 2001-02.

The spending review announcement earlier this year provided for the most sustained improvement in total support for local government in decades—an additional £1.2 billion over three years. By far the largest part of those additional resources will be directed to individual local authorities through the revenue grant and capital allocations that I am announcing today. Total revenue grant will increase by 6.2 per cent next year and by a further 5.4 per cent and 3.8 per cent in the following two years, to a total of more than £6.5 billion—increases of more than twice the rate of projected inflation in the first two years, and higher than the rate of projected inflation in the third year.

The single allocation for councils' capital investment will also receive a significant boost. For next year, the allocations total more than £311 million—an increase of more than 24 per cent. By the third year of the settlement, the total will have risen again to almost £350 million. I intend to say more about what can be achieved by local government with those substantial increases. However, I would first like to set out the structure of the settlement and say how the allocations for individual authorities have been arrived at.

I recently detailed to Parliament the new financial partnership that we have established with local government covering three-year grant and council tax levels, guaranteed grant increases for every council, a simpler and fairer distribution system, greater flexibility for councils in setting their total spending levels, and an increased focus on service outcomes. Those improvements are reflected in today's announcement.

In previous years, although three-year figures were available for total local government support, individual local authorities were advised of their allocations for one year only. The three-year grant allocations that I am announcing today for both revenue and capital will assist all local authorities to plan their budgets better and to provide their local electors with certainty about their tax commitments.

We want all Scotland's citizens to share in the benefits of improved local services and infrastructure. In the past, the local government

settlement announcement has sparked debate about the relative winners and losers from the annual cycle of distribution reviews. Those discussions distracted people from the real issue of how local authorities could make the most effective use of their resources.

The distribution system was so complex that my predecessors had to announce four different sets of figures for each council. Few people understood the distinction between those figures. The system was also unfair. From year to year, individual councils could lose grant support as a result of changes in methodology or data. The first that they would know about that was in the December immediately before the April when the changes would happen.

We have made the system simpler and fairer. It is simpler in that what I am announcing today is the total revenue grant figures that each local authority will receive. Those are the figures that they will use to plan the budgets on which they will consult their electors. We are making it fairer in that individual local authorities will be able to plan for changes in their grant allocations over a longer time scale. In addition, the substantial additional resources provided from the spending review have allowed us to ensure that every local authority in Scotland will receive a real-terms increase in grant support.

In each of the three years of the settlement, we have provided a minimum grant increase guarantee or floor. For next year, every local authority in Scotland will receive an increase in revenue grant of at least 5 per cent—twice the predicted rate of inflation. For the following two years, the minimum grant guarantee will provide increases of at least 4 per cent in the second year and 3.4 per cent in the third year. The minimum grant guarantee is easy to understand and it is fair. It will ensure that no local authority is unduly disadvantaged relative to other councils in terms of its total grant increase. It also provides for a far more stable distribution of grant between local authorities over the three-year settlement period.

The substantial additional resources provided from the spending review and the guaranteed grant increase are the key elements that will influence councils' relative grant increases over the next three years. That has reduced the relative importance of the distribution formula. The existing distribution system for revenue grant has been developed over many years through detailed consultation between central Government and local government. We agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that it was right to anchor the new arrangements to the existing formula.

I am aware of speculation about other distribution options and whether they would take

more account of specific factors, particularly deprivation. However, it is a myth that a different block and formula style distribution would have taken more account of deprivation. The aim of the new arrangements is to simplify the existing formula. The simplified formula that we use will continue to take account of those factors that have been identified as the key influences on local authorities' relative spending needs, including population levels, sparsity, urban pressures and deprivation.

The Executive is committed to working with local government to tackle the causes and consequences of deprivation. This year, with COSLA, we carried out a thorough review of the account taken of deprivation in the distribution system. That study was based on evidence from councils and reviewed by independent consultants.

Following the recommendations of the review, additional support is being provided within the formula to assist local authorities dealing with high levels of deprivation. For example, the consultants recommended an increase in the teachers-for-deprivation assessment of between 30 and 40 per cent. We agree with that, and have increased support for that factor by 40 per cent at the upper end of the recommendation to £41 million next year, with further increases built in for years 2 and 3. A range of other assessments to help local authorities to tackle deprivation within the population distribution formula have also had specific increases.

The effect of seasonal employment patterns on the data used in the distribution formula to measure deprivation has also been taken account of. That is of particular relevance to rural authorities.

The concerns of our cities, especially those experiencing high levels of deprivation, cannot be dealt with by the local government finance settlement alone. The ability of the Executive and its partners in local government to eradicate poverty and deprivation will depend on stronger joint action to bring to bear the full range of resources at our disposal. To assist our joint work on deprivation, we plan a series of discussions with leaders from each of Scotland's cities and from some of our near-urban authorities on how to meet their aspirations. That fits well with our commitment to the role of councils in community leadership. Separate arrangements will give new impetus to our relationship with cities, in parallel with arrangements through the national rural partnership for examining the challenges faced in rural areas. We aim to maintain an on-going dialogue with all councils. The important point is that substantial additional resources are being provided for local government as a whole. The

minimum grant guarantee will ensure that every council—rural, urban or other—benefits from those resources.

The distribution arrangements will take into account the results of a number of other distribution reviews completed this year. Following a major review of the special islands needs allowance, account has been taken of the additional costs faced by mainland councils with some island-based populations. That is in addition to the support that is already provided to the three wholly islands authorities. A number of other reviews have been completed this year, all of which have been fed into the formula calculation for next year.

The impact of those reviews explains in part the slightly wider range of increases in the first year of the three-year settlement period. Local authorities will receive increases of between 5 and 8.7 per cent from this year into next. That is worth repeating—local authorities in Scotland will receive increases in total revenue grant support of between 5 and 8.7 per cent next year.

For years 2 and 3, the distribution formula will be updated using population projections, to ensure that councils that need to provide additional services to growing populations will have the resources to do so. The floor will ensure that councils with declining populations still receive above-inflation increases in grant. Without the annual process of reviews, the distributions are far more stable. Increases range between 4 and 6.3 per cent in 2002-03, and between 3.4 and 6.2 per cent in 2003-04. That means that for each of the three years of the settlement, every local authority in Scotland will receive a real-terms increase in grant.

One element of the Scottish Executive grant support to local government is income from non-domestic rates. Today I am announcing the provisional non-domestic rate poundage for 2001-02. Last year we set out to conduct the 2000 revaluation of non-domestic rates with minimum turbulence for business. That is what we aimed for and that is what we have achieved. We also gave a commitment to hold increases in the non-domestic rate poundage to no more than the increase in the retail prices index, save in exceptional circumstances. I am pleased to announce that next year's provisional non-domestic rate poundage will be 47p, which represents an increase smaller than the increase in the retail prices index.

That is very good news for Scottish businesses. We consulted business interests before deciding on the rate. Today's announcement demonstrates that we have listened to the concerns of business by keeping the increase to below the inflation rate. That will provide for further stability for business. A

paper explaining how the provisional poundage has been calculated will be published on the Executive website and is available from SPICe.

I am also mindful of the concerns of small businesses. I intend to make a further announcement later this month about the point that we have reached in our consideration of a small business rates relief scheme.

In previous years, besides announcing the settlement allocations, we would have advised local authorities of the assumed average annual increases in council tax that are built into the settlement and guideline calculations. Last week, I confirmed that we will not issue explicit guidelines for local authority expenditure. We expect councils to continue to show restraint in setting their council tax levels and to take account of benefit implications, which impact on the assigned budget. However, it will be for each local authority to set its council tax level, taking account of what local electors are willing to accept.

Today I am also announcing the capital allocations that will support local authority investment in local infrastructure for the next three years. As with the revenue settlement, we will provide a guaranteed increase in capital allocations between this year and next. No local authority will receive an increase in its capital allocation of less than 20 per cent. Allocations will simply be uprated for the following two years, so that councils will receive the percentage increase that corresponds to their formula allocation for 2001-02. By 2003-04, the total allocations will have increased by nearly 40 per cent. That is a 40 per cent increase in the single allocation that local authorities spend according to their assessment of local needs.

There will be further support for local authority capital investment through the public transport fund and the strategic waste fund, and from resources set aside for priorities such as school buildings and flood prevention. Where they have not already done so, colleagues will make separate announcements about those allocations.

It is important that we focus not only on the raw statistics that I am announcing today—the percentage increases and grant totals—but on the good that those resources can do for the communities and people of Scotland. My ministerial colleagues have already made a number of announcements about specific policy initiatives that we are working with local government to deliver. The substantial provision that we are making available today will enable local authorities to make significant improvements to care services for older people, to increase police numbers to record levels, to improve education opportunities for our young people and the physical environments in which they learn, to

provide free, local off-peak travel for older people, and to make substantial additional capital investment in the local road network. Those are just some examples of the real improvements that can be achieved through the increased allocations. By far the largest part of the allocations is not ring-fenced for specific purposes. It is for each local authority to consider how best to use the allocations to meet its commitments.

In addition to the allocations that I am announcing today, separate strategic funding will be made available for a number of other initiatives. Those include additional support for deprived communities, better-integrated services for vulnerable children and local improvements in waste management. In due course, separate announcements will be made about each of those funds.

Copies of the provisional allocations for each local authority should now be available at the back of the chamber. The Parliament will have the opportunity to debate the final allocations in the local government finance order early next year.

I hope that members will acknowledge the substantial additional support that the Executive is providing for local government over the next three years. The allocations reflect our aim for a simpler and fairer distribution of grant that will provide real improvements in the quality and range of local services and increased investment in local infrastructure, from which all Scotland's citizens should benefit.

The spending commitment marks a step change in funding for councils in Scotland. The additional money is available for investment because of the outstanding success of the UK Labour Government and Gordon Brown's economic policy. The spending announcements have been made possible by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration's support for local government. Today we present councils with a positive challenge—not how to cut budgets, but how to invest the real-terms increases. From Fife to Falkirk, from Aberdeen to Ayrshire, the Administration is delivering more money for better services, more financial stability for councils and council tax payers and more autonomy for councils. This is a very good day for councils and for everyone who relies on the services that they provide.

**The Presiding Officer:** That was inevitably a long and detailed statement, so I will allow questions to run on until about 10.15.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** I thank the minister for providing me with a copy of his statement an hour ago. I have guarded it with my life.

I came here this morning hoping to hear from

Santa Claus in pre-election mode. However, although Angus MacKay may not quite be the Grinch that stole Christmas, he is not quite the man in red either. Notable omissions from his statement were extra statutory responsibilities and new burdens that may be imposed on local government that would also have to be paid for through the additional resources that were announced earlier today.

Despite the above-inflation increases that Mr MacKay gleefully announced, will he concede that there is still a long way to go before local government again enjoys the resources that it had before reorganisation and prior to the massive hikes in council tax that were endured following that Tory-inspired debacle?

Will the minister explain what the settlement will mean, in relative terms, for local authorities such as Glasgow, Inverclyde and Dundee? Does he agree with Charlie Gordon, leader of Glasgow City Council, that the rejection of the block and formula system, which is advocated by local authorities that are in the greatest need, will mean that Glasgow loses £10 million of much-needed resource and will place an additional burden on the hard-pressed council tax payers of that city and similar authorities?

Does the minister agree with Councillor Gordon's view that the Executive decision on the funding formula over the next three years means that

"ministers would be seen as walking away from their own social justice agenda"

and that

"the Executive is failing to recognise the impact of poverty on the delivery of services like social work and education"

having been browbeaten by more prosperous local authorities?

Does the minister accept that a simplistic reallocation of additional resources, primarily on a population basis, will inflict a disproportionate burden on poorer councils? Those areas often lose employed skilled residents and are left with a higher percentage of the socially excluded population which is desperately in need of higher-quality services.

When will capital allocations again reach the levels, in real terms, that they were a decade ago? Will we be able to question the minister on his pre-Christmas announcement on a small business relief scheme, or will it be leaked to the media through another planted question?

**Angus MacKay:** That was a satisfyingly muted series of questions from Kenny Gibson, which tells me that the announcements that we made today are a substantial change on previous years for local government.



I invite Kenny Gibson either during questions—I am not sure whether he is allowed back in—or at some other point in the day to apologise to me for suggesting on Radio Scotland this morning that I am refusing to intervene in the local government pay dispute because I am a Unison-sponsored MSP. I am not a Unison-sponsored MSP. I am sure that Kenny Gibson will clarify that matter.

**Mr Gibson:** You were.

**Angus MacKay:** No. I have never been a Unison-sponsored MSP. Kenny Gibson has a spade; he should keep digging.

Kenny Gibson raised several important points about the settlement, especially to do with Glasgow. I will address them face on.

It beggars belief that anybody could cavil at or complain about a settlement for local government that amounts to a 10.5 per cent increase over the next three years. It is not just the extra money, welcome though that is—I speak as someone who was a finance convener in local government—it is the stability of knowing that the settlement is over three years. That flexibility, with the additional money, allows local government to make decisions, not about cutting budgets but about investing in real-terms increases. That is what will make such a difference to people.

I will address the specific points about Glasgow. If Kenny Gibson is advocating that we should have gone back to a block and formula system rather than a population system as a method of distributing the local government settlement, he had better explain to Shona Robison, who I understand is a predominantly Dundee-based MSP from his party, that that system would have left Dundee—a city with serious deprivation problems in anybody's terms—worse off than will the population-based system that we have adopted.

There is a fundamental difference between how the two systems deliver for deprivation. The population formula does not distribute resources simply on the basis of the number of bodies in a local authority area; it is a matter not of how many people there are, but of what kind of people they are—whether they are elderly or young—and what kinds of services they require. The population formula reflects deprivation. More than 13 assessments in it relate to deprivation and cover more than £600 million of expenditure. This year, more than £85 million was redistributed between authorities specifically because of deprivation-related indicators.

If we had adopted a block and formula approach, Glasgow would have received £3.9 million more over the three years of the settlement than it will under the population approach. However, we have not taken simply the population

approach. We have taken the population system plus the minimum threshold. That gives Glasgow £16 million more over the three years than the block and formula approach would. I will repeat that for the hard of hearing. The block and formula approach gives Glasgow an additional £3.9 million, but beyond that £3.9 million what we are doing with the population approach and the minimum floor gives Glasgow an additional £12 million plus over three years. That is a good deal for Glasgow. It is a good deal for every authority in Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** I now call Keith Harding.

It would be helpful if you pressed the button.

**Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** It is pressed.

**The Presiding Officer:** It is normal to press the button if you want to be called, but I knew that you wished to speak.

**Mr Harding:** I had pressed the button.

**The Presiding Officer:** No, you had not. On you go now.

**Mr Harding:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank Mr MacKay for giving me the statement an hour ago. I spent the hour reading it, not writing a speech.

Everyone agrees that local government finance is somewhat complicated. Three-year budgeting is a welcome initiative, but the way Angus MacKay has announced it today has not made local government finance simpler. While we in Parliament will take time to dig out the details of the statement, the public will be none the wiser. We welcome much of what is in the statement, but the devil will be in the detail.

Given that the minister has not mentioned McCrone, pay increases or new burdens and pressures that have been brought about by ring-fenced spending, does he agree that his plans will ultimately result in more cuts in essential services or yet more years of well-above-inflation council tax increases?

**Angus MacKay:** I am left almost speechless by Keith Harding's contribution. It is so far removed from reality that it would have given me some concern if I had not heard some of his previous speeches when we have given good news and the Conservatives have had difficulty welcoming it.

If the worst thing that the Conservatives, or anyone else, can say about the local government settlement is that it does not appear to make understanding local government finance easier, I am happy to take that kind of criticism. The truth of the matter is that the settlement has led to substantial increases for local authorities. The idea

suggested by both Keith Harding and Kenny Gibson, that there are secret, hidden burdens—neither of them has identified what they are—that will impact on the settlement is a nonsense.

An element for McCrone money is built into the increases. We have said all along that we must wait on the outcome of the McCrone negotiations. If additional money is required, the Executive will find it. We have said openly that this year's settlement allows for inflation. It allows an element, for the first time in many years, to help to fund pay increases. That is no bad thing and it is not hidden.

We have adopted a formula that gives a good distribution—

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con)** *rose*—

**Angus MacKay:** I am not sure that I am allowed to take an intervention.

**The Presiding Officer:** No.

**Angus MacKay:** We have adopted a formula that has a good distribution for every council in Scotland. For members to be crying “Bah, humbug”, especially at this time of the year, makes it clear what their position is.

**Mr Harding:** May I ask another question?

**The Presiding Officer:** All right, I will let you in again. Your question was very short. [MEMBERS: “Oh, come on.”] His question was very short.

**Mr Harding:** Is the minister saying that, as a result of the budget settlement, there will be no cuts in essential services in councils throughout Scotland?

**Angus MacKay:** I get a bit concerned when former councillors come at the debate in those terms.

**Mr Harding:** I am still a councillor.

**Angus MacKay:** Oh, dear—that is even more astonishing. I get a bit concerned when councillors ask questions about what the settlement will mean for specific local government spending decisions. When I was a councillor, I spent much of my time arguing that central Government should not interfere in such decisions or in pay negotiations between the trade unions and employers. We cannot say that we want to increase autonomy, abolish guidelines and give flexibility on council tax and then add, “By the way, we also want to tell you how to spend your money.” Each authority will have to consider how it spends its real-terms increase in funding and what it does with its new-found autonomy and flexibility with the council tax. I am sure that local electors as well as MSPs will be interested in how local authorities readjust to the challenges of investing real-terms increases

instead of making cuts, which is something that became quite familiar under the Conservatives.

**Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD):** As someone who was a councillor in Fife for 17 years before being elected to the Scottish Parliament—

**Mr Gibson:** Is the member that old?

**Iain Smith:** I am.

**Mr Gibson:** And I thought that he was a sweet young thing.

**Iain Smith:** Thanks.

I welcome the statement. Indeed, this is the first time that a local government settlement will be welcomed by every council in Scotland. That is good news for local government in Scotland and recognises the priority given to the issue by the Liberal Democrats—and, indeed, by the partnership. It makes a refreshing change from the many years of cuts that were imposed on local government by the Conservatives—

**The Presiding Officer:** Could we have a question, please?

**Iain Smith:** Does the minister share my disappointment at the response from the SNP and the Conservatives, who fail to recognise the many good things in the settlement, including—for the first time in many years—the increase in capital expenditure that will start to reverse cuts? Moreover, will he give us more information on his proposals on support for the small business rates relief scheme, on which he intends to make an announcement later this month and which will be good news for rural areas? Finally, does he share my disappointment that the SNP yet again talks about increasing money for Glasgow but does not tell us from which Scottish councils it would take that money?

**Angus MacKay:** Iain Smith asks whether I share his disappointment at the response of the SNP and the Conservatives. That is a tough one. My colleagues and I—and the rest of wider Scotland—will not fall over with surprise at their response. We heard the same muffled responses and saw the same upset-looking faces when we made the announcements about the contracts for Govan. Opposition is a tough business, but I am sure that the SNP and the Conservatives will have many years to get used to it.

I do not want to go into too much detail on the small business rates relief scheme, as there will be an announcement on it later this month. However, today's announcement on non-domestic rates poundage is extremely good news for business. The level is certainly lower than people expected and is below the projected rate of inflation, which must be good news for businesses facing pressure from a range of costs. I hope that

we can give significant help to small business when I make my announcement later this month. After we conclude the statement, my colleagues and I will be working hard on that. I cannot say too much about the detail today, as that would prejudice the announcement.

**The Presiding Officer:** As many members want to ask questions, I appeal for short, sharp exchanges. I call Michael McMahon.

**Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)** *indicated disagreement.*

**The Presiding Officer:** Oh, sorry. I call Patricia Ferguson.

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)** *indicated disagreement.*

**The Presiding Officer:** No? Scott Barrie.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab)** *indicated disagreement.*

**The Presiding Officer:** Trish Godman.

**Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)** *indicated disagreement.*

**The Presiding Officer:** Bristow Muldoon?

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)** *indicated disagreement.*

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** Call me! [*Laughter.*]

**Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Under the circumstances, perhaps you should try some of the other parties.

**The Presiding Officer:** You have a fair point, Mr Salmond. A Labour member has not yet asked a question, which is why I was looking for one. I will now call Andrew Wilson.

**Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Allow me to speak for the Labour party on this matter, Presiding Officer.

The theme of the minister's statement appears to be that local government under him will not be as bad as it was under Jack McConnell and that things are at last getting better, despite the past three years of pain under the Labour Administration. However, when the minister talks about autonomy, does he mean that local authorities will have greater or lesser responsibility at the end of the three-year period than at the start for raising the money that they spend? Furthermore, will we still have the highest-taxed businesses and the highest council tax rates in the UK at the end of this period? Given that the minister said that he

"expects local authorities to . . . show restraint in setting their council tax levels and to take account of the benefit

implications",

will he let us know which councils will be allowed to increase their take-up of benefits through council tax and housing benefits faster than the rate of take-up in the UK? By how much will they be allowed to increase that take-up?

**Angus MacKay:** I thank Andrew Wilson for that extended request for the introduction of guidelines for local authorities. However, I will not be tempted. Under this Administration, local authorities will be granted increased autonomy, because we believe in subsidiarity, whether it applies to devolution and the creation of a Scottish Parliament or to local authorities. Indeed, that is not a policy that the nationalists are noted for supporting.

Andrew Wilson asked some specific questions. We have told local authorities that we want them to be mindful of the effect of benefits on council tax levels when they set those levels. However, we cannot say that local authorities should set council tax and then set guidelines on what is or is not acceptable. I have said repeatedly that council tax levels are a matter less for negotiation between the Scottish Executive and individual authorities than for discussion between those authorities and their electors. That seems a significantly more important dialogue to get under way.

As for UK comparisons on local government autonomy and council tax levels, I have to say that, when I was a finance convener in a local authority, I was not concerned about how Edinburgh or Scotland compared to the rest of the UK when local government allocations were made. I was concerned about whether we were receiving enough money to deliver the services on which people in this city depend. If we were not receiving enough money, I was concerned; if we were receiving enough, I was reasonably happy that we could get on and do the job. This settlement gives every local authority in Scotland real-terms increases in each of the next three years. It will enable them to know the levels of expenditure and support that they will receive from the Executive over that period. That gives unparalleled stability and flexibility to every council in Scotland. They will not be concerned about the kind of question that Andrew Wilson has asked, because that is not what determines how they conduct their business.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I welcome the statement and in particular the allocations for Argyll and Bute Council and for Highland Council, whose additional costs for serving island communities have been taken into account for the first time. Will the minister continue to review deprivation indicators, given that they tend to focus on urban areas and miss rural deprivation?

**Angus MacKay:** Many rural and island authorities are concerned—as are all councils in Scotland—that the distribution mechanism should properly assess the particular challenges that they face in their areas. Councils in city areas are concerned about deprivation, as well as other factors, and rural councils are concerned about sparsity, islandness and so on. A working group is examining some of the issues that Rhoda Grant has raised and I am certainly happy to give an assurance that we will continue to consider some of the outstanding factors.

Although the three-year settlements will provide stability to local government, it is important that the distribution mechanism that we have used for those settlements is allowed to bed in over that period. As time goes on, we can have a debate about which distribution mechanism will be most appropriate after those three years. We can also have a debate about how deprivation—however it is measured in different parts of Scotland—should be taken into account not just in local authority allocations but by the various other funding streams that the Executive has directly or indirectly to hand, including enterprise companies, health expenditure and the future of the better neighbourhoods fund. I am happy to give the assurance that we will take those factors into account. We would be happy to enter into dialogue about them.

**Mr Paterson:** I know that the minister is dishing out a lot of pre-election goodies, but can he guarantee that schools such as Airdrie Academy—which is in crisis, as the main block has been closed and the pupils are being bussed all over the place—will have the resources to do the job? As schools are insured only for accidental damage, not for deterioration, is provision being made for a contingency fund to take care of emergencies due to the deterioration of buildings as a result of wear and tear and the long legacy of underfunding?

**Angus MacKay:** Gil Paterson raises a precise point. I cannot deal with the specific circumstances of that school and that local authority, but I can reassure him on the general position of North Lanarkshire Council. The cumulative increase that North Lanarkshire Council will receive for the three years of the spending review is 16.8 per cent—which is higher than the Scottish average of 16.2 per cent—with a 7 per cent increase in the coming year. That is a significant step forward and is substantially more than twice the projected rate of inflation.

In respect of capital, which will impact most directly on the issue that Gil Paterson raises, North Lanarkshire Council will also receive a 42 per cent increase over the three years of the spending review. That will effect a substantial

change in the capacity of that local authority to address capital investment in infrastructure projects of the type that Gil Paterson has mentioned.

**Mr McAllion:** As someone who was elected to represent a constituency in Dundee, who lives in Dundee and pays the council tax in Dundee—unlike those members who claim to be Dundee based—I warmly welcome the minister's announcement of a grant settlement that is significantly above the rate of inflation. I also applaud his announcement that he will meet the leaders of city councils throughout Scotland. Can he reassure me that those discussions will leave open the possibility of negotiations on further change, especially concerning distribution and deprivation? Although three-year settlements have many advantages, they have the great disadvantage that any injustice or unfairness that is built into year 1 will be perpetuated in years 2 and 3.

**Angus MacKay:** I am pleased to receive that question from the directly elected representative of one of the constituencies in Dundee. I know that John McAllion has strong concerns about the city and the challenges that it faces. I also know that Dundee could have a bright future if the agencies that are working together for the betterment of Dundee and the Executive get their act together to produce some focused action. I shall visit Dundee soon, with the First Minister, to discuss with the leader of the administration and others a number of issues relating to Dundee and the way in which we might move forward.

I am happy to give the assurance that, in all our discussions with the leaders of city authorities, near-urban authorities and rural authorities, we will leave nothing off the table. We will want to hear what their concerns are and how they believe that we can best make progress. We will make a case for the best position that we think we can advance to assist those authorities and we will try to identify specific courses of action to secure material benefits not just for the local authorities, but for a range of other organisations, specifically to help the people who live in the area.

I am sure that when we conduct that meeting in Dundee—which may be next week or the week after—we will rule nothing out of discussion. I hope that we will have a fruitful discussion of the way in which Dundee City Council will be able to spend the real-terms increase that this announcement will bring to the city.

**Mr Davidson:** The minister has had a fair stab at making out that the Executive is no longer a centralist-style Government. The proof of that will emerge over the years.

The minister said that there was an element of

funding for the McCrone recommendations and that, if there were further requirements, he would pay for that funding. Is that a firm commitment to pay for the implementation of the McCrone recommendations?

As Andrew Wilson pointed out, the minister also said that he expected local authorities to show restraint in setting council tax levels. Does he have a scheme to interfere behind the scenes? Will he establish a benchmarking scheme for the performance of councils that consistently fail to deliver public services? Will he confirm that he will monitor the way in which the money is spent throughout the system?

The minister mentioned police numbers, but gave no specific figures or cash limits. Further to his grandiose comment about roads and the infrastructure of local authorities—he will be aware that Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council have major problems in that respect—will what he does in total this year be more than what has been announced in this morning's statement?

**Angus MacKay:** I am not sure that I fully understood Mr Davidson's last question, but I shall try to deal with the others.

The settlement already allows for an element of funding for implementation of the McCrone recommendations. Crucially, the spending requirements for those recommendations depend on the outcome of on-going discussions and negotiations. The trade unions will want to ballot their members on the outcome of those discussions. We will examine what is recommended in those conclusions and we will consider what additional resources may be required. If the settlement is right, the payment will be right, but we cannot prejudge the outcome of the discussions.

Significant steps forward have been taken this year on policing. Mr Davidson will know that additional in-year funding was introduced for all local authorities in Scotland. He will also know that the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency has provision for up to 200 additional officers, of whom 100 will join local forces. Jim Wallace and I have repeatedly stated that there is now sufficient funding in the system to employ near-record numbers of police officers in Scotland. That is a significant achievement, which should be welcomed by every community in Scotland, as every community in Scotland stands to benefit from it. I am delighted that the settlement that I have announced today will go a substantial way towards realising that objective.

How often must I say that this Administration does not want to issue guidelines to local authorities on the setting of council tax levels? The whole point of moving away from guidelines and

giving local authorities flexibility in setting council tax levels is to enable authorities to judge whether council tax should be increased to assist with expenditure or whether it should be decreased if taxation at the existing level is not required. Unless we leave it to local authorities to exercise that judgment, we will impose guidelines by another name. We do not have such a back-door scheme.

One of the key reasons why we are able to adopt that approach is that, over the past two or three years, Scottish local authorities have exercised great prudence in setting council tax. We welcome that and recognise the responsible approach that local government throughout the country has taken. We have entered into a partnership with local authorities and I hope that all members of this Parliament will join in that partnership.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** First, will the minister give an assurance that, if more money for public expenditure is made available by the UK Government—as we hope that it will be and think that it should be—local government in Scotland will get its fair share? Secondly, although his efforts to allow more freedom for local government are welcome and contrast with what is happening in England, I hope that he will give the greatest priority to developing schemes for measuring outputs and using them to get rid of ring fencing.

**Angus MacKay:** Donald Gorrie is absolutely right to talk about schemes for measuring outcomes of local government activities. As I said in a previous announcement, we want to move away from ring fencing, or hypothecation, which represents approximately 10 per cent—a small proportion—of local authority budgets. However, for such a small proportion of budgets, it represents a disproportionate amount of grief between local authorities and central Government. We will consider pilot projects to measure outcomes. If and when those pilots are successful, we will move away from the current approach of ring-fencing in some areas to give the maximum flexibility to local authorities in the delivery of services.

I am delighted that Donald Gorrie acknowledges that the Labour Government at Westminster is likely to introduce more resources from which Scotland will benefit. Although I cannot give a guarantee that any specific department will benefit directly, discussions must take place in Scotland about the way in which that money should be distributed between departments and different policy priorities. Donald Gorrie can be reassured that local government will make its voice heard loudly and that it has some strong champions in the Executive.

**Mr Salmond:** Why does the minister deny that there are hidden extra burdens on local government? That has been the central case that COSLA has put over the past few years—perhaps COSLA has withdrawn its support for the minister.

The minister said that the McCrone recommendations will be partially funded. Will he say how much of the local government settlement is for that partial funding?

The figures that we have been given include the first example that I have ever seen of a finance table that does not present the figures in real terms—after allowing for inflation—and does not include the previous three years' figures as well as the three years to come. Has that been done to exaggerate the size of the increases and to disguise the low base on which the settlement starts?

**Angus MacKay:** I am sorry that Mr Salmond has difficulty understanding the tables. If he feels that there is insufficient information in them, he is, of course, perfectly at liberty to lodge parliamentary questions or to ask oral questions. Further information will be made available to him. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, Presiding Officer—I cannot help but be slightly mirthful when I hear Opposition members scrabbling around somewhat pathetically to find negative aspects to such a positive settlement.

I point out to Mr Salmond that the COSLA finance spokesperson called on the Executive to make an award in excess of £1 billion in the three-year spending review. That is precisely what we have done. The spokesperson has said that that is what COSLA asked for and that it is what it got. That hardly betokens COSLA having serious concerns about the settlement.

On McCrone, I cannot give a specific figure today for the element that is allowed for the recommendations. Mr Salmond's first question was why I have denied that there are hidden burdens in the settlement. The short answer to that is that I have not.

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's detachment from the Michael Forsyth era, during which Scottish Westminster MPs had persistently to transport their begging bowls to Westminster. We have moved on from then.

What measures are being taken to tackle the problem in Glasgow, where an ever-decreasing council tax base is expected to support an economic infrastructure such as that which supports so many other local authorities?

**Angus MacKay:** As I said in my statement, the cities and the near-urban authorities face particular issues—as is the case for all local

authorities. There are geographical issues that are specific to individual local authorities, such as whether they are urban or rural authorities. We want to have a dialogue with the leaders of the city authorities and the near-urban authorities to address the specific issues that relate to deprivation and the distribution mechanism, as has been mentioned. We also want to discuss with them other infrastructural problems that they face, such as transport funding.

We acknowledge that local authorities have specific issues that they want to raise. It is not always possible to ensure that all voices are heard in the discussion about distribution mechanisms. That is why we want to have continuing dialogue with each type of local authority. That will allow us to get to the heart of their concerns and to look in the medium term at how to address those concerns.

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** I thank the minister for his statement. I want confirmation on the Argyll and Bute settlement. The figures seem to show that Argyll and Bute will receive an increase of about £39 million over the next three years. In his statement, the minister said that the special islands needs allowance was contained in that. Will he confirm that that is the case?

Argyll and Bute Council put in a bid for extra level playing field support for waste management through a public-private partnership. Will the minister confirm whether any action has been taken to address the council's concerns on that? The council requested between £1.3 million and £2 million to help to support that project.

**Angus MacKay:** I can confirm that Executive officials have been examining closely the waste management scheme in Argyll and Bute. We intend to look sympathetically at the issue that George Lyon raises. I know that figures of the magnitude that he mentions—between £1.3 million and £1.9 million—have been quoted. Our officials are conversant with those figures and will examine them closely to establish what the actual requirement is before making a decision on funding.

The cumulative increase for Argyll and Bute over the next three years will be about £18 million. Those are significant additional resources for the local authority. I can confirm that in the coming year, for example, the increase in funding for Argyll and Bute will be 6.3 per cent—more than twice the rate of inflation. I also confirm that the figures include an element for the special islands needs allowance.

**The Presiding Officer:** I have allowed the debate to run on well beyond the allotted time. I apologise to the four members whom I have not been able to call to speak, but I must protect the

time that has been allotted for this morning's main debate, which is on sea fisheries. I ask members who wish to speak in that debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. On the spat between Mr Harding and me, I can say that he did press his button, but his name did not register because his card was not properly inserted in his console. We were both right.

## Sea Fisheries

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We come now to the debate on motion S1M-1433, in the name of Ross Finnie, on sea fisheries. An amendment to the motion has been lodged. I call Rhona Brankin to speak to and move the motion.

10:32

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate sea fisheries ahead of next week's meeting of the European fisheries council. The debate was traditionally held in London until last year when, thanks to devolution, we had our first chance to discuss fisheries issues here in Scotland. I am sure that members will agree that that is a good example of the benefits of having our own forum for debate in Scotland. We can now set our own priorities, based on what is important for Scotland. That can only be good for the fishing industry and Scotland.

I have been in post for little more than five weeks. Those weeks have been hectic, to say the least, but I relish the chance to be involved in an area that is so crucial for Scotland. I am delighted to be the first fisheries minister and I intend to put all my energy into the job. I intend also to have an open and inclusive approach to making decisions. I have already met representatives of the fishing industry about a dozen times but, more than that, I have listened to what they have said and I intend to respond.

I want to describe to the chamber some of the observations that I have made during the past few weeks and to outline how I view the current state of our fisheries. I will describe how I would like to see matters move forward into the future and discuss how I believe we should approach the December fisheries council negotiations.

We have some difficulties to overcome and the situation might get worse before it gets better. Crucially, some fish stocks are now at an unsustainable level—cod stocks are the worst hit, not only in the North sea but off the west coast of Scotland. When one understands, as the Executive does, the importance of the fishing industry to the Scottish economy, one understands how serious the situation is. In the north-east and in the Highlands and Islands, fragile rural communities depend on the fishing industry. More than 7,000 people are employed in the catching sector and a similar number are employed in processing and other downstream activities.

Furthermore, the industry has great significance in purely economic terms. Landings at Scottish ports by all vessels during 1999 were valued at

almost £320 million. Scottish boats landed nearly £70 million-worth of fish abroad.

The Executive is committed to the fishing industry. Since last December's fisheries council, we have achieved a great deal by working with the fishing industry. We have driven forward technical conservation measures to protect fish stocks and I want to see that good work continue. We have announced record levels of financial instrument for fisheries guidance—or FIFG—spending and we have worked up a new safety scheme. We have implemented a Shetland fishery regulating order and more are in the pipeline. We have represented the Scottish fishing industry in Europe through our attendance at every fisheries council since devolution.

In the short time that I have been in post, we have managed to deliver some key objectives. Last week, we managed to secure the best possible deal for Scottish fishermen in negotiations between the European Union and Norway. I shall return to that later. We have obtained a commitment to regulate the Rockall fishery and put an end to Russian over-fishing of haddock stocks. I have asked Scottish Enterprise Grampian to lead a programme to assist the processors in an urgent examination of what might be done for them. The Scottish Fish Merchants Federation and a range of other industry bodies will be invited to join the group in trying to find the best way forward.

The key to success is working together. There is now an overwhelming common sense of purpose that is almost palpable. For example, this year, industry representatives have been invited into discussions with the European Commission on the possibilities for a cod recovery plan. I welcome that development.

I want to talk about the challenges ahead of us in the run-up to the fisheries council. Before I do that, I would like to reflect on the dangers of sea fishing and the price that the seas extract in return for their fish harvest. Anyone who reads the statistics cannot fail to be shocked. In the five years to 1999, 136 UK-registered vessels, 71 of which were Scottish, were lost, and 103 fishermen, 45 of whom were from Scottish vessels, have lost their lives. On average, more than 20 fishermen have died in each of those years as a result of accidents on fishing vessels.

This year has been the worst year for many years. Thirty-three fishermen—15 from Scottish vessels—have died. That includes the seven who, tragically, lost their lives with the sinking of the Solway Harvester. Our thoughts are with all those who have been lost, their families, their friends and their loved ones.

The issue desperately needs to be tackled. I

was delighted to make an announcement on 6 November on safety within the industry. That followed helpful and constructive discussions involving the industry and the relevant Government departments in the UK. I am aware that John Home Robertson felt passionately about that. We are making available up to £1.5 million over the next three financial years to promote the delivery of safety training for fishermen in Scotland. Money will also be made available for the testing and trials of innovative or experimental safety equipment on fishing vessels.

The aim is to ensure that all fishermen are aware of the risks involved on their vessels; that they do what they can, and ensure that others do what they can, to mitigate those risks; and that, if an accident occurs, they know what to do to help to ensure the survival of those involved. In short, we want to improve the safety culture in the industry. We cannot simply impose safety on fishermen; experience in recent years has proved that. We need to increase their awareness and help them to ensure their safety and the safety of their colleagues. I am grateful for the efforts of all those who have helped to take forward our thinking on that. We need to implement the measures and make sure that they result in fewer accidents and loss of lives amongst our fishermen.

These are tough times for the fishing industry, a fact which clearly underlines the importance of a strategic approach to fisheries management. That is why I am pleased to have launched a draft Scottish Executive strategic framework for the Scottish fishing industry for consultation. The document provides the basis for a strategic framework for the Scottish sea fishing industry, and sets out a number of aims that the Scottish Executive intends to pursue to help to deliver conditions for the successful operation of the Scottish industry. The paper is not intended to be a detailed and rigid plan. It is intended to provide a coherent context within which action might be pursued over the coming years.

Our strategic framework has the idea of sustainable fish stocks at its core. I am sure that members will all agree that, to secure a future for the fishing industry, we need to do our utmost to ensure the sustainability of fish stocks.

**Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** On the matter of the coming difficult year for communities that depend on fishing, does the minister intend to persuade the UK delegation to invoke the Hague preferences at the coming council meeting?

**Rhona Brankin:** As Mr Salmond knows, we invoked the Hague preferences last year. The matter is under consideration. At this stage, however, I do not want to display our negotiating hand. The matter will be discussed and the Hague



preferences will be invoked if necessary.

The recent scientific advice on white fish stocks is grim. Whatever comes out of the current tough round of negotiations on total allowable catches, it is inevitable that the total allowable catch of white fish will be down. We need to think about what we can do for the future.

We are deeply involved in drawing up cod recovery plans for the North sea and the west of Scotland areas. Those plans, which must be drawn up with close industry involvement, might include a range of measures such as restricting access to certain areas and making fishing gear still more selective.

This year, Scotland led the way in the introduction of square-mesh panels. Although the need for panels was highlighted by the desire to protect the large class of juvenile haddock that was due to enter the fishery during 2000, the panels have a positive impact for other species.

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** The Minister says that Scotland is leading the way in conservation measures such as the use of square-mesh panels, but others who fish in that sea do not have the same regulations. What attempts are being made by the Executive to encourage others to sign up for the same exercise?

**Rhona Brankin:** Scottish and English vessels that fish in Scottish waters must use the square-mesh panels. Similar technical conservation measures are being considered in many countries. Scotland leads the way in that research. We will be pushing for all countries to be able to use those measures as we believe that it is important that they do so.

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Rhona Brankin:** Not just now.

The Scottish Executive is pressing the European Commission to introduce 90 mm square-mesh panels and other technical conservation measures, such as twine thickness limits and increased mesh sizes, across the board. Ross Finnie and I made that point strongly to Franz Fischler when he visited the north-east last month. The promotion of the square-mesh panel is one way in which we can use the forthcoming discussions about cod recovery plans to our advantage. There is another argument that we should pursue. The constitution of a working group comprising fishermen, scientists and fisheries managers to consider the measures required to support the recovery of cod stocks provides a blueprint for enhancing the regional dimension of the common fisheries policy. The proposed means of tackling the issue, which kicked off in Brussels

on 13 November, is not far removed from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's ideas for zonal management. If we can show that that management approach can work with regard to cod recovery, we have strong grounds for optimism in the context of the review of the common fisheries policy. That remains one of the Executive's priorities for the review, alongside the retention of the six and 12-mile limits, the protection of relative stability and the Hague preference, and the securing of the Shetland box.

The impact of technical measures should have a read-across to the current rounds of negotiations that are under way. At the recent North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission meeting, we were extremely concerned about reports from our fishermen and from the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency about large numbers of Russian vessels fishing for haddock in international waters around Rockall. Left unregulated, their activities would undoubtedly harm the stock in international and UK waters. I was absolutely determined not to let that happen. We have worked hard in partnership with the Scottish industry to raise the profile of this issue at the annual NEAFC meeting and I am delighted that we obtained a positive commitment to regulate the stock next year.

I am also very pleased to confirm that another important Scottish objective was achieved at the meeting, namely, to get Russian agreement to international catch limitations of mackerel in the north-east Atlantic. That is an important stock for Scottish pelagic fishermen and the agreement that was reached last week is a breakthrough that will help to ensure the sustainable management of the stock.

Our objectives have clearly been reflected in the outcome of the NEAFC meeting. I believe that the priority given to those matters demonstrates the advantage of being part of a large, influential member state. That has also been demonstrated by the agreements reached at the recent Norway negotiations, which agreed TACs for the stocks in the North sea that are jointly managed with Norway. The Executive's objective for the negotiations was to get the best available deal for Scottish fishermen consistent with the scientific advice and the need to sustain stocks for the future.

**Richard Lochhead:** On the subject of being part of a larger member state, will the minister confirm whether there have been any meetings between the UK Minister for Fisheries and the Countryside and fisheries ministers of other member states in the past couple of days to discuss the strategy for next week's EU fisheries council? If so, was the minister party to those discussions?

**Rhona Brankin:** I am happy to say that I regularly have discussions with Elliot Morley and my officials are regularly in discussion with Mr Morley's officials. I will travel down to London next week for discussions with Mr Morley, and I am satisfied that we are in the lead, with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in those discussions. Frankly, if that is all the SNP has to offer from their supposed shadow fisheries minister, this is a sterile debate. We have 10 votes in the EU. I think that that is important.

**Richard Lochhead** *rose—*

**Rhona Brankin:** No, I will not take any more points of information, thank you very much.

The negotiations with Norway proved to be very tough. They were held against the background of bleak scientific advice, particularly on cod, and of a relatively low uptake of 2000 quotas. Our approach was to seek to balance those warning signs on the sustainability of stocks with the socio-economic dimension.

The initial signs were not good. The scientific advice called for the lowest possible TAC on cod, and the Norwegians wanted that to be as close to zero as possible. The Commission's initial proposal was for a 60 per cent cut in cod fishing effort and a corresponding cut for haddock. That would have roughly translated into a 50 per cent TAC reduction. The Executive's view was that that did not adequately balance the economic requirements with the sustainability needs, and we successfully argued for the cod TAC to be set at a figure some 40 per cent below that set for this year. For haddock, we argued down the reduction to a level 16 per cent below that of this year.

I understand that the industry will be disappointed at such cuts but, set against the scientific advice, the initial negotiating outlook and this year's catches, I think that they represent the best possible deal. We have also managed to negotiate a transfer of 6,375 tonnes of haddock from Norway to the European Union. At current prices, that is worth more than £7.5 million, the bulk of which will come to the Scottish fleet. We have also held down the level of transfer of blue whiting to Norway. That is a smaller transfer compared to last year, by 32,000 tonnes, and will be a welcome boost to the Scottish pelagic fleet. It is encouraging to see the pelagic quotas holding relatively steady at this difficult time.

The EU-Norway negotiations represent some progress. We have shifted the initial positions in the direction that was sought by the fishing industry, but in a manner that is consistent with the scientific advice and with the long-term needs of the industry. We must always be careful not to sacrifice longer-term conservation benefits for short-term quota gain. The fishing industry well

understands that point.

Our success in the EU-Norway negotiations demonstrates that the approach proposed by the Executive is the right one. We need to protect the interests of the Scottish fleet in the short term and, just as important, in the longer term by ensuring sustainable fishing. That is the approach that the Executive intends to take to the December council. We accept that something significant needs to be done to protect the west of Scotland cod stocks, but we shall oppose any attempts to have the same TAC reductions applied to haddock, by deploying the arguments used successfully in the EU-Norway talks for the North sea. We think it realistic to target recovery action for cod in a way that will allow some reasonable haddock fishery. Similarly, we will fight the Commission's proposal to cut the TAC for nephrops—prawns to the lay people among members—by 20 per cent, in order to protect cod, which is taken as a bycatch in the nephrops fishery.

The financial impact of the negotiations is as yet uncertain, but the progress that we have made on the situation in the North sea demonstrates the extent of lost income that can be reined back. We shall seek to achieve the same again. We need to get through the December council and then get some feel for the shape of any recovery plan before we can take any realistic view of the likely impact and of what the Executive might do to address these matters. I have already had preliminary discussions with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, and I intend that we should further consider the issues in the new year. The way forward for the December council is clear. We must continue to secure the best deal for Scottish fishermen while ensuring a sustainable fishing industry.

I urge members to reject the nationalist amendment. The Executive has better things to do than enter into a sterile debate about who leads at the fisheries council. The agreed UK position takes Scottish requirements fully into account, and we get the benefit of the UK's 10 votes. I ask the Parliament to endorse our negotiating position and to support the Executive's motion.

I move,

That the Parliament calls upon the Scottish Executive to seek from the negotiations leading up to the December Fisheries Council the best available outcome for the Scottish fishing industry consistent with sustainability of fish stocks.

10:44

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate the Deputy Minister for Rural Development on her first speech on sea fisheries, and I pay tribute to her predecessor, John Home

Robertson, for his contribution to the fishery sector in Scotland over the past year and a half.

Next week's fisheries council will be the most important for many years. Thousands of Scottish jobs depend on its outcome. To say that the European Commission's proposals make grim reading would be an understatement. We are used to the worst-case scenario being painted by the Commission officials, but we know that major cuts are on their way, and that the Norwegian agreement will impose cuts of 40 per cent on cod and 16 per cent on haddock in the North sea.

So far this year, 80 per cent of the cod landed in the UK has been landed in Scotland, as has 96 per cent of the haddock and 92 per cent of the whiting. That highlights just how important those white fish stocks are to the Scottish economy and to the Scottish fishing industry. Next week's European fisheries council will be more important for Scotland than for just about any other country. This morning, the SNP intends to convey to ministers what we think their priorities for next week's council and for their return to Scotland ought to be, to ensure that the industry can cope with the challenges ahead.

We all recognise the urgent requirement to regenerate the stocks, especially those of cod, that are important to the Scottish fishing fleet. However, we have to get the catching levels right for the other vital stocks, as well as seeking the best deal for cod at next week's fisheries council. It will be a key priority for our minister to minimise the link between cod conservation measures and the TACs that will be set for other stocks. The Norwegians managed that last week, as the minister indicated.

The Norwegians managed to set TACs without using the crude approach that was adopted by the Commission. They linked the need to conserve cod with the catch figures set for the stocks of other white fish. The Norwegians also took into account the enormous strides that have been made with the 90 mm square-mesh panel, which has been adopted by the Scottish industry—again, as mentioned by the minister. The Commission appears to have overlooked that when making its calculations. The Commission also appears to have exceeded some of the scientific advice with regard to certain stocks.

I will turn to a number of the Commission's proposals that caused particular concern. First, there is the proposal for a 20 per cent cut in west coast and North sea stocks of nephrops. The minister must argue for that link with cod to be broken. There is no science to back up a 20 per cent cut in that valuable stock for the Scottish fishery, as the nephrops fishery sustains many of Scotland's smaller ports, as well as some of the bigger ports, such as Fraserburgh in Alex

Salmond's constituency. Cod is rarely caught as a bycatch in the prawn fishery; indeed creels, which are often used, do not catch any white fish. That cut therefore has to be taken out of the equation at next week's council.

Monkfish is another valuable fish under threat. The Commission proposes a 25 per cent reduction. The industry tells me that that is worth £2.5 million to Scotland. Again, there is little science to justify that cut, and the minister must commit to ensuring that that matter is revisited at next week's council. A 25 per cent cut is proposed for west coast herring, despite the rollover in the North sea. That is the subject of much confusion and debate, and must also be revisited and eliminated at next week's council. One fish stock that does not appear to be under threat with regard to the allowable limits for catches is sand eels.

The Danish and Norwegian fisheries are hoovering up much of the juvenile fish in our seas, and have a legal bycatch of 50,000 tonnes of fish stock, including a lot of the white fish that are currently under threat. It is not just the bycatch that threatens Scottish stocks: that fishery also removes much of the food supply for young haddock and other white fish that are so important to Scotland. We must pursue either a ban on such industrial fishing at next week's council or the decommissioning of the boats. We cannot seriously talk about conservation measures and sustainability and allow that rapacious fishery to continue.

I come now to technical conservation measures. Closing down the industrial fishery is one such measure, but we must embark on a major recovery plan. Quotas are a blunt instrument. They are there for sharing out fishing rights among member states. They control the fish landed, not the fish caught. That is why technical conservation measures are so important. However, the EU and our own Government here in this country, and previous Governments in Westminster, have completely failed to implement many conservation measures in recent years. As a result, stocks are now under threat. I welcome the fact that the European Council will consider that point following the fisheries council next week.

We must build on the adoption of the 90 mm square-mesh panel by the industry, and we should congratulate the industry on its initiative. Selective fishing gear is one of the crucial ways forward, but the amount of work done in recent years by Fisheries Research Services on selective gear is quite pathetic. Of the 240 members of staff who work at the marine laboratory at Torry in Aberdeen, there are eight who sometimes work on developing selective gear to conserve fish stocks, and 40 who work on stock assessment. That

means that there are 40 people who tell us how low stocks are, but only eight who are trying to do something about it. We need to re-examine the research that the Executive is conducting and set up a stock regeneration unit with adequate resources and personnel in the Fisheries Research Services.

We have to consider other technical measures. The closure of spawning and nursery areas, particularly for cod, should be top of the agenda at the fisheries council meeting next week. We should be closing for the spawning season between January and March to give our juvenile fish the chance of survival. We have to consider introducing a days-at-sea scheme. That idea is controversial in the industry, but it must be examined if we are seriously to restrict fishing efforts. We do not want a scheme that is not sensible and will not work. The commissioner is suggesting that under such a scheme our fishermen would not be allowed at sea for more than 130 days a year. That is unacceptable, as it would not leave many boats viable. We cannot have other boats fishing in our waters while our boats are tied up. Other countries have to impose similar conservation measures. I would be grateful if, in closing, the minister would confirm that compensation will be payable to Scottish boats, should they have to tie up temporarily.

We have to consider restructuring the Scottish fleet, which will involve decommissioning some of our boats. We need new cash for a scheme to do that, which should be introduced as a matter of priority. Indeed, we need new cash for all the measures that I have outlined, and we need all countries on board as soon as possible.

On her return from Europe, the minister should introduce general economic and social measures to help the Scottish fishing industry. We all realise that there will be short-term pain for long-term gain. We need help for fish processors. When we remember that 33 per cent of employment in Alex Salmond's constituency, Banff and Buchan, and 20 per cent of employment in places such as Berwickshire, the Western Isles and Shetland is dependent on fisheries, we realise how important the sector is. We cannot afford a decline in fisheries in those areas.

If the minister really wants to deliver a good deal for Scotland at the fisheries council next week, she has to request that Scotland take the lead in negotiations for the whole of the UK. Labour and Liberal ministers have been thoroughly disappointing since the Parliament was established, with their couldn't-care-less attitude to Scotland's fishing communities. It is time that they got the bit between their teeth and started fighting for our fishermen both in Europe and in Scotland. Given that two thirds of the UK industry is based in

Scotland, it is absurd that the Scottish minister does not lead for the UK. Our minister is semi-detached from all the major decisions that are taken on fish stocks in Europe—that is absurd and has to change.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** I am trying to tally up how much the member is promising to spend on supporting fishing communities, over and above what the Executive, which has promised to double funding for the FIGG, is spending. On the question of representing the fishing industry at the council, I know from experience, and Rhona Brankin is about to discover from painful experience in the wee small hours in Brussels, that Scotland takes the lead in negotiations on vital Scottish interests. That is what we are there for.

**Richard Lochhead:** I understand that the UK fisheries minister was in Dublin yesterday to discuss with the Irish fisheries minister the strategy for the meeting of the fisheries council next week, at which the future of Scotland's fishing industry will be decided, but our ministers were absent. Scotland has to take the lead because we cannot trust Westminster. Westminster is the Parliament that took 6,000 square miles of Scottish waters and that transferred the Rockall waters from EU to international jurisdiction and told us that that transfer would have no detrimental impact on Scottish stocks.

Westminster cannot find 10 minutes to put through the statutory instrument to apply the 90 mm square-mesh panel to the English fleet, despite the fact that the UK promised the Norwegians last year that we could get our act together in introducing conservation measures. Only one part of the UK—Scotland—is fulfilling its side of the bargain. Westminster pulled the plug on UK fish media advertising earlier this year, without even telling the Scottish Parliament. Indeed, in fishing debates at Westminster, Scottish MPs quite often outnumber English MPs. The Government in London has never treated our fishing industry as a priority and never will do. Scotland can no longer afford to have the Government turn a blind eye to the challenges facing our fishing industry.

**Rhona Brankin:** The member talks about Scottish ministers not being involved. Will he accept that Franz Fischler, the European commissioner for fisheries, was in Peterhead a few weeks ago, where he met Ross Finnie and me but did not meet Elliot Morley?

**Richard Lochhead:** I accept that. It is just a pity that our minister did not go over to Brussels to meet Franz Fischler. Why did he have to come to Scotland to speak to our ministers? Surely our minister should be in Brussels to fight and put the case for Scotland's fishing industry.

Fishermen are used to being ignored by ministers. They could be forgiven for thinking that devolution never happened. On the fuel issue, the Government turned a blind eye to everything that happened and was no help at all. Our scallop fishermen are still waiting for help from the Government. We have to move away from a situation in which the Government just responds to events, leaving our industry to deal with constant crisis management. We have to change the concept of fisheries management in Scotland. We have to introduce zonal management soon, so that our fishermen are at the heart of negotiations from day one, and are not brought in late in the day.

In conclusion, 20,000 jobs in the industry depend on the outcome of the fisheries council meeting next week. Our industry will have a bright future, if the right decisions are taken and the Government starts fighting tooth and nail for our fishing communities. The world authorities tell us that there will be a 40 per cent increase in demand for fish products in the next 10 years. We must ensure that our industry is fit, and is still around, to meet that demand. Down the centuries, the industry has made an enormous contribution to Scotland. Indeed, some fishermen have made the ultimate contribution to bring fish to our tables. Now it is time for the Government to give something back.

I move amendment S1M-1433.1, to insert at end:

“, and to negotiate the transfer of lead responsibility for European Union fisheries negotiations from Her Majesty's Government to the Scottish Executive in recognition of Scotland's dominant position within the UK industry; questions the basis on which many of the proposals tabled by the EU Commission for the December Fisheries Council were formulated; calls for the urgent implementation of a recovery plan for fish stocks comprising a range of technical measures to achieve the aim of sustainability; further recognises that adequately funded economic and social measures will also be required to ensure the viability of our fishing communities and achieve a restructuring of the fishing fleet; calls for an early introduction of zonal management to ensure that the unacceptable decision-making process that prevents stability in the fishing industry is not repeated, and notes that the Labour-Liberal coalition's policies have left the Scottish fishing industry at a competitive disadvantage.”

10:56

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I congratulate the minister on her first speech on fisheries. I welcome the thrust of the motion, which is to seek the best available settlement for the Scottish fishery.

The situation that confronts the Scottish fishing industry is more serious than any other that it has faced in its history. The most recent proposed

quotas have added fuel to the fire that has been destroying the industry ever since the common fisheries policy was established. There is no doubt that the core objectives of the CFP have failed. Declining fleet numbers, lost jobs and rapidly dwindling stocks—especially of cod—show that the system has been a disaster for our fishermen.

The quota system, which was designed to conserve fish stocks, has led to the dumping at sea of huge numbers of dead fish. Twenty-five per cent of all the fish that are caught in the EU annually are thrown back over the side, dead. That represents more than 2 million tonnes. Surely that statistic alone shows the need for drastic reform of the CFP. Since we joined the EU, the British fleet has lost 3,000 vessels and the European Commission is calling now for a further cut of 800 boats—10 per cent of the UK fleet. Why should we make such a cut when the Spanish fleet, which is much larger, is being asked to make only a 4 per cent cut?

We Scottish Conservatives are saying that reform of the CFP is vital and that conservation measures to help stocks and other measures to bring immediate help to our beleaguered fishermen are necessary.

**Richard Lochhead:** The member talks of reforming the CFP. Will he clarify what the Conservative policy is, given that some elected parliamentarians in his party think that we should withdraw from the CFP?

**Mr McGrigor:** We have a flexible policy, which includes zonal management. Richard Lochhead knows very well what our policy is—it is in our manifesto.

An embryonic zonal management plan for the North sea already exists. Sixty regions from the UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden have formed the North Sea Commission, which is a model of how a zonal management structure could operate. It is chaired by Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, a Conservative who has a great deal of fisheries experience. That organisation could show the way forward for future true devolution of the CFP. The organisation is popular with the industry because ideas come from it and scientists and politicians take the back seats for once. By bringing together fishermen and scientists and all the partners that take fish from the North sea, an effective conservation plan and cod recovery programme can be achieved.

Any cod recovery plan would have to last for at least five years. It must introduce conservation measures such as square-mesh panels that use thin twine. Is a 3 m square-mesh panel long enough? Perhaps it should be 6 m or even 9 m. Why is the Scottish fleet the only one to have fitted the panels? Every fleet should adopt them.

Conservation methods should negate the need for the proposed swingeing cuts in haddock and nephrops quotas. Our fishermen say that there is an abundance of haddock and that they can be caught in areas where hardly any damage would be done to cod stocks.

The Conservatives support a 12-week closure of the cod spawning ground in the Norwegian deep, but it is vital that our fisheries minister does not give way to demands from the Norwegians for extra quota on mackerel and blue whiting in return for that act of conservation. Norway must admit that it requires the conservation measures as well. Net mesh sizes are very important. It may be that to an increase to 120 mm would help to bring about a really rapid revival of stocks.

The Scottish fishing fleet is important enough to take the lead on conservation, but doing that will be of no use unless all member countries agree to and adopt the same measures. However, the industry needs help now. The Conservatives strongly support a decommissioning programme, but not only for old vessels—some new vessels and licenses should be taken out of the North sea fleet. That would be a good conservation measure, but it should be funded by the European Commission and not be a drain on the FIFG. New money must be made available. The European Commission must finance socio-economic measures to alleviate hardship and poverty in the fishing industry. To do otherwise would be socially unjust. Why should our fleet be victims of the CFP? We should take a leaf out of the Spanish book and use the CFP for gain and the betterment of our fishermen.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea's zones would correspond to the zonal areas that would have to be chaired by commission officials from the fisheries directorate-general. That would stop the dislocation of zonal management from the CFP and hopefully negate the need for treaty changes.

Our fleet must be aware of other opportunities during these difficult times. Could not it make more use of the rich fishing grounds of the Falklands, which our country fought so hard to protect? The west coast grounds and the Irish sea need protection and management as well. Prawn stocks are vital to remote island communities and the smaller west coast boats. The proposed 20 per cent cut in prawn quotas is unnecessary, especially on the west coast. There is very little bycatch of cod and scientific advice on the stock is unaltered.

I have been continually pressing the Executive for compensation for our scallop fishermen and for measures that would allow them to continue to sell only white meat during an amnesic shellfish poisoning ban. Other EU fleets receive

compensation—ours should as well, especially when there has been a complete loss of fishermen's livelihoods. I asked the Deputy Minister for Rural Development recently about a new testing method and her reply was that a statement would be made in January. I urge her not to forget about that.

As we move towards 2002, when the derogation that protects our six and twelve-mile limits ends, the Executive must fight to maintain the limits. The strong likelihood is that the limits will be retained, as almost every EU member state seems to want to protect their inshore fishermen and local fishing communities. We go further and call for an extension to 24 miles; that position must be emphasised in the council.

Enlargement of the EU exacerbates the need for urgent CFP reform. It is likely that Poland and Estonia will both be full members within five years and both have large fishing fleets. The Polish fishing industry employs 40,000 people, but the fleet is very old. The Poles will not hang about—they will take full advantage of the EU scrap and build programme and, although that would reduce the size of their fleet, the replacements would be modern vessels that are capable of going anywhere and hoovering up huge catches.

The fact that stocks of cod, herring and sprat have diminished in the Baltic is likely to push central and east European fishermen back to the North sea. Many fishermen in the northern isles remember Lerwick being used as base by Polish fishing boats 30 years ago. Extra fishermen are hardly going to help conservation, so zonal policy must include only nations that have traditionally fished in those zones. Effort limitation must be a consideration, but only if it is equitable. In any effort limitation or days-at-sea scheme, it should be possible to employ the fishermen to test technical conservation measures.

Conservation zones such as the Shetland and Irish boxes must continue to be protected and we must stop the immoral dumping of dead fish. A way of doing that might be for fishermen to log each haul they bring in. If they have landed many undersized fish or a species for which they have no quota they should immediately stop fishing in that area and give notice of their findings so that others can also avoid the area. At the end of the day, he who throws the net controls conservation.

Zonal management offers a positive alternative to the current over-centralised management by the CFP. The self-interest of countries in a zonal management group is the key to successful conservation if measures are applied equally by all.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** Please wind up.

**Mr McGrigor:** A complete fishing ban does not necessarily conserve or revive stocks, because an over-abundant stock of some species will prey on the young of a dwindling stock and also on the available food resource. Conservation is about balance; that is why fishermen are often sceptical about scientific advice. Fishermen see an abundance of stock such as haddock and many think there are too many saith, which eat a lot of sand eels. That is why fishermen must be included at every level when conservation measures that affect them are discussed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please come to a close.

**Members:** Time.

**Mr McGrigor:** I am just winding up.

The next Conservative Government will fight to evolve a policy that sustains our fishing industry and secures its future. The CFP must be reformed. We must be pragmatic and sensible and lead our European partners to a better arrangement.

11:06

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I, too, compliment the minister on her first speech on fisheries. It was much enjoyed. I also enjoyed listening to the other speakers.

Communities such as Kinlochbervie and Lochinver in my constituency rely to a very large extent on fishing—it is hugely important to my constituency. Come the future Conservative Government that Mr McGrigor looks forward to, some of the Kinlochbervie fishermen will be alarmed at the prospect of having to sail to the Falklands for their catch.

The nephrops, or prawn, fishery is extremely important. I trust that the minister will pursue its interests vigorously at the council meeting. On the west coast, some communities rely on it and there has been overkill. The situation regarding monkfish is similar. There is a lack of scientific evidence to back the position on nephrops and monkfish. We would all agree that there is a case for further scientific examination of the situation. I make a plea to the Executive to undertake a review of marine research expenditure, not with a view to cutting it but to examining where it is targeted and spent. I also plead that fishermen be involved in any research, because they know the industry better than anybody. That could be useful employment for people who are coming out of fishing—skippers could go out and test-trawl, or do whatever else is needed.

In recent years, consultation with fishermen has been much improved. That must continue and be

further improved. Fishermen are more concerned than anybody with ensuring a sustainable fishery. If we take them on board and build on previous good work, that can only be to the good. It is sometimes easy to forget that.

The industrial fishing of sand eels has been mentioned. There is a 5 per cent bycatch of small white fish, as Mr Lochhead mentioned. Apart from, as has been pointed out, reduction of the sand eel stock's possible effect on other fisheries, the 1999 brood of haddock is not as good as expected. There might be evidence that that is due to small haddock being caught by big boats as part of their sand eel catch, which cannot be policed. Once it has been in the tank for a day or two, it has turned into fish soup and one cannot tell whether the amount of haddock in the catch is 5 per cent or well above that. The suggestion that some vessels should be decommissioned is very good and I hope that it that will be taken up.

I know that the price of fish-meal has fallen in recent times and I would be surprised if some of the industrial boys were not killing each other in the rush to get out of that business. We might therefore be knocking at a very open door.

I spoke to Richard Lochhead yesterday, and he told me that today Mr Fergus Ewing might mention seals, which are the great unmentionable. Nevertheless, seals should be considered. In doing so, we should take the green lobby with us in considering the matter and coming up with recommendations. Those people will, after all, take a responsible attitude. It would not be sensible to turn our back on the problem of seals.

I turn now to my main point. The Scottish fleet is the biggest player in the North sea. We have heard about square mesh and about the size of twine, on which we have led the way. We must maintain and build on that leadership. How do we do that? How do we match capacity reduction with a reduction in effort? We have already heard the answer—decommissioning. We must be courageous and upfront about this: if we do not take that hard route, we will lose our fleet and our stocks and that will leave us with the worst of both worlds.

Mr Jamie McGrigor appealed eloquently for European funding. As we consider decommissioning, we must remember that, when a Spanish boat and a Scottish boat are next to each other on the sea, the Scottish skipper looks over at the Spanish skipper and thinks, "I am losing on almost every front—he gets a subsidy to build his boat. He even gets a subsidy for satellite positioning apparatus." The subsidy regime is not at all fair to Scottish fishermen. Why is that? When Jamie McGrigor appeals for European funding, he should remember that one Margaret Hilda Thatcher signed that away at Fontainebleau some

years ago—not just on agri-compensation, but on the fisheries. We have been reaping the whirlwind ever since.

**Mr McGrigor** *rose*—

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con)** *rose*—

**Mr Stone:** I will take an intervention.

**Alex Johnstone:** Jamie?

**Mr McGrigor:** Alex?

**Mr Stone:** Can I choose? [*Laughter.*]

**Mr McGrigor:** Alex.

**Alex Johnstone:** Does the gentleman acknowledge that the Fontainebleau agreement has produced a net benefit for the United Kingdom economy? It has produced a massive return against the small amount it cost to fulfil our commitments under that agreement in agriculture and fishing.

**Mr Stone:** It was said that when the great lady swung her handbag she came back with a cheque—but some would argue that it was rather a short-term cheque.

**Alex Johnstone:** Labour is cashing it to this day.

**Mr Stone:** Yes—and that brings me to my final point. It could be said that the Treasury has banked money, but when we examine decommissioning and subsidies, we must remember why the present situation has come about: it was because of the stroke of a pen all those years ago.

**Mr McGrigor** *rose*—

**Mr Stone:** No, I am sorry, Jamie.

Alex Johnstone's point was well made, and I agree with him. The Treasury has, it can be argued, reaped a certain financial benefit. With respect, I urge our ministers to make representations to the Treasury when the time is right, to try to claw back some funding. The Tories possibly did take some back; but did they spend it wisely? I doubt it. I make a plea for ministers to go to the Treasury and argue for funding. I believe that both ministers are with us on that one.

I ought to touch on the SNP's argument, but I have not really got anything to say about it, other than to point out that it is not especially encouraging for our guests in the public gallery to watch SNP members carping about who sits in the front chair and who sits in the back chair. When Mr Salmond decides whether he will stand for the unionist Parliament in Westminster or the Scottish Parliament, that will be something that the fishermen will remember.

11:14

**Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab):**

Today, the fishing industry faces what is probably one of its most serious crises in several decades. White fish stocks, particularly cod, are in serious decline and their numbers are below safe biological limits.

The white fish fisheries are especially important to Scotland. They support many communities, particularly in Aberdeen and the north-east. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation estimates that one fisherman at sea supports about four jobs on shore. In Aberdeen, the council believes that some 2,000 people work in the fish processing sector. The sector provides employment to many people in the less well-off areas of Aberdeen, such as Mastrick and Northfield in my constituency. Many of those people are single parents, so the sector is very important. Therefore, I welcome the minister's swift action in creating the working group—led by Scottish Enterprise Grampian—to assist the fish processing sector.

Fishing is a traditional industry that is woven into the fabric and history of Aberdeen and the north-east. It is essential that it continue as a living industry that has a positive future. Crises are not new to the industry. During the past few months, my office—like that of my Westminster counterpart—has been contacted by many former deep-sea fishermen who lost their livelihoods during the changes to the fishing boundaries around Iceland. Today we face new challenges. The continuing discussions about this year's quotas are crucial. We must recognise the successes that have been achieved and that will be achieved. There have been welcome positive moves in bringing together all the fish-catching organisations with scientists and with Government at all levels—Scottish, UK and European—to work together to ensure that the industry has a future. Each of those groups recognises the contribution and expertise that the others can bring. The commitment of all fish-catching organisations to sustainable fisheries, both in the North sea and in the west of Scotland, is especially important.

We have seen some real successes—for example, the introduction of the square-mesh nets that are now in use in Scottish waters. Those nets reduce the number of juvenile fish that are caught. That sort of conservation measure needs to be built on and I am especially pleased that the minister will be urging other countries to follow Scotland's lead.

I visited the marine laboratory in Aberdeen last year and was shown a typical net that was used before the square-mesh net came in. What struck me was the thickness of the twine, which looked as if it was big enough to stop anything bigger than the average goldfish from getting away. The



introduction of a maximum twine width from next April is another positive move.

Conservation of the health and well-being of the sea and its inhabitants, together with all the communities around the shores of Scotland, is the way forward. We do not want to go down the road of the Canadians, who have probably lost their cod fisheries for ever. It has been suggested that young cod in the North sea are not growing as well as they should and we need to understand why. Is it because of a lack of food? The many impacts of global warming are beginning to be felt. Sea temperatures are unusually high. Does that impact on the cod food chain in ways that are not understood? We need to take action in many areas.

Intergenerational equity is a phrase that I came across recently. It means simply that we do not have the right to deprive future generations of healthy fisheries because of our failure to implement sustainable policies. We must work towards that. It is what our ministers—past and present—have been delivering in their many initiatives during the past 18 months, whether in the fisheries strategic framework, in the positive results of the EU and Norway negotiations or in the current commitment to achieving the best possible deal for Scotland's fisheries.

11:18

**Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I would like—in my hoarse voice—to add my congratulations to Rhona Brankin. I liked what seemed to me to be her sincere attitude. I wish her well at the fisheries council.

However, I support the amendment in the name of my colleague, Mr Lochhead, on the question of the transfer of lead responsibility to the Scottish minister, given that two thirds of the weight of fish that is caught by the UK is caught by Scottish fishermen. I heard Mr Stone say that such a transfer was not important. However, when the legal affairs committee of the EU, of which I was a member, last visited Edinburgh, the Scottish minister—Mr McLeish—who was then a London minister, gave a categorical assurance on that. I noted his words, and told him that I had done so. He said that such a transfer would happen where Scottish interests dominated. Apparently, that is not regarded as important by the Lib-Lab coalition—at least by some of the Liberals—but I think that it is. It should be clearly on the record that Mr Elliot Morley said that he led the UK fisheries and that he led for the UK at fisheries councils. That is the current position and the SNP does not think that that is satisfactory. A promise was given, but it has not been kept.

**Mr Home Robertson:** Will the member give

way?

**Dr Ewing:** I am sorry. I will not give way until I have got further into my speech. The weakness of my voice is making things rather difficult.

The Deputy Minister for Rural Development seemed to be taken aback by the SNP's disclosure of the fact that yesterday in Dublin, Frank Fahey—the Irish equivalent to the fisheries minister—met Elliot Morley to discuss the fisheries council. They covered subjects that are of vital interest to Scotland, including the cod recovery programme and the deep-water-species hake recovery plan. If nobody from the Scottish Executive attended that meeting and—worse—if it was not known about, we must attend to Richard Lochhead's proposal that the promise that was made on legal affairs and the internal market must be implemented.

**The Minister for Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** I understand Dr Ewing's concern. However, I assure her that we knew about the meeting and that we have arranged a separate bilateral meeting with Frank Fahey at which we will discuss our position.

**Dr Ewing:** I thank Mr Finnie for that answer—he has had time to think one up since Mr Lochhead first put the question. Nevertheless, I am glad of that answer—it is an improvement on the earlier situation.

I spent decades on the European Parliament committee on fisheries. Why is there an uneven playing field? Why cannot we get rid of it, given that we have so much clout? I am thinking about building subsidies, light due payments, installation and operation of satellites, highest fuel costs and fuel subsidies. Yesterday, Ireland gave out IR£4 million to help to defray fuel costs. Why is it that Scottish fishermen obey the rules about 90 mm mesh and square-mesh panels? The rest of the UK has not even made time for a 10-minute statutory instrument to make such measures enforceable in respect of fishermen from the rest of the UK. Why is Scotland always disadvantaged in such matters, which are in the interests of all fishermen in Europe? Conservation interests are served by the way in which our responsible fishing industry reacts.

In the decades that I spent in the European Parliament, time and again the groups that included UK Labour and Conservative members—there were no Liberals from the UK, although there was a Liberal group—gave in to the Spanish members in their group. That was to the disadvantage of the whole UK and to Scotland in particular. That happened over and over again. It is time to use whatever clout we have to get rid of unfairness.

We do not even seem to object to industrial fishing, which should be banned. Are we fighting for that ban? As Jamie Stone said, skippers of industrial boats are dying to get the money to get out of the industry. I support all references to zonal management. That is an approach for which—before he died—my distinguished colleague Allan McCartney obtained the unanimous approval of the fisheries committee.

11:23

**Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, congratulate the minister. The Conservative party welcomes the sincerity and general thrust of her opening speech.

I will confine my speech to the conservation aspect of sea fisheries and the fish stocks without which the fisheries would not exist. In researching for the debate, I was struck by how often the subject of conservation is raised in the Scottish Parliament. That is to be welcomed. However, conservation always comes down to two basic points—habitat and harvest. We must accept that the balance of species becomes altered largely because of the interference of mankind, so it is up to mankind to do everything in its power to correct that balance. That is why some of the measures that are actively promoted by some environmentalist groups, such as no-take zones, are not quite as good as they might sound on first hearing. Merely saying that we have a problem in an area and that we must back off and leave it alone is no answer to any problem, let alone one that involves fish stocks. I understand that some of the scientific work behind that concept was carried out in the tropics—hardly the same conditions as the north Atlantic—and that the evidence by no means suggests that a no-take zone necessarily leads to the automatic recovery of the at-risk species.

We cannot simply back away from the problem—we must stay involved. If we accept that leaving well alone is not an option, it follows automatically that we must look closely at what can and must be done. It is equally logical, when we consider species recovery, to address each stage of the life cycle of a threatened species. We must start with the spawning grounds where the life cycle begins and we must find out whether the scientists, in tandem with the fishermen—their involvement is vital—can strike a balance between the needs of the spawning grounds and the economic interests of fishermen. A mixture of science and common sense should mean that a rapid improvement in spawning rates could be achieved quickly.

We must then turn to conserving greater numbers of juvenile fish. The Scottish Parliament and the fishing industry—as the minister pointed

out—can hold their heads high, having introduced square-mesh panels. Other nations must—not should—follow our lead, because the benefits of those panels are both instantaneous and measurable. The use of square-mesh panels, coupled with a maximum twine thickness, means that Scottish fishermen are leading the way in demonstrating how technical measures can play their part in the conservation process.

If we are successful in increasing spawning numbers and juvenile stocks, we must then ensure that there is an adequate food supply for the increased stocks. That means that we must tackle some thorny issues. Seals—a word that only the bravest members ever mention—share with foxes and raptors the dubious honour of having no predators. We recognise that there is a need to control foxes, but we need to address the control of seal numbers sooner rather than later. I repeat the Conservative call for the establishment of a seal commission. After all, seal numbers have trebled in the past 20 years. That would be fine if the food stocks had trebled at the same time, but the opposite is the case. It is an emotive subject, for obvious reasons, but it is also a perfect example of what can happen when man stands back and does nothing.

Industrial fishing for sand eels—a vital food source for demersal stocks—must come under tighter control. We should bear it in mind that a huge percentage of that catch is simply recycled as food for fish farms. There is an urgent need to investigate the role that saith stocks play, given that saith is a dominant predator on the sand eel. I am told that it is possible that heavier fishing of saith could have a beneficial effect on other species, because that would protect and preserve their food source.

An abundance of options is open to us as we begin to address the regeneration of fish stocks and that can only be good news. To their credit, the fishermen have shown that they are willing and ready to help. The Executive must back that commitment by fully resourcing the science to help the fishermen to find the solution that will benefit us all.

11:28

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** As the constituency MSP for Shetland, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's debate. I would like to add my congratulations to Rhona Brankin on her first speech to the chamber as Deputy Minister for Rural Development. Other members have referred to the visitors in the public gallery. I would like to welcome the chairman and the chief executive of the Shetland Fishermen's Association. We face particular difficulties in Shetland. It has been recognised over the years

that the fishing industry pays close attention to both Westminster and Scottish Parliament debates on relevant matters; I hope that this morning's debate reflects their concerns.

I met the Shetland Fishermen's Association on Friday to discuss a range of issues, not least of which was the white fish crisis. On Monday night I was in Whalsay. Whalsay is an island of 1,000 people, all of whom—man, woman and child—are connected to the sea in one way or another. The Parliament will not be surprised to hear that in our discussion about the island in general, the dominant issue was the current situation in the white fish industry.

I welcome the minister's commitment to the Shetland box and her announcement on blue whiting and pelagic quotas. Those are helpful points. The current position on stocks and quota remains extremely difficult. It was to some extent mitigated by last week's European Union-Norway negotiations, but that does change the importance—several members have rightly raised this point—of getting the science right, of involving fishermen and of building a consensus on science for sensible change and reform.

The SFA policy, which I was able to discuss last week, is in favour of a stock regeneration programme. It could include many of the measures that have already been outlined this morning, such as closed spawning areas including the areas in the Irish sea that, crucially, have been identified by fishermen and scientists; technical conservation measures—square-mesh panels and progress on the thickness of twine—and days at sea, but most important is a decommissioning scheme to take capacity out of the fleet. I cannot think of any other measure that would have a more profound effect on what needs to happen over the coming years.

Both Jamie Stone and Jamie McGrigor made a good point about using fishermen's skills as one of the options in an integrated package of measures to investigate the most effective methods of achieving change.

Shetland has been at the forefront of thinking on conservation. The approach—inshore fisheries management and the promotion of technical methods of conservation—needs to become mainstream thinking, not just in Scotland but around Europe. However, the financial impact on the industry will be great. In my view, an integrated five-year programme that ties the conservation measures that I have mentioned to financial assistance, so that there is a sustainable fishery and a sustainable fishing industry, is what the industry and the Government must develop together over the coming weeks and years.

The figures for Shetland are worrying. The SFA

gave me an economic analysis of the white fish fleet for the past three years. It shows, for example, that for 87 ft boats, crew share, which is the amount of money the crew take home, has fallen by 36 per cent and gross earnings are falling while running expenses are increasing. Less money is available for crew share and loan servicing and, if the trends continue, boats will simply be unable to service their loan repayments. I met skippers last Friday, one of whom illustrated the situation by saying that his boat's gross for the previous fortnight was down £20,000 and the expenses for the same period were £14,000, of which marine diesel was £7,000. The situation is extremely difficult.

I will conclude with the thought that it is important, as others have rightly mentioned, that the Minister for Rural Development and the Executive take a strong case to Brussels next week and fight for the industry. However, we need to think beyond next week. We need to think into the next year and the next five years and come up with a realistic, radical and strategic five-year plan for the future of the industry that achieves not only a sustainable fishery, but a sustainable future for fishermen.

11:33

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Until this morning, I had not recognised the connection between John Home Robertson, the former Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs, and Leon Trotsky, but when I heard the new Deputy Minister for Rural Development declare herself the first fisheries minister in Scotland, I thought that the airbrushing that Trotsky suffered had affected John Home Robertson.

I wish to make a number of comments on the situation on the west coast, particularly about fuel, but before I do I will pick up on the rumbling debate on two matters. The first is whether the debate about who leads for the UK delegation is, as the minister described it, sterile. According to Jamie Stone, that is not important.

I take the minister back to her speech, in which she said that it is a sign of the progress that we have made that this Parliament has been established and that we can discuss distinctively Scottish fishing issues, particularly given the massive relevance of the industry to Scotland. If it is true that it is important to have that Scottish focus in a Scottish debate in a Scottish Parliament, why, given that we have two thirds of the industry, is it the case that in the European delegation the Scottish interest does not lead from the front? Surely there must be a Scottish focus. Clearly there is not.

That takes me to my second point, which is the

mystery of the meeting in Ireland, which it is clear ministers knew nothing about. There was hurried activity at the back of the room on the part of the ministers' officials, then the ministers came up with the idea that they were going to their own meeting.

**Rhona Brankin:** On a point of information.

**Mr Hamilton:** No thank you. Perhaps the ministers can respond to this point; apparently, they did not know about the first meeting because they are having their own meeting. If we are part of the UK delegation, why were they not at the first meeting, where the strategy was being discussed?

**Mr Stone:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Hamilton:** No thank you.

Frank Fahey, the Irish Minister of Marine and Natural Resources, said that that meeting was probably the most crucial meeting that any Irish fisheries minister had attended in recent years, and neither of our ministers was at it. That is a fact.

I wish to make a number of observations about the proportion of the cuts being borne by the west coast, because it seems, for example for cod stocks, that the cuts will be deeper on the west coast than elsewhere. I think that I am right in saying that there will be a 56 per cent drop. That has caused enormous concern on the west coast. The same applies in respect of whiting; the total catch will be 2,800 tonnes instead of 4,200 tonnes, on the basis of scientific advice. I would welcome from the minister—whenever she stops dotting around the chamber—an answer to why 2,800 tonnes was accepted, as opposed to 4,200 tonnes. The figures suggest a disproportionate cut on the west coast.

I support what Jamie McGrigor said about scallop farmers. Jamie and I have been working together closely on this matter and it is important to note that what we are discussing today cannot be viewed in isolation from the other problems that exist on the west coast. Certainly the relative inactivity of research into why we continually have bans on the farming of scallops is a matter of profound concern. There is also the matter of compensation, which I will come back to. Until we can say that bans will not happen year on year, the sustainability of affected communities will be under threat.

The fuel issue continues to rumble on and is a matter of some importance in this debate. Dr Ewing referred to the Irish Government's announcement yesterday of a IR£4 million package to help with rocketing fuel prices. That highlights yet again the point that there is inactivity in this Government, and in the Westminster Government, compared with some of our European colleagues.

I have a quotation from Hugh Allan, the secretary of the Mallaig and North-West Fisheries Association, which, better than any other, conveys the impact of fuel costs, which are often assumed not to affect the fishing industry:

"Maintaining fishing gear rose 21%; the cost of the crew bus was up 40%; fuelling the boat was up 53%, and earnings dropped, caused by higher road transport costs of 15%. That was a rise in operating costs of more than £24,000 and a cut in gross income of £52,500, giving a total loss to the business of £76,500."

Does not that show the grim reality of the position that is faced in the Scottish industry? Is it not important that if wages are cut, and therefore recruitment to the fishing industry becomes more difficult, there will be safety considerations, which must always be paramount? On the grounds of safety and sustainability in the fishing industry, I suggest to the ministers that today is not a day for self-congratulation, but an opportunity to look again at some of the serious problems in the industry.

11:38

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** I welcome the Deputy Minister for Rural Development. As she said, the issues that are being addressed today are of great importance to rural Scotland, but I contend that they are important not only to rural Scotland. My concern is about an urban fish processing industry in Scotland's third city. It employs several thousand manual workers, some in highly skilled and highly demanding jobs, and others in less skilled jobs. Some are full-time jobs and others are part time. Some people are working in large, modern factories for multinational firms, others are in small, family-owned fish houses. They are all threatened by the potential impact of falling fish stocks on the fish processing industry.

These issues are not of concern only to fishermen and their communities, important though those concerns are, nor are they significant only to owners and managers in the fish processing sector. In my constituency, and across Aberdeen, as Elaine Thomson said, fish processing jobs are concentrated in the communities that need them most. For example, the community of Tillydrone in my constituency has one of the highest proportions of working single parents anywhere in the United Kingdom, which is due in no small part to the availability of flexible and part-time employment in the fish processing sector. Securing the future of Scottish fisheries, therefore, is not only a matter of conserving stocks, or even business survival; it is also, in urban and rural Scotland, close to the heart of the social inclusion and social justice agendas.

I welcome the steps that have been taken by the ministers in bringing together the expertise of Scottish Enterprise Grampian and the interests of the fish processing industry to plan how best to protect businesses and jobs, whatever the outcome of the fisheries council. I urge the Deputy Minister for Rural Development, in her on-going discussions with that working party, to pay particular attention to the social priorities: to protecting jobs in the long term and short term; to enabling employers to keep jobs in being in the event of a downturn in the early part of next year; and to ensuring that the Scottish industry is in a position to take advantage of a future recovery in supply, particularly in cod and haddock.

Protecting those jobs depends on successful negotiation at the fisheries council. The opportunity exists to build on the achievements of recent weeks at the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission and at the talks between the EU and Norway. In both sets of talks, Scottish interests were advanced because our ministers successfully argued their case to fisheries ministers from elsewhere in the UK and because UK ministers succeeded collectively in arguing that case and winning the support of the EU as a whole when conducting negotiations with other fishery countries outside the EU.

I know that ministers will not be too distracted by some of the SNP's byzantine obsessions with who leads on what. Most bizarrely, SNP members are unable to recognise that the status of Irish bilateral talks with Scottish fisheries ministers is equal to that of Irish bilateral talks with English fisheries ministers. It is sad that SNP members do not recognise that.

I agree with all members who said that a drastic cut in sand eel fisheries would be greatly in the interest of the Scottish white fish industry. That point was made by Jamie Stone, as well as SNP members. I hope that the UK delegation will press that case. If it is resisted by Denmark—which has three votes on the fisheries council—I hope that our representatives will not hesitate to use Britain's 10 votes to vote that country down.

The freedom to promote Scotland's interests and the political clout to achieve them is what Scotland's fishermen, fish processors and fish factory workers expect from the Parliament. That is what the Executive continues to deliver.

11:41

**Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I welcome the minister to her place and particularly welcome her remarks about the ultimate sacrifice that is paid by so many of our fishermen. I am holding the front page of this week's *Buchan Observer*, which notes that the fishing memorial—

the bronze memorial built by public subscription following the loss of the Sapphire—is ready to be unveiled in the town of Peterhead. I mention that because it reminds members that we are talking about a special industry that involves special people to whom we owe a special moral obligation. That applies to every fishing MSP and every fishing minister.

The situation that faces the industry is as serious as any that I can remember as a fishing MSP. I doubt whether even those sitting in the public gallery who have great experience in the industry can remember a time when the situation was more serious. I asked the minister a question about Hague preferences for a reason. The Hague preferences were negotiated at a conference in 1976, at the initiative of Garrett FitzGerald, the then Irish foreign minister. As a result of FitzGerald's initiative, Denmark moved to protect Greenland and the UK Foreign Office moved to protect what were described as the northern parts of Britain.

The Hague preference means that in decision making special account should be taken of the vital needs of fishing-dependent communities when applying the common fisheries policy. The minister should reflect on the fact that that was agreed on the initiative of the then Irish foreign minister. That provision has been crucial in defending the Scottish fishing industry at times of great difficulty.

I will not list how many initiatives the key fishing states of Europe have taken, because I do not have enough time. The Spanish and the Danes have obtained special protection for their fishermen. The Norwegians—outside the Community—have also obtained such protection. I say to the minister that her belief that who leads a delegation at the Council of Ministers is not important is fatuous.

Lewis Macdonald should understand that although I think Elliot Morley would make a fine English fisheries minister, he does not, unfortunately, regard himself as the English fisheries minister; he regards himself as the fisheries minister for the United Kingdom and is absolutely sure that he leads the UK delegation in the Council of Ministers. It is an incredible idea that that leadership role can be substituted by slipping in a Scot when a subject that is of particular importance to Scotland arises. Scotland's fishing industry is 30 times as significant to the Scottish economy as the fishing industry is to the UK as a whole. There is no fishing issue that is not vital to the Scottish national interest. We should have a fisheries minister who has the same status as those of other countries at the Council of Ministers.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Will the member take a point of information?

**Mr Salmond:** No, I do not want information. I will rephrase that—I do not want information from Lewis Macdonald, at least.

My next point is crucial. The Hague preference obligations have usually been represented in tonnes of fish. The Hague preference bottom line for haddock is 60,000 tonnes. The minister said that the Executive would invoke the Hague preference if it were necessary. I say to her that the idea that 1,000 tonnes of haddock will be distributed among the rest of the European Union to meet the Hague preference limit strikes me as hopeful. I will hold her to her undertaking, but I am not convinced that the rest of the EU will accept her argument.

What, therefore, can the minister do to discharge her obligation? She could fund a tie-up of the Scottish fishing fleet, particularly during the spawning period. She could fund the decommissioning scheme—which was stopped for five years during the 1980s and 1990s by the UK minister who was responsible for it. We could have a fuel subsidy, as the Irish have. We could provide help with water charges for the processing sector. We could try to increase supplies, rather than stop international supplies, as Aberdeen City Council has. We could also help with transport costs.

My final point is simple. The minister mentioned the stability of the pelagic fleet. It would be of enormous service to my constituents who work in fish processing if there were an initiative to secure more pelagic landings in Scotland. That would generate more jobs in Scotland and give employment opportunities to people in fishing-dependent areas.

11:47

**Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD):** I will try to be brief, because I know that many members wish to speak. I take this opportunity to make a plea for the small village fishing industry. I represent Pittenweem, in north-east Fife—the east neuk of Fife—which is a relatively small prawn in the fishing sector in Scotland but is an important part of the employment picture in that area. Almost 20 per cent of the population there depends in some way on the fishing industry. The number of fishermen has declined from more than 300 in 1991 to only 162 going out to sea at the end of last year, but fishing is still important to the economy of the east neuk of Fife.

The community is not as directly affected by next week's negotiations as are some others, because it has had largely to withdraw from the white fish sector. The negotiations are still important, however. The knock-on effects of the discussions in the European Union will affect the fishing industry in the east neuk of Fife. The

impact on nephrops will be great, because that is what the fishing industry in that area has had to withdraw to. There are no white fish within 100 miles of Pittenweem. Our boats can no longer fish for white fish. The last two deep vessel boats were sold this year because the value of their licences and track record was greater than what they could earn catching from Pittenweem.

Prawns have now become important because they are the only stock available to our local fishermen. As other catches are withdrawn and quotas are reduced in other areas, the value of the licences for prawns will be pushed up, as other fishermen will seek to enter a market in which they are not yet present. That will have an impact on our fishermen too, so it is important that we try to maintain the prawn quotas, to protect those small fishermen in my area who work in the under-10 m boat sector.

There is more that needs to be done. We should consider the reform of the common fisheries policy. As Liberal Democrats, we fully support proposals to move towards a zonal policy. We must consider whether we can find a way of decommissioning and of helping to subsidise fishermen so that they do not have to go out to sea to earn a living at times when it is perhaps best for them not to do so—especially during the breeding seasons. It would be nice to consider those issues as part of the discussions on the future of fishing.

I hope to be able to participate in future fishing debates in the chamber, but the situation is becoming so desperate in the east neuk of Fife that there may not be a fishing industry in a few years' time. Fife Council has been supportive of the fishing industry over the years, investing some years ago in a new fish market and a new breakwater. Unfortunately, the future of the fish market is in doubt because, due to the loss of white fish, there is simply nothing to sell.

The east neuk of Fife needs a good deal out of the discussions. I am confident that our ministers will help to deliver that good deal, but in the longer term we need to get more sustainable fish stocks back into the North sea so that our fishermen in the east neuk of Fife can start to fish again for white fish locally.

11:50

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** At the start of the debate, I was surprised to hear how many members congratulated the new Deputy Minister for Rural Development, who is responsible for fisheries, on her first speech on deep sea fisheries. I had forgotten that today is her first speech on the subject because members of the Rural Affairs Committee, of which I am

convener, have quickly become familiar with the new deputy minister—and I am sure that she has tired quickly of us.

It is the nature of the relationship between the Rural Affairs Committee and the deputy minister that we will see a lot of each other in future. In fact, it is surprising how much of the committee's time is spent on issues that are directly connected to Scotland's fishing industry, but it is right that that is the case. The fishing industry is important because, while it is not an enormous industry in relation to the Scottish economy as a whole, it is an absolutely essential industry in many of the peripheral areas, where it is right up there as the No 1 employer.

It is important that we form a cross-party opinion today that is supportive of the minister, because it is essential that she has the full and unanimous backing of the Scottish Parliament as she prepares to go to the fisheries council meeting. That is why today the Conservatives will support the motion in the name of Ross Finnie. I hope that the SNP will also be able to support that motion when we come to vote on it this evening. The SNP's amendment is a step too far, as it attempts to tie the hands of the minister and to drive a wedge into the unanimous support that is undoubtedly required before the minister leaves for the council meeting.

I am sure that, when the Minister for Rural Development winds up, he will be able to defend the Executive's record against Richard Lochhead's attacks. However, it is probably my responsibility to deal with the attacks that were made on the Conservative party and its policy, and I propose to do so.

The question is fairly simple: where do the Tories stand in the debate about the future devolution of fisheries management? In the UK in particular, the widespread feeling is that Brussels bureaucrats have been running the common fisheries policy for far too long. Everyone recognises that fishermen and scientists who live and work in specific fishing zones should be involved in the management of fisheries.

Conservatives believe in the continuation of the common fisheries policy, but that policy must work on behalf of those in Scotland whose livelihood depends on it. The preferred option would be to devolve fisheries management away from Brussels to national, local or, above all, zonal management structures. Many in the chamber and in the fishing industry favour the nomination of zones across international boundaries, embracing countries where the waters have been fished for centuries, as one way in which that devolution could be achieved. Such areas would include the North sea, the western approaches, the Bay of Biscay, the west of Scotland and the Irish sea.

Management committees in each zone would take decisions on total allowable catches, quotas, discards, subsidies, technical conservation measures and enforcement. The European Commission would chair and provide the secretariat for those communities and would continue to act as an international referee. I will not read out our whole manifesto for the benefit of Richard Lochhead, but I hope that I have clarified the Conservative party's position.

I again urge the SNP to take the opportunity to join the rest of the chamber in sending the Deputy Minister for Rural Development to the negotiations that will take place in the December round of the fisheries council with the unanimous backing and encouragement of all members in the chamber.

11:54

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to discuss sea fishing before the meeting of the European council of fisheries ministers.

We are all aware of the problems with white fish stocks, which we must deal with now if we want a fishery for our children. I am encouraged by the steps that have been taken to regulate the Rockall fishery, which will lead to sustainability in that area, but we must find ways of managing fisheries in other areas in order to create a sustainable industry.

We must involve fishermen in that work. Conservation methods are not worth the paper on which they are written unless those working in the area are signed up to them. We must use the knowledge that fishermen have. Many have fished those areas for years and know their fishing grounds; they know where fish spawn, where young fish are and where they can make good quality catches.

We must take an holistic approach to the problem, rather than simply target one fishery, which is an approach that leads to missed opportunities for conservation. We must consider the marine environment as a whole and address pollution and bad practice. To coin a phrase, we need a joined-up policy on fishing. Zonal management would go a long way to achieving such a policy, but we must ensure that all involved are working towards the same goals. There is little point making an effort towards conservation in one area if that effort is being undermined in another area. Fish do not recognise boundaries.

We must also examine the systems that we use to manage fisheries. I am unsure if the right approach is that of total allowable catches, because it creates bycatches—dead fish that cannot be landed because the fishing boat is over quota for that species or because the fish are too

immature. Throwing dead fish back into the sea is an incredible waste. We must consider implementing a system that allows people to buy extra quotas to enable them to land fish that they have caught but for which they have no quota. That system would reduce waste.

This year, it looks unlikely that we will use our total allowable catch for haddock and cod. Therefore, there must be a way of making quotas available at ports where fishermen could buy extra quota to land those species of fish. While that might be less profitable, it would not encourage overfishing.

Fishermen recognise the problems of bycatches and I acknowledge the steps that they have taken to lead the way in conserving fish stocks by fitting square-mesh panels. However, there will always be a bycatch; the challenge is to reduce it while ensuring that we find ways in which to avoid the practice of throwing dead fish back into the sea. Bycatches encourage predators by creating a ready food supply for seabirds and seals, which also feed on live fish, putting more pressure on the fishery.

We are told that there is overfishing of sand eels, which means that the food source of haddock and cod is being exploited. Many of those catches are being used to feed fish in fish farms, and I wonder whether thought has been given to using the bycatch of immature fish for feeding fish in fish farms. We would need to examine that approach in order to ensure that it did not encourage bycatches, but it would be less wasteful than throwing fish over the side.

We must also consider alternative fisheries, such as the pelagic fisheries, which have been mentioned. We all know what happened to the herring fishery during the 1970s; we must consider whether there are ways of adding value to it by encouraging consumers to buy herring.

Many of the points that I have made are relevant to the review of the common fisheries policy and must be considered. The total allowable catch approach is a blunt instrument and we must consider ways in which it can be refined. We should aim for sustainability and conservation, instead of starving our fish and feeding their predators, which is what we are doing at present.

11:58

**Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** In the few minutes available to me, I will talk about the fish processing industry in the north-east, which is where that industry is mainly located. It employs 5,000 people in the Grampian region alone.

The dire situation that the industry faces has a

number of causes, including increased waste water and veterinary costs and rising fuel costs. There has been a dearth of landings, with 40 per cent fewer landings this year alone. All those factors lead to plummeting profits.

The high-quality companies in Aberdeen are vulnerable, as they have invested heavily in their businesses and require considerable throughput to meet their overheads. However, in recent weeks and months, they have been faced with shortages of fresh fish at the quayside. There is a great deal of concern in the north-east following the measures on catch quotas that the European Commission recently unveiled.

Of most concern is the fact that not only jobs but the essential skills for future generations will be lost. Robert Milne of the Scottish Fish Merchants Federation is on record as saying that the Government must learn from the terrible mistakes that were made in the 1970s, when the North sea was closed for herring fishing and no account was taken of the onshore sector—when the herring returned, there was nobody left to process it. He suggested that the north-east is the only place in the world where people have the skills to handle the type of fish that are landed. Those jobs must be preserved.

The problems facing the processors in the north-east are unique, because the industry has always relied on the indigenous fishing fleet to supply it with its raw material. Indeed, all the machinery, equipment and skills are geared to processing smaller fish than are traditionally landed in Norway and Iceland. Processors in the Aberdeen area have always been dependent on the 300 to 400 fishing boats in the North sea. Therefore, if the number of those boats is going to be halved, there will be difficulties. We trust that stocks will eventually recover and that local fishermen will be able to supply the processing sector, but help is needed in the short term.

Fish processing firms are looking to the minister to initiate the short-term measures that will help processors to survive, despite the declining stocks. If processing staff are forced to seek employment elsewhere in the meantime, there will be a loss of skill to the industry that may never be retrieved. As if to underline the urgency of the problems, members will note that Abacus Seafoods of Mintlaw recently went into receivership. I suggest that that company will not be alone; many companies have borrowed heavily to meet the new hygiene regulations and other requirements that have been mentioned.

I welcome the fact that a working group has been set up to consider the problems facing the processing industry. I understand that the group will report its findings soon—that is also to be welcomed. However, the fundamental issue will be



retaining the skills while demand for them drastically reduces in the next few years. Without doubt, the Scottish Executive will need to remain committed to addressing those issues effectively. Restructuring of the industry is now an urgent necessity. What the fish processors need most is the prospect of a climate within which the industry can operate with confidence and the assurance that fishing-related employment will remain an important factor in the Scottish economy, particularly in the rural areas of the north-east.

12:02

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** My constituency includes the port of Eyemouth in Berwickshire, where the Anglo-Scottish Fishermen's Association is based. Its membership is currently 61 boats, including nearly all the vessels between Dunbar in East Lothian and Craster in Northumberland. About 20 of the boats are white fish boats and the rest are prawn, crab and lobster boats. There are fish processing jobs onshore in Eyemouth and elsewhere in Berwickshire. The Berwickshire coastal economy is brittle and we can ill afford the loss of income that the quota reductions would entail if they were introduced. About 20 per cent of local jobs are fisheries dependent. The multiplier of four jobs onshore for one man at sea applies in Berwickshire, so we are facing what can only be described as the sort of crisis that, as Alex Salmond said, has probably never been seen before—certainly not in my part of the world.

What are the potential solutions? As other members have said, we must get the square-mesh panels and the maximum twine thickness introduced across Europe. We could consider the days-at-sea scheme but, as the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has said, it is difficult to cope with the different types of boats and monitor which ones are at sea. I do not think that such a scheme is a particularly strong candidate.

The decommissioning scheme with joint UK and EU funding is another solution that should be considered. However, I understand from the Anglo-Scottish Fishermen's Association that the only sector in the UK fleet with large overcapacity is the pelagic fleet. We could consider closures of specific areas. There is some local support for closed areas around the Farne islands.

I agree with what a number of members said about the sand eel fishery. It is high time that that issue was addressed. The environmental damage that is done by industrial fishing is obvious. So far no one has quoted the figure for the sand eel fishery bycatch of cod and haddock, which stands at 5 per cent. That equates to a tonnage greater than the quotas for some nations.

Iain Smith spoke about the nephrops fishery. The proposed 20 per cent cut in the nephrops quota is a serious problem. I cannot understand it. Last September, when there was a serious prospect of tie-ups in the nephrops fleet, the Executive obtained a further quota. I give John Home Robertson full credit for that. Why are we now considering reducing that quota? I do not understand the logic of that. Of course when people fish for nephrops there is a bycatch of cod and haddock, but it is nothing like the size of the bycatch in the sand eel fishery.

Ministers will do well to talk to the Scottish Fishermen's Federation—I am sure that they will do so before they attend the forthcoming meetings. Parliament should support their efforts. I ask them to consider all the points that have been raised. As Iain Smith said, the nephrops fishery is particularly important, especially to my constituents. Action on the other proposed quota reductions would greatly benefit an industry that is vital to Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to closing speeches. I call Dr Elaine Murray to wind up on behalf of the Labour party.

12:07

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** This is an important debate about a sad situation. The SNP's rather carping amendment is designed to disguise the fact that it approves of some of the actions that the Executive is taking but would rather choke than admit it.

I was extremely surprised that Richard Lochhead objected to Franz Fischler coming to Peterborough to discuss the fishing situation with our ministers. That is extraordinary.

**Richard Lochhead:** Will the member give way?

**Dr Murray:** No, I do not have time. The member should sit down.

The Tories were rather more generous, although at times Jamie McGrigor seemed to be casting his net rather wide and trying to bring in issues that are close to his heart but are not up for debate today. Alex Johnstone was right to recognise the importance of the Parliament's support at such a crucial stage in the negotiations that our ministers will be undertaking.

The first main issue relates to total allowable catches. We must give credit to the Scottish Executive and to the fishing industry for the measures that they have taken, which are one reason why the settlement is not as bad as expected. I say to my SNP colleagues that that is not being self-congratulatory—it is giving credit where credit is due.

Jamie Stone, Alex Fergusson and some other members raised doubts about some of the scientific evidence in relation to quotas. The issue of bycatches must also be addressed. Some important points were made about the knock-on effects on the TACs of other species, such as nephrops. Richard Lochhead did not seem to have listened to what the minister said about the action that the Executive intends to take in concert with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. Rhoda Grant made an important point about the waste created by bycatches and the fact that it may attract predators.

The second important issue is conservation. It is heartening to note the policy agreement that has been struck between the industry and environment agencies such as the World Wide Fund for Nature. I was a little surprised by what Dr Winnie Ewing had to say, although I commiserate with her on her sore throat; I hope that I am not responsible for the outbreak of sore throats that we have in the Parliament at the moment. Dr Ewing seemed to imply that we should do nothing because other people were dragging their feet. I regard that as an irresponsible suggestion.

A number of speakers noted the successes that we have had with square-mesh panels. It was suggested that we should also consider zonal management, the closure of spawning grounds and the protection of juvenile fish.

Richard Lochhead made an important point about the improvement necessary in food supplies and the fact that the haddock cohort is small for its age at the moment. Industrial fishing of sand eels by the Danish and, to a lesser extent, the Norwegian fleet—I am told that sand eels are being processed and fed to pigs, which is yet another reason why I buy Scottish bacon rather than Danish bacon—is unnecessary and must be addressed, as must the problem with saith.

On the general issue of predation, Alex Fergusson renewed the call for a seal commission. I remind him that there is already a special commission on seals, which reports to the UK Government with scientific advice. The Executive is advised by research carried out at the University of St Andrews sea mammal research unit. I am sure that Fergus Ewing will want to major on seals, because his dislike of wild animals is legendary. I look forward to hearing what he has to say about that.

We must face the thorny issue of restructuring, which several speakers mentioned, including Jamie McGrigor, Tavish Scott, Jamie Stone and Alex Salmond. Alex Salmond had a long wish list, but as usual with the SNP, there was no price tag. As we heard, some money is available through the FIGG.

Members from all parties pointed out that we must reflect on the sacrifices made, in lives, by fishing communities in bringing fish to us. Moreover, we must recognise the great importance of the fishing industry to many other industries. Elaine Thomson, Lewis Macdonald, Irene McGugan, Tavish Scott, Iain Smith and Euan Robson pointed out the importance of those industries in many rural communities, especially in the provision of flexible and part-time employment.

12:11

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland)**

**(Con):** I welcome the sensitivity of the minister to the perils of the sea. My family fished out of the north-east of Scotland and we lost family at sea. That is not to be wished on anybody, but it obviously still happens. We therefore welcome the emphasis on safety. We would like the minister to do more to help to fund the satellite monitoring systems, which have a vital role in monitoring—and not only fish stocks.

I hoped that there would have been more passion and urgency. I listened to Richard Lochhead's speech today with some amazement. The xenophobic point about not allowing Franz Fischler to come to Peterhead was above my head. I could not understand what that was about.

**Richard Lochhead:** Will Mr Davidson give way?

**Mr Davidson:** Not just now, thanks.

**Richard Lochhead:** I never said that.

**Mr Davidson:** It came across that way. That is the message that the SNP is putting out.

Many members have demonstrated the importance of the Scottish fishing industry. Our coastal communities, in particular, need assistance at a time when they are under stress from other factors. I hope that the minister will do her best to be creative and have an input into the objective 2 system that is coming into place—we have not yet heard all the announcements about what will happen.

We have distance-from-market problems, which are accentuated by the cost of fuel to the haulage industry. Fish processors throughout the country suffer from waste water charges and the difficulty of getting trained staff. All sorts of costs are piling up. The SFF suggests that there are four jobs on land for every one at sea. I would put that figure higher, as there are a lot of ancillary industries. As people in those industries earn money and spend it in the community, the service industries are hit as well.

It is vital to get the message across that parts of Scotland are bleeding because of these problems. We must ensure that prompt action is taken. The

best way to do that is to come to agreement with the people who fish the seas with us. We must move towards some form of zonal management. The North Sea Commission, which is chaired by Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, has been mentioned. The commission is a start, because it has representatives from countries other than EU member states; it includes Norway and all the other countries that fish.

Mesh sizes were mentioned. There must be agreement on that among all the parties that fish in our waters. We must have a level playing field for Scotland's fishing. That would take us on to the next stage, which we must get right.

Two years ago, I went to the Haddo House conference. That conference represented a start—its title at least mentioned scientists and fishermen, who until then had been the poor relations, as there was no trust. We must build on that development. Things are happening, but we must go further. There is evidence that some of the TACs information is based on landing statistics. That merely measures effort; it does not measure fish stocks.

We must get down to brass tacks. The Executive must play a role in doing so by putting more resources into the scientific effort, which could be shared throughout the fishing community. For example, fishing boats that are tied up could be hired to undertake sampling. However, although there are many things that we could do, the information must be right. Much of the information on TACs was speculative and opinion forming, to say the least, and would be hard to justify. That is just not good enough. If we can do the job in Scotland, we will demonstrate that we know what to do in the fishing industry and we can sell that work. We should apply that model of best practice to all the seas in which our fishermen fish. Although I do not blame the minister for the situation, I beg her to stiffen her resolve to take those messages back, to talk to the scientists and fishermen and to pull everyone together. That is the only way in which we can go.

Perhaps the minister will also consider the licence system, which results in our boats being tied up. As Duncan Hamilton pointed out, because fishermen can go out with only one licence, they have to face the huge fuel costs of returning to pick up another. It is a nonsense and has to be stopped. I hope that the minister will comment on that point in his summing-up.

Decommissioning, which many members have mentioned, must be carried out with sensitivity. There must be measured outcomes, which means that hard choices will have to be made. As a result, there must be safety nets—if members will pardon the pun—for people and communities who will suffer from that programme. However, in the

long term, decommissioning is a requirement if we are to have sustainable fisheries.

There must be some form of control on industrial fishing; we cannot allow it to go on willy-nilly, because it is a tremendous force against sustainability. I will not go through the litany of members who have brought up the subject, but the point has been well made. However, industrial fishing cannot be banned outright because other industries would be affected.

Members mentioned the seal commission. Some of the evidence from the current arrangements does not stand up and better work must be undertaken on this major problem. We need clear evaluation of the effect of the seal population on Scotland's fisheries.

I have argued for zonal management in one form or another for three years and happily endorse Alex Johnstone's comments on the subject. We must move to a more positive position that involves the fishermen and scientists and that reinforces the confidence of people in our coastal communities. I hope that the deputy minister has listened well to what we have said today; she is our shining hope and a lot rests on her shoulders.

12:18

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I thought it both fitting and appropriate that, in her speech, the deputy minister referred to the unique nature of fishing. It is a highly dangerous profession and activity in which lives are lost. We should remember that, in the fishing industry, the past year has been extremely difficult and representatives of the industry have expressed concerns that the financial pressures that they have faced this year—even before they face the difficulties that are ahead—threaten safety at sea. Because the pressures of simply surviving affect the level of wages that skippers can pay, it has been difficult for them to find enough crew to man their boats.

The debate has been useful. Members of all parties have recognised that as well as conserving fish, we must address our attention to conserving fishing communities in Scotland. Those communities are at stake if we do not act on the range of measures that members from all parties have highlighted. Alex Salmond—who, as far as I know, is the MSP for Peterhead, not Peterborough—made an impassioned and eloquent speech born of years of experience of the fishing industry. I suggest that we have a good read at what he had to say about the way ahead for a recovery plan.

It has been predicted that the whitefish industry will this year lose up to a third of its income after what has been a very difficult year for many

fishermen. How can that happen without jeopardising safety at sea? We must be gravely concerned about that.

We also know that the Executive is spending only 0.03 per cent of its total budget on fishing—only 1.1 per cent of its rural affairs budget. When members whinge and moan about the SNP, saying that we must act for the fishing communities, they should search their conscience and the Executive's balance sheets. Perhaps a little less should be spent on spin doctors and a little more on our fishing communities.

We heard eloquent and impassioned arguments from Duncan Hamilton on, for example, the cost of fuel. What is not appreciated is the fact that catches must be hauled three times: from the harbour to the market, from the market to the processor and from the processor to the consumer. Haulage costs must be paid three times, in the context of the iniquitous fuel taxes on which I shall not dwell further today.

Irene McGugan made the only speech that dealt solely with the problems that are faced by processors—other members touched on the issue, but she devoted her whole speech to it. She highlighted the fact—and this is also my view—that increased water charges and expenditure on health and safety measures are bringing the fish processing business close to extinction. The minister will remember from his previous career that accountancy is not so complicated: if more money is going out than is coming in, the business ends. That is called bankruptcy, and I know a bit about that. In my former employment I was—and I still am—an accredited specialist in insolvency law.

Richard Lochhead showed his years of experience in this subject when he suggested specific measures that need to be taken. Many other members talked of specific measures and all parties put forward good ideas, which I do not have time to deal with one by one. It is evident from the debate that a recovery plan for our fishing industry must be brought to the Parliament next month. If it is not, we will seriously let down all those who work in the industry.

Lest anyone think that I am overdramatising the issue, I point out that the leading active conservation measure that the SFF, in its excellent briefing paper, said should take place relates to spawning and nursery closures. When does the spawning of cod take place? Between January and March—so we have only weeks in which to act. I hope that the minister will act on my suggestion and issue a statement. It is appalling that we have only one debate a year—and not even a half-day's debate, but a couple of hours—in which to discuss the fishing industry. That is unacceptable.

I know that members would not wish me to neglect the issue of who speaks for Scotland. I was interested in the MAFF concordat document, which tells the truth that some members of the unionist parties are coy about. It says that Westminster takes the lead in EU matters, as I assume all members know. Under the heading, "Pre-Fisheries Council Meetings", it states:

"Before each meeting of the Fisheries Council the MAFF Minister acting as leader of the UK delegation will meet industry representatives".

Anyone who has ever been involved in negotiation knows that the important period in negotiation is right at the start—before all one's negotiating partners have adopted lines from which they will not move. That document says that Mr Morley is speaking up for Scotland, and that has been proven in the debate by the references to the important meeting with Mr Fahey, in Ireland, at which Scotland's interests were discussed.

In conclusion, it seems to me that on the European stage, Scotland's role is not that of a player, but of a prompter; not that of a leader, but of a passenger. Instead of producing a carefully worked out package of measures to ensure that our industry survives, we are the bystander at the councils of Europe.

12:25

**The Minister for Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** I am pleased to make the winding-up speech for this debate. As is common on such occasions, it might be described as having been a broad discussion, ranging, by and large, across the important issues that affect sea fishing. The debate has, by and large, focused on what we all regard as the key issues. I endorse everything that the Deputy Minister for Rural Development said about where we stand on the negotiations and I believe that the Scottish Executive in the past 12 months has demonstrated categorically its commitment and determination to get the best for the Scottish fishing industry. Members need only look at our latest successes at the NEAFC and Norway negotiations to see that.

When I woke this morning, I had two interesting little thoughts. One was that, given the length of Richard Lochhead's amendment, he might forgo his right to an opening speech. My second hope was that Fergus Ewing would leave his toothbrush at home.

**Fergus Ewing:** That must be an in-joke.

**Ross Finnie:** It was Fergus Ewing's joke. It was awful the last time and we are glad that he did not repeat it.

I am pleased that Richard Lochhead did not forgo his opening speech, because it was very

interesting indeed. He stressed the concern that we all have about the difficulties with our cod stocks and the imperative need for us to do something about cod recovery plans. That was exactly the position of the Executive that Rhona Brankin set out. He also made the point that we must be careful not to use scientific evidence relating to the state of cod stocks to set the TACs for other stocks. I am glad that he made that point, because that is exactly the policy of the Executive on the catches that he listed—haddock, nephrops, monkfish and herring, to name some that he mentioned. He also referred to sand eels, which are another concern for the Executive. We are encouraging Norway, in particular, to agree that we need a TAC reduction. That is essential, as a minimum, because we know that the sand eel fishery causes considerable concern.

Richard Lochhead went slightly off track when he talked about our position on the more detailed aspects of the common fisheries policy. That is important, but the discussion that will take place next week will centre on the TACs. Let me make it clear, in case there is any doubt about our policy, that as well as the continuation, as a minimum, of the six and 12-mile limits, there will be no changes to the system of relative stability and the Shetland box will be retained. Those will be key elements for the Executive in future discussions. I assure the member for Shetland, Tavish Scott, that although the Shetland box is a permanent part of the CFP, we know that there are nation states that would want to challenge that. We have commissioned research to give additional backing should we be challenged. Many members also mentioned the need for greater regional and zonal management, which is exactly the Executive's stance.

Those are vital issues, but we must not confuse them with the key issue of how we take forward our position on the TACs to be negotiated next week. We are quite clear that we have to have those technical measures and that the proposals set out by the Commission are not yet agreed.

Duncan Hamilton correctly raised a point about why there were differences in the Commission's proposals between the east and west coasts. He asked where we stood on that issue. We will stick to the scientific advice. Duncan Hamilton will be aware that the west coast cod stocks are, according to the evidence, in a much worse state than those in the east. That is the reason for the proposals. On the other hand, the level at which it has been proposed that whiting catches be set is lower than that suggested by the scientific advice. That is a Commission proposal that the Executive does not wish to support.

On the matter of investment in technical measures, I take issue with Richard Lochhead.

Our single largest investment in that is at the marine laboratory in Aberdeen. It has the most significant gear research capability in Europe; it has shown the way forward on that issue and has led the way on square-mesh panels. We are wholly supportive of technical conservation measures. Let us not suggest—as Mr Davidson appeared to—that simply because we have failed so far in our policy of getting square-mesh panels accepted across Europe, we should wait for other countries to start using them before we do. The panels have been of huge benefit to Scottish fishing in monetary terms and in demonstrating that such technical conservation measures work. The question of closing fishery zones at certain times and of not having a dogmatic stance that would not reflect patterns of spawning is an issue on which the Executive is quite clear.

Alex Salmond mentioned the Hague preference. He will know better than anyone that the Hague mechanism is a trigger, not an automatic right. As part of our negotiation, we want to ensure that we are clear about where the negotiations are leading before we invoke a mechanism that we would have to justify at a later stage. However, it was used last year and we will use it again if it has to be used. We must bear it in mind that we should not go into the negotiations stating that we intend to use it. We are seeking an outcome that would be better than the use of that trigger.

**Mr Salmond:** I thank the minister for that statement, which reinforces the words of the deputy minister. I was thinking of other ways in which the commitment that the minister has given on the Hague preference could be honoured. When the minister meets Frank Fahey, the Irish fisheries minister, will he ask him about the IR£4 million emergency package for the fishing industry that the Irish Government has just announced? Will he try to match that in Scotland or will he try to block the Irish package—a move that would be of no benefit to Scottish fishermen?

**Ross Finnie:** I am grateful for those two points. I am glad that Mr Salmond accepts the way in which we intend to approach the Hague preference. I am sure that Mr Salmond will be aware—he always is when he asks that sort of question—that the IR£4 million is officially described as IR£3 million for quality assurance schemes and IR£1 million for efficiency measures. Rhona Brankin and I would be willing to consider such measures as part of the commitment that we have given and as part of the additional funds—an additional £11 million—that we have committed to FIG over the next three years. However, if those measures were to be described as Duncan Hamilton described them, as fuel subsidy and operating support, we would be right to raise that matter with the Commission as an abuse of EU legislation.

Many members talked about the processing industry. We understand perfectly that any further serious reduction in our catches will put enormous pressure on that sector. That is why, as an interim measure, my colleague Rhona Brankin has already announced a task force in Grampian to examine the fish processing industry and to come up with proposals on what can be done about it.

**Mr Stone:** As a former fish gutter, I take some interest in this matter. The deputy minister touched on the local enterprise network's involvement in tackling the problem. Can the minister confirm that the network will specifically target the fish processing industry?

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** I ask the minister to wind up now, please.

**Ross Finnie:** Jamie Stone refers to exactly the commitment that I have just given. However, we do not wish to go too far on that matter just yet, because we have not yet concluded those negotiations. The appropriate time to come up with forward, more thought-out plans on that is when we know the outcome of the negotiations on TACs.

Like Tavish Scott, whose constituency perhaps has the highest proportion of gross domestic product from fishing, I understand that the measures are not just short term, but long term. The outcome of the negotiations has to set a process in train for this year; the negotiations must also put in place—if we can achieve it—measures to assist with the long-term sustainability of fishing and of our fishing industry.

I state for the final time that the objective for the forthcoming negotiations is to aim for the best possible fishing opportunities for Scottish fishermen, consistent with scientific advice and with the need to sustain stocks for the future. That is what matters and is what we aim to deliver. Let me tell members: Rhona Brankin will lead for the United Kingdom in those negotiations at the points when it is relevant and important to the future of the Scottish fishing industry. That is our commitment, and I invite the Parliament to support the motion at decision time, and to reject the amendment.

## Business Motion

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The next item is consideration of business motion S1M-1428, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out the business programme for the next two weeks. I call Tavish Scott to move the motion.

12:37

**The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Tavish Scott):** Before moving the business motion, I should inform the Parliament that the Executive business that is expected to be taken on Thursday of next week is a debate on a Sewel motion in respect of the tobacco advertising and promotion bill, which will be dealt with at Westminster. The proposed legislation was announced in the Queen's speech yesterday, and will shortly be introduced to Parliament. Details of how the bill affects Scotland will be made available to members in advance of the debate.

Unfortunately, I am unable to inform the chamber of the topics that the Scottish National Party has chosen for debate for Thursday next week. I hope that, in future, we will be able to provide information for members as it comes up.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 13 December 2000

9.30 am	Time for Reflection – The Reverend Dr. Gordon Murray, Minister, Edinburgh and Forth Methodist Circuit
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Education, Culture and Sport Committee and Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee Debate on SQA Inquiries
2.30 pm	Finance Committee Debate on 2001-02 Budget Process Stage 2
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-1206 Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Abercorn Primary School, West Lothian

Thursday 14 December 2000

9.30 am	Scottish National Party Business
<i>followed by</i>	Ministerial Statement on the Health Plan
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion

2.30 pm	Question Time
3.10 pm	First Minister's Question Time
3.30 pm	Debate on Committee Restructuring
<i>followed by</i>	Executive Business
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-808 Fergus Ewing: Shinty

Wednesday 20 December 2000

9.30 am	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 Debate on the Transport (Scotland) Bill
2.30 pm	Continuation of Stage 3 Debate on the Transport (Scotland) Bill
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It is not a prerequisite to put forward what the business will be—it is not necessary. That is a point of order.

**The Presiding Officer:** No, it is not; it is a point of argument.

Donald Gorrie has requested to speak against the business motion.

12:38

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** What Tavish Scott has just said strengthens my argument. My concern is about the time that is allocated on the afternoon of Thursday 14 December for the debate on committee restructuring. Presumably, it will last considerably less than an hour and a half. My argument is that that debate is on what is pre-eminently a back-bench issue, which has hitherto been dominated by the Parliamentary Bureau. Doubtless, the bureau will get its say first—at considerable length. The amount of time for back benchers will be very short. I think it very important that arguments can be made from all points of view.

Some members, like me, may oppose the proposals that have been made; others feel that, because of travel or other commitments, they would like to be on fewer committees; some might like to be on more committees; and some have views on the effective size of committees. Many individual members would have useful contributions to make. As things stand, they will be denied the opportunity to make them.

I therefore urge the Parliamentary Bureau to

allow a longer time for this very important debate. It is the first time that there will be a serious debate on committees, their role and their membership. We deserve much more than an hour or whatever length of time we will get. I oppose the motion.

12:39

**Tavish Scott:** The four business managers of the main parties agreed to the programme of business, including the timings of the debate on committee restructuring, at the Parliamentary Bureau meeting on Tuesday. Mr Gorrie was made aware of that fact at the Liberal Democrat group meeting on Tuesday night. I am not convinced by the argument that Parliament should extend its public navel-gazing. We should spend more time sorting these matters out carefully. Donald Gorrie has the opportunity to press his request-to-speak button next week. I hope that he will do so, and will speak in the debate. It does not follow from the motion that the Executive or, indeed, the front-bench members of any of the main parties will seek to dominate the debate. Therefore, I hope that Mr Gorrie will withdraw his opposition to the motion, on the basis that I am sure that he will catch the Presiding Officer's eye next week.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S1M-1428, in the name of Tom McCabe, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (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)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 74, Against 3, Abstentions 0.

*Motion agreed to.*

12:41

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Crichton Campus (Visits)

#### 1. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has any plans to visit the Crichton campus. (S1O-2679)

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander):** I will meet members of the Crichton campus advisory board on Monday morning in my office in Glasgow.

**David Mundell:** I am pleased to hear that the minister is having that important meeting about the financing of an innovative complex. I hope that the minister will visit Crichton campus, because I believe—as do other members—that it is the most exciting thing that has happened in Dumfries and Galloway for many years. It is an innovative and cutting-edge project and so, inevitably, it comes up against many institutional blockers. The minister's personal support, and that of other ministers, might be required to deal with those blockages.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** There might have been a question there somewhere.

**Ms Alexander:** I would be delighted to visit the Crichton campus early in the new year, following Monday's meeting and receipt of the steering group's interim report on the project for a south of Scotland university.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** I, too, look forward to attending the minister's forthcoming meeting with the Crichton campus advisory board to hear more about the joint working between the higher and further education sectors on the Crichton site. I, too, hope that the minister will visit the Crichton campus. Will the Executive review the funding structures, in order to facilitate the co-operation that is necessary between the further and higher education sectors at that site, and other sites in Scotland?

**Ms Alexander:** Earlier this week, I visited Bell College of Technology which, as Dr Murray will know, is one of the three institutions—the others are the University of Glasgow and the University of Paisley—that contribute to the Crichton campus. The issue of how we make more accessible the circumstances in which people receive access to money was up for discussion last week and I am sure it will be next week.



## European Fisheries Council

### 2. Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what is being done in preparation for December's meeting of the European fisheries council. (S1O-2671)

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** The Scottish Executive is preparing extensively for the December meeting of the European fisheries council, as outlined during this morning's debate on fisheries.

**Elaine Thomson:** I know that the minister is fully aware of how important the fish catching and processing sector is to Aberdeen and the north-east and of the many thousands of jobs that it supports, as was discussed in this morning's debate. Can the minister reassure members that she has obtained the best possible deal from the recent European Union-Norway negotiations in the lead-up to the European fisheries council?

**Rhona Brankin:** Yes. As I am sure Elaine Thomson is aware, the negotiations between the EU and Norway were tough. We managed to argue for a total allowable cod catch that is 40 per cent below this year's figure, but for haddock we argued to get the reduction down to 16 per cent. I know that those figures seem tough but, as was noted in this morning's debate, we must take hard measures.

I am, however, delighted to say that we managed to negotiate a transfer of more than 6,000 tonnes of haddock for Scotland and we have cut by 32,000 tonnes the transfer of blue whiting to Norway. That is a welcome boost to the Scottish industry.

I pay tribute to my officials, who spent more than 28 hours negotiating the deal last week.

## Long-term Care

**3. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its current position is on the financing of long-term care for the elderly. (S1O-2669)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** In her statement on 5 October, Susan Deacon announced additional provision, which builds up to £100 million extra for older people for the national health service and local authorities in 2003-04. Local authority allocations for community care will increase by more than £85 million in 2001-02, rising to more than £120 million in 2003-04, much of which will benefit older people.

Payment for personal care is currently being reviewed.

**Dennis Canavan:** Is the minister aware that there has been a general welcome for the

proposal that the Scottish Executive package of long-term care for the elderly should be more generous than that south of the border? Is the minister aware that there would be an even warmer welcome if the Scottish Executive implemented fully the recommendations of the Sutherland report, so that the cost of personal care for elderly people was met from public funds, as recommended by the Health and Community Care Committee of this Parliament?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** The Executive is already implementing the vast majority of the Sutherland commission's recommendations. I note what the Health and Community Care Committee said, but it was honest enough to acknowledge that free personal care for everyone would have a knock-on effect on other community care budgets. As I said, the issue is under review. To some extent, there must be a trade-off between building up services in the community—which will benefit everyone—and helping the minority of people who pay for personal care.

**Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** Sutherland recommended free personal care in all care settings, and the Health and Community Care Committee's report unanimously backed that position. Figures that Age Concern supplied to all MSPs today show that free personal care would therefore benefit 63,000 people who receive care at home, 14,000 people in residential care homes and 18,000 in nursing homes. That means that almost 100,000 Scots would benefit.

**The Presiding Officer:** Ask a question.

**Mrs Smith:** Is the minister happy to accept those figures as a true reflection of the situation? Ministers have claimed that only 7,000 people would benefit from the measure.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** Those figures were sent to Margaret Smith only today. Like all members, I shall want to examine them with great care. As Margaret Smith's committee acknowledged, to some extent a choice must be made between building up services and helping people with care costs. We are already helping people through free nursing care. A definition of nursing care is being worked on, which I hope will meet some of Margaret Smith's demands for a definition that relates to the level of dependency. That might well be a way forward. As I said in my first answer, the wider issue continues to be reviewed.

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** Will the minister stop dodging the issue of personal care? Will he accept that there is a consensus in Scotland in favour of public payment for personal care of elderly people? Will the minister tell Parliament whether the Executive is part of that consensus? If it is, will the minister say when the Executive intends to implement the Sutherland

recommendations in full and deliver fairness for pensioners in Scotland?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** An announcement of the result of the review will come soon, in January—not least because we shall also respond to the Health and Community Care Committee then. I acknowledge the arguments that have been made, but I remind Nicola Sturgeon what the Health and Community Care Committee said about the knock-on effects on other community care budgets. In the real world, we must make choices. I think that everybody is keen, in principle, on Nicola Sturgeon's recommendation, but we must make choices. There are trade-offs. That is the difficult judgment that we are considering.

### Referendum

**4. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will recommend to Her Majesty's Government that there should be a referendum on independence for Scotland and suggest an appropriate date. (S10-2656)

**The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe):** No. The SNP is not paying attention. The people of Scotland consistently reject independence.

**Mr Gibson:** I find that answer surprising. [Laughter.] The Scottish people have never been asked directly whether they acquiesced in the surrender of the nation's independence 293 years ago, following the bribery that was inherent in the old Scottish Parliament. Given the fact that the Scots were denied a multi-option referendum in 1997, and the fact that people who support independence vote from across the political spectrum, is it not about time that the choice was put to the people of Scotland, or is the minister simply afraid that his side would lose?

**Mr McCabe:** We should listen to the democratic voice of Scotland. Four out of five Scots rejected independence at the previous general election. The SNP was trounced in Anniesland, and it should be worried about Falkirk West. How long will it be before the penny drops?

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that the fact that Mr Gibson calls for a referendum at a time when support for the SNP is haemorrhaging is proof that he represents the masochistic wing of the nationalists?

**Mr McCabe:** I do not know about masochistic, but it is certainly an indication that the SNP is becoming a bit desperate.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** As the minister may be aware, the First Minister was rather rudely described by a leading Italian academic on "Newsnight" this week as "an

irrelevance".

Does the minister agree that, following the successful referendum, his party would have some relevance at last—as members of the Opposition in an independent Scotland?

**Mr McCabe:** The only irrelevance that we are discussing today is the claim for a referendum on independence. As I said, that claim has been rejected consistently by the people of Scotland. The next time that the people of Scotland think that the SNP is relevant will be the first time.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister agree that we have already gone through major constitutional change with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament? Does he also agree that the duty of every member and party in the Parliament is to make Parliament's work successful? Does he consider that the SNP's option is nothing other than a distraction?

**Mr McCabe:** There is a warm welcome for the Conservative party's conversion to making the Parliament work and I welcome Mr Gallie's comments. I only wish that the SNP would pay heed to the fact that every other party is committed to the Parliament, while the SNP is committed to ruining it on each and every day that Parliament meets.

### Health Databases

**5. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to link the information that is available on separate health databases across Scotland. (S10-2664)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** The information and statistics division of the common services agency already links together a wide range of health information. Further linkages can be made where it is appropriate to do so.

**Mr Macintosh:** I thank the minister for her answer.

I know that the minister is aware of the level of concern throughout Scotland following allegations about a link between the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine and autism. A helpful way to respond to those concerns would be to research fully and analyse the information that is already available to us through the immunisation recall system, the child health record, the community health index and the continuous morbidity record. No other country in the world has as comprehensive a system of health recording as Scotland has and those information databases could be linked for a relatively small cost. I ask the minister to consider that proposal.

**Susan Deacon:** Kenneth Macintosh makes an important point when he says that the NHS in

Scotland is particularly information rich. It is important that we make the most effective use of the data that are available to us.

It might be possible to link the records that were mentioned by Kenneth Macintosh—I am happy to look into that in further detail. However, it is important to note that linking those records would not, in itself, assist us in seeking a causal relationship between the MMR vaccine and autism. Throughout the UK, in recent years a number of full studies have been conducted into that matter and no evidence of a causal link has been found.

#### **Broadcasting (Schools Programmes)**

**6. Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it will make to broadcasting companies, Her Majesty's Government and other relevant bodies to increase the number of schools' programmes which cover Scottish current affairs. R (S10-2670)

**The Deputy Minister for Sport and Culture (Allan Wilson):** I have no plans to make representations on that matter.

**Michael Russell:** That is a pity.

The minister and I have just taken part in an event—organised by the Parliament's education service—for Auchenharvie Academy in Stevenston. There is an interest in Scottish current affairs, but even Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools recognises that there is not enough knowledge in schools.

Programmes such as "Newsround", which is a children's news programme, have no Scottish agenda whatsoever. Would not it be good to tie together joined-up government and the educational priorities on citizenship that were announced yesterday by the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs with action on schools broadcasting? Perhaps the minister might even give some gentle encouragement.

**Allan Wilson:** I hope that I can give Mike Russell that gentle encouragement.

Educational broadcasting, like broadcasting in general, is at arm's length from the Executive, and that is how it should be. However, we have a close interest in the use of broadcasting as an educational medium. Learning and Teaching Scotland updates broadcasters on the curriculum in Scotland, including modern studies, and it is carrying out a consultation exercise to promote education for citizenship—to which Mike Russell referred—across the school curriculum.

I am sure that the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs will take on board the points that were made by Mike Russell, and interested

members such as him might wish to participate in that consultation. All parts of the curriculum are relevant to active citizenship—UK citizenship, that is.

#### **Relenza**

**7. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive when the expert group set up to investigate the influenza drug Relenza will give advice to the Minister for Health and Community Care on its availability in the national health service in Scotland. (S10-2674)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** The expert group's guidance will be issued tomorrow. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the group for its prompt response to my request for advice on the issue.

**Mary Scanlon:** I am delighted that the group has met once and that tomorrow we will get the report without a delay. Can the minister tell members why we need an additional expert group to give advice on new drugs, when we already have the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Health Technology Board for Scotland, the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network, the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland, the Scottish drugs and therapeutics consortium and local drugs and therapeutics committees?

**Susan Deacon:** I am pleased that, in listing those bodies, Mary Scanlon has drawn attention to the robust range of organisations that is in place in Scotland to ensure that the highest possible standards of clinical quality are maintained. We strive constantly to ensure that those efforts are co-ordinated as effectively as possible in Scotland and that effective links are established with equivalent UK bodies. For example, the Health Technology Board for Scotland has established and is developing protocols with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in England, to ensure that the people of Scotland can get the best possible advice and the highest possible standards.

**The Presiding Officer:** Donald Gorrie, did you want to ask a supplementary question?

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** No, I wanted to ask the next question.

**The Presiding Officer:** You pressed your button a little early.

**Donald Gorrie:** It can be difficult to find the moment critique to press one's button.

**The Presiding Officer:** You need to wait until the previous question is over.

## Transport

**8. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its plans are for promoting the development of better ferry connections, with good rail and road links, to Ireland and to continental Europe. (S1O-2661)

**The Minister for Transport (Sarah Boyack):** Our integrated transport strategy recognises the need for good road and rail links to ports and harbours. The transport aspect of ferry services that have origins or destinations outside Scotland is a reserved matter, but the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Enterprise network have an interest in the potential economic development benefits.

**Donald Gorrie:** It emerged in discussions between members of the Transport and the Environment Committee and Irish MPs that there is great concern from the Irish point of view about clarifying the route that they would take either to Britain or to the continent. Will the minister clarify whether we are continuing to develop Stranraer and the road to it—which badly needs development—or whether an alternative site on the Ayrshire coast is being considered? Will she also say what the prospects are of developing Rosyth for ferries to Europe?

**Sarah Boyack:** There is a range of opportunities to develop all those routes. On the A75 in particular, the major problem is platooning, which happens when vehicles come off the ferries. That is why the Executive is promoting schemes to ensure that we can get good overtaking opportunities that will make that route more attractive. On Rosyth, Donald Gorrie might be aware that there are proposals for ferry opportunities there. I am keen that those proposals should be pursued. They would bring major benefits and offer opportunities for an east-west road connection across the country to create access between Ireland and Europe. There are also opportunities to improve the rail network to provide an east-west link. We are keen to consider those opportunities and see what can be progressed.

**The Presiding Officer:** A lot of members want to ask supplementary questions, so let us have short exchanges, please.

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** Is the minister aware of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions document, "Modern Ports: A UK Policy", which states:

"The road network in England and Wales is also vital to the movement of Irish trade?"

Does not that also apply to the A75 Stranraer to Gretna road? How does she square that with the

derisory investment that she plans for the A75?

**Sarah Boyack:** Alasdair Morgan will know that the Scottish Executive was supportive of that new document, which sets out new opportunities for ports developments in Scotland and the rest of the UK. We have ensured that there is investment in the A75 because we see it as an important route.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** The minister mentioned the development of the Rosyth Europort, which is in my constituency. Will freight facilities grants for rail transport be progressed?

**Sarah Boyack:** An application for freight facilities grant that would contribute to reopening the Stirling-Alloa-Dunfermline leg is currently being considered. I have increased freight facilities grant awards to £36 million over the next three years. If a good proposal were put forward that could be built into the existing proposal for the Stirling-Alloa-Dunfermline route, I would be very interested in looking at it.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** The minister will be aware of the problems of the A77 south of Ayr, because I have just written to her about that. What plans does she have to resolve the accident black spots that are developing on that road between Ayr and Stranraer? There have been six accidents on the road during the past five weeks. That is very worrying.

**Sarah Boyack:** We keep under close review all areas where there are accidents. We receive reports and consider route accident reduction plans, where remedial work on the trunk road network could reduce accidents in the future. Our major contribution to road safety on the west coast is the upgrading of the A77, which we intend to pursue as soon as we can. Work on the project is already under way and I am keen for the major improvement to the A77—which will cost £60 million—to be implemented as soon as possible.

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** The minister will be aware of the huge amount that is being done under the leadership of Brian Wilson of the Scotland Office, Argyll and Bute Council, Argyll and the Islands Enterprise, Moyle District Council and me, to open up the Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry service, which would once again link Campbeltown to Northern Ireland. Can she assure me that the Scottish Executive will do everything in its power to ensure that, this time next year, that service will be running again?

**Sarah Boyack:** I can give the member the commitment that the Scottish Executive will continue to work in partnership with Brian Wilson in the Scotland Office, with Argyll and Bute Council and with the authorities in the north of Ireland. We are keen to see a partnership approach to this issue. That requires the support of all the key agents, which is why the Scottish

Executive takes a keen interest in the project.

### Asylum Seekers

**9. Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to implement recommendations of the report by Save the Children and the Scottish Refugee Council, "I Didn't Come Here for Fun". (S1O-2645)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** The findings of the report by Save the Children and the Scottish Refugee Council were presented only at a conference at the beginning of last week. The report contains a number of recommendations, some of which are for the Scottish Executive. We shall study carefully those recommendations that are directed specifically at the Executive.

**Shona Robison:** As the minister will be aware, the report highlights the experiences of refugee children coming to Scotland and shows that each of them has been subject to some form of racial harassment, abuse or attack. Does the minister see the Scottish Executive having a leadership role in ensuring the rights and needs of children seeking asylum in Scotland? How does he intend to respond to the proposal for a cross-departmental working group on refugee and asylum issues, which is one of the report's key recommendations? As the minister responsible in this area, will he agree to meet the refugee children when they visit the Parliament in the new year and to listen to their concerns directly?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I would be very keen to meet the children. Over the summer I visited refugees in Glasgow. Shona Robison knows that, because we visited them together. I have a strong personal interest in the issue of refugee children.

The Executive has a role to play in this area. We will examine the specific recommendations that are made in the report and respond to them in due course. We are already doing some of the things that have been suggested, such as creating positive images. I often tell people about a schoolgirl who came to my surgery with her family—she was the only member of the family who spoke English—and said: "We did not come here for the money. We came here because we were going to get killed". That encapsulates the tragedy that faces so many asylum seekers at the moment.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that the present plight of asylum seekers in Scotland and elsewhere throws into stark relief the rank hypocrisy of those who argue for the absolute freedom of movement of capital and goods across national boundaries, while maintaining that every possible obstacle should be put in the way of the free movement of peoples?

Can the minister explain why people moving into Scotland should be seen as a threat, while capital and manufacturing jobs moving out of Scotland are not seen as an equivalent threat?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** We do not see people moving into Scotland as a threat. We should remember that a large number of asylum seekers will remain here and will, in the near future, be Scottish citizens and highly valued members of Scottish society. Whenever people talk about asylum seekers, they should bear that in mind.

### Architecture

**10. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in developing a policy on architecture. (S1O-2678)

**The Deputy Minister for Sport and Culture (Allan Wilson):** We published a policy framework document, "The Development of a Policy on Architecture", at the end of last year. The document set out the Executive's aspirations for architecture and a framework for policy development. We have since consulted widely on the document and have, this month, published a report on the public consultation. It is my intention to make a statement on the detail of policy as early as possible in 2001.

**Karen Whitefield:** I thank the minister for his response. I welcome the Executive's consultation.

The minister will be aware that Airdrie was recently voted the ugliest town in Scotland. That label failed to recognise some good examples of architecture in the town or to address some of the genuine planning problems that exist in many towns in Scotland. Is the Scottish Executive considering the introduction of legislation to control design quality? Has the Executive considered alternatives to legislation, such as creating architecture, planning and design panels like those developed in the Netherlands or extending the remit of the Royal Fine Art Commission?

**Allan Wilson:** On the carbuncle awards, the Executive believes that debate and criticism is healthy. However, an award for Scotland's most dismal town is ill judged as it encroaches on the sensitivities of the residents, who have an understandable pride in their own community.

The current legislation that has some influence on design quality is the planning and building control framework. We would only mess with that lightly, so as not to stifle creativity.

On extending the remit of the Royal Fine Art Commission and creating aesthetic panels like those in the Netherlands, we will build on the suggestions that have come back from the consultation document. We will examine best

practice in other countries and roll it out in Scotland.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** I am sure that Airdrie is innocent. It was not the fault of Airdrie that such pockets sprang up; it was the fault of architects in the 1960s and 1970s. Will the Executive keep an eye on those architects? Their ghastly plans left many areas of Scotland in much the same state as Attila the Hun left Gaul. Will the Executive please have a policy against ugliness in architecture?

**Allan Wilson:** The member will be pleased to learn that I am against ugliness in all its shapes and forms. That is precisely the point of developing a policy on architecture. Government has a responsibility to conserve the built heritage for future generations. We will demonstrate that by introducing policy proposals in the new year.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** The minister will be aware of the role that good architectural practice can play in the creation of high-quality school environments, better hospitals and the transformation of our housing stock. Given the amount of resources that the Executive is putting into those matters, will the minister ask his colleagues to take account of architectural policy to ensure that we get the best value for money and, as a result of the investment, create the best environments?

**Allan Wilson:** I can easily agree with that. Building is a key delivery mechanism for Government policy, which aims to improve social policy and modernise and develop our infrastructure. It is an important part of the work of all my colleagues.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Harper, you are not coming in on this question, are you?

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I would like to ask a quick supplementary.

**The Presiding Officer:** No. Ask question 11 please.

### Farmers (Financial Support)

**11. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its current policy is regarding financial capping of support measures for farmers. (S1O-2668)

**The Minister for Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** In accordance with the requirements of the European rural development regulation, there is no financial capping of the support that will be available under the new rural stewardship scheme. The financial limits in place, and approved by the European Commission and Parliament for existing schemes, remain. The organic aid scheme remains a free-standing scheme and its hectareage limits remain.

**Robin Harper:** Matthew 13:12 states that to those that have shall be given in abundance, but from those that have not shall be taken away even that which they have. Does the minister sympathise with that view? In respect of individual farm payments under the less favoured areas scheme, will the minister acknowledge that the shift from headage payments to area-based payments will penalise crofters and other small farmers? Does he agree that annual reviews of the scheme should aim to address the imbalance in effect between small and large farms?

**Ross Finnie:** I am happy to confirm that Matthew 13:12 was probably also directed to the crofting communities. I acknowledge that the move from a headage-based system to an area-based system has the inherent flaw that intensive livestock operations that are prevalent in many of Scotland's remote and rural areas will be disadvantaged.

Furthermore, although I am not necessarily contemplating annual reviews, we have already set up a group to assist the department. The group is made up of members of the National Farmers Union Scotland, the Scottish Landowners Federation and, critically, the Crofters Union and will examine how we might deploy funding to address problems with the implementation of the scheme as they affect some of our smaller and more remote communities.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The minister will be aware that capping individuals who receive huge amounts of public funding will free up finance. Does he agree that that money could be used to provide additional payments to those who deploy sustainable and environmentally friendly farming methods? Furthermore, does he recognise that the crofting system provides those benefits as well as allowing people to remain in rural areas?

**Ross Finnie:** I am happy to confirm that I am very seized of the problems emerging from the implementation of the new less favoured areas scheme. I can only repeat my response to Robin Harper. I intend to ensure that the funding made available from the tapering mechanism will be directed quite specifically to the most affected areas, which include the crofting communities.

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I declare an interest in this issue. Does the minister accept that, because of Scotland's natural economic and climatic disadvantages and its distance from its main market, it was inevitable that Scotland's farming businesses were always likely to be bigger than those in other parts of Europe? Does he further acknowledge that any attempt to cap across-the-board support measures paid to farmers would instantly disadvantage the Scottish industry in comparison with those regions

where farm sizes are likely to be smaller?

**Ross Finnie:** The member makes two important points. First, we must recognise that the less favoured areas support mechanism covers 85 per cent of Scotland's agricultural land because that amount of land has less favoured area status. There was no attempt even with the predecessor scheme, the hill livestock compensatory allowance, to distinguish between smaller and larger units because of the make-up of Scottish agricultural tenure. Although I accept that point, it does not get away from the fact that particular pockets in Scotland are being disadvantaged in the change to this new scheme. As I said in my earlier responses, I intend to address that problem.

### Supply Teachers

**12. Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to deal with any on-going lack of supply teachers in particular areas of Scotland and in particular areas of the curriculum. (S1O-2659)

**The Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Mr Jack McConnell):** In addressing the issue of teachers in the supply pool, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council applied increases of 22 per cent to primary intakes and 7 per cent to secondary intakes to teacher education institutions for the 2000-01 session. From current examples of good practice, my officials are seeking to identify ways in which the management of supply teachers can be more effectively administered with local authorities.

**Bruce Crawford:** The minister's response will be of little comfort to the pupils, parents and teachers of Kirkland High School in Methil in Fife. Like many other schools, this school has real problems in securing supply or permanent teachers to full specialist teacher vacancies, particularly in English. What helpful advice should I give to the rector of Kirkland High School, who recently said:

"When you lose a specialist teacher these days, you wonder where you will get a replacement given the national shortage that's evolved over recent years?"

**Mr McConnell:** I would be very careful to say that Kirkland High is a very good school and to praise the head teacher and teachers for their work. Some of that work takes place in difficult circumstances because of the difficulties in filling posts. Although that situation exists in other schools across Scotland, it is one that we are determined to address.

Although discussions on the subject have taken place with the directors of education and local authorities, it is my view that the outcome of those

discussions should await the outcome of the current negotiations on the McCrone report, as those negotiations will help us to determine the number of supply teachers who will be required in years to come. Immediate action was required this year, which is why the intake to the teacher education institutions was increased and why we are involved in a recruitment campaign to follow on from the McCrone negotiations. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Did I hear a mobile phone ringing? I hope not.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Maybe it was Jack McConnell phoning a friend. *[Laughter.]*

I thank the minister for his answer to Bruce Crawford's question. He told us what he is doing to encourage people to become primary and secondary school teachers. Does he have any plans to encourage recruitment for specific subjects such as maths and English?

**Mr McConnell:** The issues are different in different subject areas and between primary and secondary education. Some of those relate to the increase in school numbers over the past two or three years; some relate to the fact that, in specific subjects, more people are working part-time or job sharing. The traditional method of calculating the number of full-time teachers is therefore not necessarily relevant in modern schools in which a head count might be more appropriate.

Given the number of parliamentary questions on this subject that I have received recently, it is my intention to send a submission on it to the convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. That submission will be placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre, for the information of all members—before Christmas if possible. I hope that, next time, Brian Monteith will be able to ask the audience before he asks me.

### Regional News Bulletins

**13. Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has made any representations to the Independent Television Commission in connection with the planned schedule for Scottish regional news bulletins. (S1O-2648)

**The Deputy Minister for Sport and Culture (Allan Wilson):** We have not made any such representations.

**Richard Lochhead:** That is absolutely shameful. Is the minister aware that what was formerly the "News at Ten"—which was shifted to 11 pm—will once more be scheduled at 10 pm after January, but that the regional news, which was also shifted, will stay at 11.20 pm? Does the minister accept that that represents a downgrading

of Scotland's national news?

In a letter to me, Sir Robin Biggam, the chairman of the Independent Television Commission says:

"I hope that ITV might reconsider what I believe would be the more natural and preferable place for the regional news headlines."

Does the minister agree with the chairman of the ITC—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. That is enough. We have got the point.

**Richard Lochhead:** Does he agree—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. We have heard the question.

**Allan Wilson:** Coincidentally, I met representatives of the Scottish Media Group earlier this week. They pointed out that, even when the "News at Ten" was at 10 pm, the regional news was at 11.20 pm or 11.30 pm, so there is no change there. The main channel 3 news at 6 pm is "Scotland Today" and "North Tonight", each of which has a substantial share of the market. I expect that that will continue.

### Care Homes

**14. Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the timetable now is in relation to its proposals to end the distinction between residential and nursing care homes. (S1O-2665)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** The necessary provision will be contained in the regulation of care bill that we hope will be introduced before Christmas. The plan would be to commence the provision on 1 April 2002, the expected start date for the new system for regulating care services.

**Alex Fergusson:** I thank the minister for that answer. Does he share the view of the Abbeyfield Society of Dumfries and Galloway, which believes that the proposal to standardise care homes will reduce choice, increase charges and result in a short to medium-term reduction in the number of care providers and bed spaces in that sector? Does he also agree that, in standardising all the homes to nursing care standard, this proposal is effectively placing a tax on tender, loving care that is currently available in abundance and free of charge at residential homes that are run by organisations such as the Abbeyfield Society?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** The proposal certainly will not increase charges, but will support the interests of older people. As their condition changes, they will be able to stay in the same place but receive a different level of care.

## First Minister's Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

**1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to raise. (S1F-710)

**The First Minister (Henry McLeish):** I speak regularly to the Secretary of State for Scotland on the telephone. This week, I had the great privilege of seeing him on Monday and Tuesday in Rome.

**Mr Swinney:** I am grateful to the First Minister for his answer. When he next meets the Secretary of State for Scotland, he might like to raise this issue. On Monday, the Minister for Health and Community Care said in relation to winter that

"there has been better preparation, better planning . . . than ever before."

Last winter, the Minister for Health and Community Care said that the national health service had

"planned earlier and better for winter than ever before."—  
[Official Report, 12 Jan 2000; Vol 4, c 5.]

Last winter, waiting lists went up by 7,000. Is the First Minister able to translate into plain English the words

"better planning . . . than ever before"?

Will he tell us whether waiting lists this winter will go up or down?

**The First Minister:** The NHS is better prepared this year than it has ever been. That is the view not only of the Executive, but of the British Medical Association in Scotland. There may well be problems this winter—winter is hard for the NHS, as more people fall ill and more people slip and fall as the weather gets colder—but we are prepared to meet the peaks in demand.

**Mr Swinney:** I am grateful to the First Minister for his answer but, as on every Thursday, he did not answer the question. I asked him whether waiting lists would go up or down this winter. Will the First Minister answer the question?

**The First Minister:** We discussed this issue recently and made the point about waiting lists. We are investing for further success to ensure that the waiting lists go down. The point of entry to the question was preparation for winter. I have every confidence that every step has been taken to ensure that we cover the winter period. That is supported by the BMA and by others in the NHS.

**Mr Swinney:** I hear what the First Minister says about resources. However, the Minister for Health and Community Care this week promised 700



extra beds, yet since Labour came to power 3,000 beds have been cut. Labour promised more nurses, but has cut 900 nursing posts. It has promised better care services in the community, but home help services have declined by 11 per cent since the Government came to power. Will the First Minister tell us whether part of the planning for winter—part of the Executive's guarantee to the people of Scotland that it will get waiting lists down—is dependent on the NHS cancelling essential appointments and operations to meet Labour's election commitment to cut waiting lists, which it is failing to deliver?

**The First Minister:** John Swinney has to do a bit better than that. The waiting list commitment is to 2002. The simple point is that people throughout Scotland will welcome the fact that the Executive has taken some extraordinary steps this winter to ensure that we are prepared—there is £0.5 billion more this year and £60 million to prepare for winter pressures. Older people in Scotland will be more reassured by those facts than by the constant whingeing of the SNP.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** When the First Minister met the Secretary of State for Scotland, did he discuss the view expressed by Fiona Hyslop, who described SNP policy as contradictory and out of date? Does he agree with her view?

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Order. I have said before that the First Minister is not responsible for Opposition policies.

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** I will ask the First Minister a question from the real Opposition in Scotland.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he plans to raise. (S1F-708)

**The First Minister (Henry McLeish):** I am delighted that David McLetchie likes that description. I last met the Prime Minister on 23 October. I have no plans to meet him in the near future.

**David McLetchie:** I am disappointed to hear that, because if the First Minister were going to meet the Prime Minister, I am sure that the subject of law and order would come up in the discussions, given the Prime Minister's new-found and long-overdue concern about the issue.

I remind the First Minister that this week, commenting on the Chhokar case, his Minister for Justice, Jim Wallace, accused police officers in Scotland of being institutionally racist. To his way of thinking, the police are the only people in our society who are guilty until proven innocent. Does

the First Minister agree with that view?

**The First Minister:** That is a typically distorted perspective on law and order from the Conservatives. We discussed the Chhokar case at question time last week. It was important that that was done in a constructive environment. David McLetchie's attempt to play cheap politics with a sensitive issue is certainly not welcome, nor does it befit this chamber.

**David McLetchie:** I hope that the members of the press in the gallery noted the considerable finesse with which the First Minister failed to answer that question. The fact of the matter is that all this business about institutional racism is being used as a smokescreen. The real issue is not race but incompetence. The Chhokar case is just the latest in a long line of administrative disasters that have followed on from the Holyrood building project and the exams fiasco—issues on which the Executive has abdicated its responsibility and constantly tried to blame someone or something else. Instead of engaging in a lot of irresponsible talk about institutional racism, why does not the First Minister do something about the institutional incompetence at the heart of his Executive?

**The First Minister:** To comment on that question would be to dignify it. It was a disgraceful comment. The Chhokar case and racism in general relate to deep-seated issues that this chamber should take seriously. I do not intend to take Mr McLetchie's comments seriously.

**Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I wonder whether the First Minister will dignify question time by answering a question. When he next meets the Prime Minister, will he raise the issue of taxation in Scotland and ask him to explain whether it is fair that people in Scotland have to pay 20 per cent more in tax than the average for the UK, which they will do by this time next year? Why is Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom?

**The First Minister:** If the member supplied a paper explaining the question, it would be much easier to deal with it. The question is a typical illustration of SNP economic nonsense and distortion. The SNP seems not to have noticed that, in a week in which the party was beginning again to wax eloquent about the prospects for North sea oil and the economy, the price of oil went down by 18 per cent. What a nonsense to pretend that we could build a safe and secure economy on the back of a volatile oil price.

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** Will the First Minister discuss with the Prime Minister the implications for the Scottish budget of the stated fiscal plans of Mr McLetchie's party, which are to cut Government revenue and expenditure across the UK by £8 billion a year?

**The First Minister:** I relish that question. The Conservative party in Scotland has the same problems as William Hague has down south. I believe that the Conservatives are committed to an £8 billion cut. That will mean a massive cut in services.

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. I can only repeat what I said earlier. Ministers should not be asked questions about Opposition party policies.

### Education (Arts and Sport)

**3. Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Executive has to enhance the role of arts and sport in schools. (S1F-715)

**The First Minister (Henry McLeish):** Over the next three years, we have set aside £750,000 to carry out a pilot of cultural champions posts in schools throughout Scotland. Some £1.5 million will also be used to develop further the school sports co-ordinator programme and £2.8 million will be used to expand the active primary schools pilot to all parts of Scotland.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I welcome the First Minister's detailed answer to that question. Will he assure me that emphasis will continue to be placed on ensuring that that money is targeted to the most disadvantaged areas?

**The First Minister:** Yes. Sport and culture is important, and not only in relation to the need for coverage throughout the country. I know that our new Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture will ensure that that becomes a reality in every school.

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the First Minister accept that it is difficult to enhance the role of arts and sport in schools such as Lockerbie Primary School, which was burned down in an act of vandalism, and Lockerbie Academy, which is falling down? Will he ensure that the money that Mr McConnell announced is focused on projects such as those and that we have a report back on how the money has been spent relative to the maintenance of those buildings?

**The Presiding Officer:** I am slightly doubtful about whether I should allow that question, but I will let it pass.

**The First Minister:** I think that the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs has noted the question. However, I will say that we have spent an additional £17 million on schools. In discussion with local authorities, we will ensure that what David Mundell calls for happens.

### Fishing Industry

**4. Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Executive has to preserve jobs in the catching and processing sectors of Scotland's fishing industry. (S1F-701)

**The First Minister (Henry McLeish):** There is no doubt that many fish stocks are in a parlous state. We will argue strongly at the fisheries council next week that catch levels for 2001 should take into account both the need to preserve stocks and the socio-economic needs of areas that depend on fishing. Once the catch opportunities for Scottish fishermen are clear, we will assess their impact on the industry. However, I am pleased to note that Scottish Enterprise Grampian has responded quickly to our proposal to establish a working group to address the challenges facing Scottish fish processors.

**Brian Adam:** In addition to verbal support, will the First Minister offer financial support not only to Scottish Enterprise Grampian, but to the local authorities that are affected, so that they may do all that they can to assist with the restructuring of the industry and to increase the supply of fish from elsewhere?

**The First Minister:** I want the Executive to provide the maximum help for our fishing communities and for our fishermen. Two things are most important. First, we want to wait for the outcome of next week's negotiations on total allowable catches, which will give us more of a perspective on the situation that the industry finds itself in. Secondly, the working group that has been set up will wish to examine the specific needs of the processing sector. I will stay closely involved with Ross Finnie and with the UK Minister for Fisheries and the Countryside.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Jamie McGrigor to ask a supplementary—but not on the telephone.

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** In the event of fishing boats being tied up due to cuts in quotas, will the minister consider the idea of using and paying fishermen to test the technical conservation measures needed for the cod recovery plan? Will he push for European compensation to allay the hardship and poverty that fishermen and their families will undoubtedly suffer?

**The First Minister:** We are happy to consider those points. These are tough and testing times for the fishing industry—no one would deny that. It is helpful to wait for the outcome of next week's negotiations, so that we know the extent of some of the pressures that we will be facing. I promise Mr McGrigor that we will be wanting to discuss the way forward with people in the communities concerned and with representatives of fishing

interests.

### Scotland in Europe

**5. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive plans to promote Scotland in Europe. (S1F-713)

**The First Minister (Henry McLeish):** The Scottish Executive will promote Scotland by fostering links with smaller member states, with some accession states and with some of the more powerful regional Governments of the European Community; by seeking membership of influential European bodies; and by ensuring that the importance of the European Union to our future prosperity and security is widely understood by the people of Scotland.

**Mr McNeil:** I welcome the First Minister's description of Scotland's developing role in the European Union, which is to act with strength as part of the United Kingdom. Would the First Minister agree that, to better understand and promote Scotland's best interests through the European decision-making process, we should have active dialogue with other devolved Parliaments across Europe and with our own MEPs? Would not such an approach be in stark contrast to the Scottish National Party's priority of pulling Scotland out of Britain and, as a consequence, out of Europe?

**The First Minister:** I am pleased to respond positively to that question. We met MEPs in Europe during the week and we want to continue such links. I was delighted to see more Conservative MSPs in Brussels than I have ever seen before. I welcome their conversion to that positive policy.

Europe is absolutely vital for Scotland: 300,000 jobs depend on it and 63 per cent of our manufacturing exports are sent there. It is therefore important that we take Europe seriously. I say to the SNP that we are already sitting at the top table. The only difference between us and the SNP is that we do not have to break up Britain and be separate in order to enjoy that privilege.

**Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** With regard to Duncan McNeil's rather strange statement that if Scotland came out of Britain, we would come out of Europe, I could perhaps refer him to the legal views of the top two lawyers of the time.

**The Presiding Officer:** No—but you could ask a question.

**Dr Ewing:** They were Lord Mackenzie-Stuart and Mr Noe. In their opinion, Scotland would automatically remain in Europe—as would England. The treaty umbrella would continue to

apply.

**The First Minister:** Living in the real world, I am content to be at the top table as part of the United Kingdom. Scottish people also want to live in the real world. There are huge benefits to be drawn from Europe, which we are enjoying. I want that to continue. Once again, as was suggested in reference to Fiona Hyslop, the SNP still has no policies—here or in Europe.

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** Will the First Minister commit his Executive to the same degree of positive realism that was demonstrated the other day by the visiting Conservative delegation, which he was so obviously keen to see and happy to welcome?

**The First Minister:** They say that things can only get easier. I am delighted to respond positively to that question. However, there is a serious point about the quality of debate that we need in Scotland. I would like the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP and us to talk positively about Europe. We can have academic debates in the chamber but, at the end of the day, the people of Scotland are interested in jobs, investment and quality of life. I am convinced that, if we are at the heart of Europe, those objectives can be secured.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Although, sadly, I do not seem to have been invited, will the First Minister agree that the forthcoming nuptials of Madonna in Dornoch in my constituency will do much to promote Scotland in Europe and, indeed, the world?

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. The First Minister is responsible for many things, but Madonna is not one of them.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** On several occasions, the First Minister has mentioned that we are in the top league in relation to Europe. However, we are not at the top of the table. We have the lowest pensions, the lowest benefits and the lowest investment in health services in the whole of the European Union. Does the First Minister agree that we should be ashamed of our standards in relation to the European Union and that, if we became an independent socialist Scotland, that would get us not just to the top table, but to the top of the league?

**The First Minister:** I would rather have answered Jamie Stone's question about Madonna.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** The First Minister has said that we are at the top table in Europe. How many representatives of the Scottish Executive will be at the top table at the intergovernmental conference in Nice, and who

will those representatives be?

**The First Minister:** I expect better questions of Alex Neil. The point that we will constantly make is that, to get to the top table, Alex, you would have to break up Britain and become separate. We are devolutionists and we are at the top table. That is to the benefit of the whole of Scotland.

### Hospitals (Winter Pressures)

**6. Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** If I could return to earth and leave Mars behind, I wonder whether the First Minister recalls that following the winter crisis—

**The Presiding Officer:** You have not asked your first question.

**Ms MacDonald:** I know, but the First Minister knows what my first question is.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must read out your first question.

**Ms MacDonald:** Right, we will go through the form.

To ask the First Minister how he plans to recruit the required number of nurses for hospitals to cope with seasonal admissions this winter. (S1F-716)

**The First Minister (Henry McLeish):** I am sorry that standing orders force me to answer your first question before we get on to the real business. The recruitment of hospital nurses is a matter for national health service trusts. Across Scotland, trusts have made provision for an additional 700 beds over the winter period and for the extra nurses to staff those additional beds.

**Ms MacDonald:** Now that we have got that clear, does the First Minister remember that although after the winter crisis last year the Accounts Commission for Scotland admitted that agency nursing staff were an important resource, which should be called on, it said that they should be recruited only to fill unforeseen staff shortages or in unforeseen, unplanned emergencies? I was glad that on Monday the Minister for Health and Community Care said that she was planning ahead for the winter crisis. However, she also said that part of the plan was to recruit the extra supply of nurses from nursing banks. As the Accounts Commission said that that should be done only to deal with unforeseen circumstances, how does the First Minister intend to recruit the nurses that will be required this winter and to maintain services in elective surgery and so on, to which my colleague John Swinney referred and on which he did not receive an answer?

**The First Minister:** The Minister for Health and Community Care and I agree with Margo MacDonald that the use of nursing banks should

be appropriate.

On winter recruitment in Lothian, approximately 240 additional nursing staff have been taken on. We intend that Lothian should have sufficient nursing staff to implement its winter plan. I hope that Margo MacDonald is reassured. I also hope that the whole chamber will join me in congratulating her on becoming maverick of the year at the recent awards dinner sponsored by *The Herald*. [Applause.]

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** Will the First Minister tell the chamber how he expects the appointment of nurse consultants, a further nine of which posts were announced by the Minister for Health and Community Care earlier this week, to help with the retention and recruitment of nurses and with seasonal admissions? Will he give us the detailed job description of the nurse consultants, say how many more the Executive expects to appoint and indicate how much direct contact nurse consultants will have with patients?

**The First Minister:** I welcome Keith Raffan back to the chamber. We are keen to retain NHS staff and to boost morale. The steps taken by the Minister for Health and Community Care are part of that. We want an NHS in which the staff feel that they are making an enormous contribution. One way to do that is to offer progress, which is what we are doing.

## Points of Order

15:31

**Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on a matter of this Parliament's competence—how to deal with the consequences of the motion of censure that I lodged today on Muir Russell's inability to fulfil his functions to the standards required of this Parliament. I cannot find in either the standing orders of the Parliament or the Scotland Act 1998 a means of dealing effectively with what the Audit Committee found to be a shortcoming on the permanent secretary's part, because he is not a servant of the Parliament or answerable to it but is employed by the civil service of the Westminster Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** You must ask questions of ministers, because ministers, not civil servants, are answerable to the Parliament. That is a clear policy.

**Ms MacDonald:** I wish to move a motion of censure. Surely the Parliament can move a motion of censure.

**The Presiding Officer:** Have you lodged a motion?

**Ms MacDonald:** I have lodged a motion today and it has been accepted.

**The Presiding Officer:** In that case, it is entirely a matter of whether the motion is selected for debate. Your motion is no different from any other motion in that respect.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My point relates to the question that I asked the First Minister during question time. If it is out of order for members to ask questions on Opposition party policies, is it not equally out of order for members to ask the First Minister about reserved matters?

**The Presiding Officer:** You are correct. It is not in order to ask about reserved matters except where ministers are being asked to make representation on reserved matters, which is in order.

## Alcohol Misuse

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We now come to the debate on motion S1M-1434, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on the development of a national alcohol misuse strategy. One amendment to the motion has been lodged.

15:33

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** I welcome this opportunity to engage the Parliament's support for our plans to develop a new alcohol misuse strategy, in the form of a national action plan. I know from the debate last month on Donald Gorrie's motion that there is considerable interest in this issue among members. I will start by examining some of the issues with which we must grapple and then outline how we propose to take things forward.

Drinks containing alcohol have been part of the social and cultural fabric of societies across the world since ancient times. Alcohol has long been associated with relaxation, individual enjoyment and community celebration. For most people in Scotland, it does not create problems, but there are worrying trends in excessive and irresponsible drinking, particularly among our young people but certainly not confined to that group. It creates problems not only for the individuals concerned but for society as a whole.

There is no doubt that if we are to look objectively at alcohol consumption and tackle alcohol misuse, we have first to acknowledge and accept its place in Scotland's social and cultural fabric. We then need to recognise the complexities of the issues involved. The response needs to be many faceted, as is the problem. There are no quick or simple solutions.

There is a positive side: in moderation and at the right time and place, alcohol can be included in healthy lifestyles. Moreover, the production and distribution of alcohol plays an important part in the Scottish economy. For example, the Scotch whisky industry provides direct employment for more than 11,000 people and indirect employment for a further 30,000.

On the negative side, excessive drinking carries a heavy toll in illness, accidents, anti-social behaviour and criminal acts of violence. From health complications to career and relationship breakdowns, alcohol has the potential to ruin lives. Its costs in personal, social and economic terms are great. Unfortunately, that is often hidden or unheeded. Alcohol is undeniably linked to road deaths, lower achievement, poor physical and mental health, family breakdown and poor

employment prospects.

Sadly, 14—yes, 14—appears to be a milestone, with most teenagers having begun to drink by the age of 15. There is also evidence to suggest that youngsters who smoke and drink are more likely to experiment with illegal drugs.

Scottish health survey figures that were published this week suggest that 33 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women are exceeding the recommended weekly limits. Those figures suggest that we need to do far more to make people aware of the health and other consequences of regularly exceeding the recommended limits. Some studies suggest that there may be as many as 3,000 to 4,000 alcohol-related deaths each year. Alcohol misuse also contributes significantly to crime levels through offences such as being drunk and disorderly in public and through offences—especially violent offences—committed under the influence of alcohol.

Alcohol misuse is not, of course, a new phenomenon. Successive Governments have attempted to tackle the problem. Some measures have been successful—most notably in drinking and driving. There are already many initiatives to address alcohol misuse. The Scottish Advisory Committee on Alcohol Misuse, which brings together representatives from all key sectors—from the health sector, local authorities, the police, the drinks industry, the licensed trade and the voluntary sector—was set up last year to advise on the development of the new strategy. Among others, the committee has focused on two key issues: service provision for those with alcohol problems and an evidence-based approach to prevention and health promotion. As members who were present at the earlier debate will know, I have now taken over the chair of that committee to give its work added political impetus.

As I said during the earlier debate, work is continuing on the development of a nationally recognisable proof-of-age card, through pilots being conducted in Glasgow and Angus in co-operation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Young Scot. Moreover, the Executive is still supporting the work of alcohol misuse co-ordinating committees that were set up locally to ensure that measures and services are in place to tackle alcohol misuse. Those local partnerships involve representatives from all key interests—in health, local authorities, police and licensing. In addition, we are funding schemes such as server intervention programme Scotland, which provides training for licensees and their staff, and—in partnership with the Health Education Board for Scotland and the Scottish Council on Alcohol—Drinkwise. Overall, £2.5 million has been made available over three years

to help support the development of a strategy.

**Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):**

Spending £2.5 million on the strategy for dealing with alcohol misuse is welcome, but measures for tackling drug misuse received £100 million from the Executive. That was obviously welcome, but does the minister agree that the proportion of money being spent on alcohol services is very small when we consider that the alcohol problem is much bigger?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** One thing that the Scottish advisory committee is considering is the level of services that are provided locally. The £2.5 million is for strategic development. A lot of money is spent on that in health board, local authority and voluntary sector budgets. I am not being complacent; I want to point out that a lot more than £2.5 million is being spent. We want to have an overview of that and, clearly, the development of services will be a key part of the action plan.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** In the members' business debate on alcohol misuse, the minister addressed that point and said that £2.5 million was earmarked for strategic development. He also said:

"However, much more money than that is being used."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2000; Vol 8, c 1623.]

That was a month ago. Given the imbalance in the amount of money that is spent on other drug issues—bad as those are—will the minister be more specific about how much money is being spent on alcohol misuse?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** As I said, that is something the advisory committee is considering. I will ensure that we get some figures on that in the near future.

I recently attended my first meeting as chairman of the advisory committee at which, to inform prevention efforts, members took evidence from a range of experts on the factors that might encourage alcohol misuse and those that might protect against it. It gave us a fascinating insight. There is no doubt that marketing and the media influence behaviour, particularly among young people.

Where do we go from here? When considering national action, we are not starting with a blank sheet of paper, but we need to build upon, develop and reinforce all the good work that is going on. The Executive plans to bring all the various strands together into a comprehensive plan for action, which will act as a framework for action for all concerned at national and local levels.

We also wish to consult much more widely. I am pleased to announce that, early next year, we will begin an inclusive consultation process to take

place over six months leading to the production—by the end of next year—of a comprehensive action plan on alcohol misuse. It will emphasise the partnership nature of policy development on alcohol misuse and help us to shape the shared action plan.

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** Will the member give way?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I will give way in a moment. I must make some progress first.

We must all bear in mind that we are dealing with complex social policy issues. There are many influences that impact on our drinking patterns. If we are to make progress in reducing the harm caused by alcohol, it is vital that we ensure ownership of the strategy and that the views of all with an interest are taken into account in its development. Action is not for the Executive alone, but for many groups—individuals, parents, all those who work with children and young people, industry, the retail and licensed trade, employers, the national health service, local authorities, voluntary organisations, the police and last, but by no means least, the Scottish Parliament.

**Mr Raffan:** Could the minister clarify a comment that he made in the debate on alcohol misuse that was secured by Donald Gorrie? He said that the Executive was

“still considering the question whether we should develop a joint strategy”—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2000; Vol 8, c 1623.]

on alcohol and drug misuse. If he is going to develop a strategy with SACAM, will that committee interact with the Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse to ensure that there is a joint strategy on alcohol and drug misuse? The Executive's thinking seems far from clear.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** You have one minute left, Mr Chisholm.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I was told that I had 15 minutes to speak.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but you have only 10 minutes.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** That is a major problem. There has clearly been a breakdown in communication. I will make two brief announcements.

There is strong support for an overhaul of current licensing law. Licensing laws have generally stood the test of time and are not systematically failing. Nevertheless, we have looked carefully at all the arguments. I am pleased to announce that we have decided that the time has come for a comprehensive review of licensing laws. An independent committee with a fairly wide-

ranging remit will conduct the review. Full details of the membership of the committee and how the review will be conducted will be announced in due course.

I am also pleased to announce that the Executive will launch a new television commercial set in a hospital casualty department on a busy Friday night. The commercial graphically illustrates the strong links between alcohol and the results of alcohol-induced violence. It does so by locating a bar behind the accident and emergency reception desk, which continues to serve drinks as injured patients move around it. The aim of the commercial is to demonstrate the cost to us all of inappropriate drinking and to encourage us to see that type of behaviour as socially unacceptable.

I hope that members will recognise that we have listened to what has been said before. We wish to engage with the Parliament, the alcohol misuse field and the public in general, in reaching the final shape of our action plan. The Executive is committed to act and trusts that others will play their part also.

I move,

That the Parliament endorses the Executive's plans to work towards the publication of a national action plan to tackle alcohol misuse.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I should explain that the time limit for opening and closing speeches depends on the length of the debate. As a strict rule, in a debate of this length, the opening speaker has 10 minutes. I am sorry if the minister thought otherwise.

**Mr Raffan:** On a point of order. How much time do we get?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I would have told you before you spoke, but for your information you get five minutes.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** On a point of order. The minister finished his remarks so quickly that it was not clear whether he was accepting the Conservative amendment, but I take it that he is.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will address that at the close of the debate.

I call Mr Keith Harding. You have seven minutes.

15:45

**Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Seven minutes?

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** So there will be at least five minutes to spare then. [Laughter.]

**Mr Harding:** That leaves two minutes then.

I lodged a motion last year calling on the Executive to review the terms of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976. Our amendment to the motion reaffirms that call to bring Scottish licensing practice up to date. I welcome the Executive's announcement that an independent review of the licensing laws is to take place.

Alcohol misuse affects many individuals, families and communities. To change things for the better, we must change the cultural approach to alcohol in Scotland. That needs a licensing system that is in line with modern attitudes and today's social outlook.

One major issue that must be addressed—my colleagues will address others—is under-age drinking. Many people find their local public places vandalised and blighted by gangs of anti-social youths involved in illicit drinking. The automatic reaction is to call for additional legislative powers and direct Government action. That is wrong, and a legal crackdown on drinking would have a detrimental effect, as prohibition did in America. The alternative is nothing less than a wholesale change in the culture of drinking in Scotland, to bring our attitudes more into line with our neighbours in southern Europe.

Since the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 was introduced, society and social patterns have changed considerably. One of the issues that must now be addressed is whether there is a case for reducing the age at which a young person can legally drink in a public house. We already have the anomaly that a 16-year-old can have a glass of wine with a meal, but not drink beer or spirits.

In Greece, the legal age at which drink can be purchased and consumed is 13, and in Spain it is 14. Those countries do not have under-age drinking problems like ours. In those countries, there is a social stigma in getting drunk, and drinking is seen as a social occasion. Here, young people go out not just to socialise, but specifically to get drunk.

The cultural difference is marked. The anti-social behaviour associated with illicit under-age drinking that we see in this country is not nearly so widespread in southern Europe. The European Commission has only just released findings showing that

“more than half of 15 year old boys and girls reported having been drunk two times or more”

in their lifetime

“in Denmark, Finland, England, Scotland and Wales, whereas the corresponding percentages were below 30% for boys and girls in France and Greece. The clear geographical pattern, with students from South European countries reporting low levels of drunkenness in sharp contrast to certain Northern European countries, persists in

15-year-olds reporting having been drunk 10 times or more.”

That is no accident; it is based on attitudes formed by northern European licensing systems that encourage teenagers to see alcohol as an illicit substance to treasure as a forbidden fruit and make part of a rights-of-passage rebellion. Against that background, I would like to see a full investigation to determine the best age limit for alcohol consumption in a modern society. I emphasise that I am not calling for a reduction in the drinking age. We simply wish to investigate the matter to determine why such material differences arise.

Drinking in pubs, when properly enforced, is socially inclusive and controlled. Drinking illicitly in public places causes vandalism, nuisance and violence, and excludes our youth from responsible attitudes to drink that are found in our wider society. Any change to promote sensible drinking must involve parents. Their role does not appear to be emphasised enough in the Executive's approach, but it should be included in education programmes that are delivered in schools to inform young people about sensible drinking.

The Portman Group, in response to recent changes to licensing in England, has said:

“small quantities of alcohol consumed at home under parental supervision can provide a training ground for sensible and moderate drinking later in life . . . It does not make sense to have one rule for home and another rule for the pub/restaurant; the key issue is parental responsibility.”

That logical argument was used for a change to the laws on alcohol with food, but it needs investigation in a wider context.

If we can encourage sensible legal drinking in a controlled environment, we can cut the cost of illicit drinking to our communities and reduce the burden on police resources. I asked the Executive to consider the need for a fresh look at licensing; I am delighted to hear that that will happen. Combined with continued, realistic education programmes and the involvement of parents, the attitudes of young people could be transformed. If we do that, we will change the future culture of drinking in Scotland and produce lasting benefits.

I move amendment S1M-1343.1, to leave out from “endorses” to end and insert:

“notes the Executive's plans to work towards the publication of a national action plan to tackle alcohol misuse and calls upon the Executive to review the terms of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 in order that licensing practices are brought into line with modern attitudes and social outlooks.”

15:50

**Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):**



On behalf of the SNP, I welcome the debate on the national alcohol misuse strategy. The debate is well overdue, as it is more than a year since the Executive first promised to hold it. Furthermore, we will not see the strategy until October next year, which means that it will take the Executive two and a half years to come up with an alcohol strategy for Scotland. That is not good enough.

We are all comfortable discussing and condemning drug use, but we are less comfortable with alcohol for the simple reason that it is something that we all—or most of us—drink, and most of us enjoy, particularly at this time of year. However, it is not all joy and merriment when one in five people in Scotland worries about their own or someone else's drinking. Statistically speaking, at least 25 members of the Parliament have a drink problem or know someone who does.

Let us be clear. Alcohol is a major public health issue in Scotland. Scotland has a drinking culture and the definition of a good time is often based on how paralytic someone got the night before. Alcohol costs us dearly, socially and economically. Alcohol misuse is an important cause of social exclusion, and the despair caused by poverty and unemployment often leads people to alcohol for comfort.

At least 85,000 children in Scotland live with a problem drinker. The problem remains largely hidden, yet we know that drink is a common factor in family break-ups and has clear links to domestic violence. Many children suffer psychological and physical abuse or neglect because of alcohol misuse.

Crime and violence are linked to alcohol misuse. Drink is involved in 65 per cent of murders, 75 per cent of stabbings and 41 per cent of assaults and muggings. It is interesting to note that one in five of all violent crimes takes place in and around licensed premises. Therefore, the review of liquor licensing law is to be welcomed.

The economic impact of alcohol is huge. Each year 14 million working days are lost because of alcohol-related problems and 25 per cent of accidents at work involve workers who misuse alcohol. Alcohol misuse puts a strain on our health service. The estimated annual cost of hospital treatment for alcohol-related illnesses in Scotland amounts to £180 million. One in seven acute hospital admissions relates to the misuse of alcohol.

The number of alcohol-related deaths in Scotland is increasing. A conservative estimate puts the number at about 3,000 a year, which is 10 times the number who die from taking illicit drugs. Despite that, the resources that are dedicated to alcohol misuse are small compared with those dedicated to tackling drugs. As I said to the

minister, the £100 million of new Executive money that will be invested in drug-related services in the next three years is welcome, but there is no matching commitment for alcohol services and initiatives. In the light of the evidence of the harm that is caused to society by alcohol misuse compared with drug misuse, that decision seems hard to justify.

How do we begin to tackle our drinking culture?

**Mr Raffan:** Shona Robison rightly welcomed the extra money for tackling drug misuse. Does she agree that to tackle the patchy treatment and after-care for drug misuse throughout the country, even that amount of money is inadequate?

**Shona Robison:** I agree. However, the amount for drug-related services is significantly more than that for alcohol-related services.

I will return to how we tackle our drinking culture. Gone are the days of prohibitionist candidates such as Neddy Scrymgeour, who ousted Churchill from Dundee in 1922 with a landslide victory on the back of doing away with the demon drink. A platform of such candidates in next year's general election would not work in quite the same way. Instead, we need a strategy that is suited to Scotland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The proposed strategy provides us with an opportunity to consider new ways of tackling alcohol misuse. If we are to have a fresh look at the problem, the collection of information about what works and what does not is important. We need to know what the problems are before we can tackle them and we must define what we are talking about when we discuss alcohol misuse. We must have different strategies to deal with the binge drinker, who tends to be younger and who may become involved in associated violence and criminal activity because of their drinking.

We must also address under-age drinking. The SNP supports the use of proof-of-age card schemes as one way of reducing access to alcohol. We should be concerned about under-age drinking when we consider that 40 per cent of 13 to 14-year-olds were drunk when they first had sexual intercourse, leading to unsafe sex and unplanned pregnancies. We must examine the role played by alcohol as the gateway drug to illicit drug use by young people, as there appears to be evidence that alcohol plays an important role.

The strategy for under-age drinkers will be different from the strategy that targets consistently heavy drinkers, who could be described as alcoholics and tend to be older. Some people in that group will not stop drinking and will require support to enable them to stay at home, which would prevent their admission to acute hospital beds. That strategy will include having an adequate number of beds available in

rehabilitation units, such as Castle Craig in West Linton, although that will have implications for community care budgets, which have always struggled to cope with that difficult client group. I hope that the minister will confirm that he will consider that issue.

The development of a more coherent prevention strategy is crucial. We must put an end to the confusing mixed messages about alcohol consumption. We must evaluate how helpful it is to talk about the number of units that are good, or bad, for people, rather than trying to help people to identify whether alcohol is becoming a problem for them and whether it affects their health, relationships or ability to hold down a job.

Any strategy needs to be backed up with adequate resources. Although the £2.5 million that has been earmarked for the development of the strategy is welcome, there is no indication of whether there will be a significant injection of resources for preventive work and service provision. I hope that the minister will give us an indication as to whether significant additional resources for the strategy will be forthcoming. Is there an argument for the hypothecation of some of the massive £660 million that is generated through the Scottish alcohol revenues that are due to be collected this year alone? Perhaps the minister will tell us what he thinks of that.

The Scottish Council on Alcohol, which has 30 years of experience in the field, struggles financially. Local councils on alcohol are integral to the strategic delivery of special alcohol services, yet they are funded on a shoestring, often through charitable donations, and they do not know from year to year where their funding will come from. The Scottish Council on Alcohol must be funded adequately. I hope that the minister will address that point.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Shona Robison:** I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

The strategy must be ambitious, but such ambition is not reflected in the targets that are set in "Towards a Healthier Scotland" for reducing the incidence of adults who exceed weekly alcohol limits. The target for men is a mammoth 2 per cent decrease between 1995 and 2005 and, for women, a 1 per cent decrease for the same period. The Executive must raise its ambitions somewhat.

We must have a national alcohol strategy that is modelled specifically on Scottish needs but is of an international standard.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please wind up.

**Shona Robison:** We must remember that the

vast majority of Scottish people who consume alcohol use it sensibly and responsibly. However, alcohol is a problem for a sizeable proportion of the population who are affected either directly or indirectly by alcohol misuse.

I will conclude with the Scottish Council on Alcohol's comments.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Very briefly, please.

**Shona Robison:** The Scottish Council on Alcohol says:

"Scotland requires an alcohol strategy which will have a positive impact on our drinking behaviour and which will adequately fund services to those who need them."

We hope that the strategy that is to be produced next October will achieve that aim.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Keith Raffan. As I said, Mr Raffan, you have five minutes.

15:59

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I am sorry to see that the minister appears to be leaving. I hope that he will return to the chamber shortly, because it is traditional for ministers to sit through the whole debate, particularly if the debate is on a subject as serious as alcohol misuse.

I have been involved in drug misuse issues since the mid-1980s, when I took the Controlled Drugs (Penalties) Act 1985 through the House of Commons at Westminster. I have been involved even more intensively in the Scottish Parliament as a member of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, which instigated the inquiry into drug misuse and deprived communities, and as convener of the cross-party group on drug misuse.

I am increasingly concerned that drug misuse is overshadowing and grabbing the headlines from an equally serious problem that affects even more people in Scotland—alcohol misuse. Today, the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee published its report on drug misuse in deprived communities. It estimates, conservatively, that there are 30,000 drug injectors in Scotland. I think that the more likely figure—the one that the cross-party group came up with—is probably more than 40,000. At least five times as many people in Scotland—200,000—are problem drinkers.

My next statistic is slightly at variance with Shona Robison's, but it is still dramatic. More than 10 times as many deaths are alcohol related as are drug related. We had 136 drug-related deaths in 1998, but there were at least 1,800 deaths in the same year as a result of alcohol misuse, which

represents a doubling over a 20-year period.

I do not want to deluge the chamber with statistics, but I shall do so very briefly. Sixty-five per cent of murders, 56 per cent of fire fatalities, 52 per cent of wife-battering cases, 50 per cent of rapes and 25 per cent of road deaths are alcohol related. I am indebted to the *British Medical Journal* for most of those statistics. The cost to industry is at least £2 billion and the cost to the NHS in Scotland is estimated at around £180 million, but I suspect that the true figure is much higher.

I am sorry that Malcolm Chisholm is not in the chamber. I am really quite put out by that, because I feel that he should have stayed for the entire debate, particularly for the opening speeches.

Earlier today, I criticised the Scottish Executive's funding of drug misuse treatment and rehabilitation as "woefully inadequate". The service is far too patchy over Scotland as a whole. As Shona Robison said, the figure for 1999-2000 was £143.5 million for tackling drug misuse. That did not cover only treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare; it also covered enforcement, education and other matters—I do not want to be unfair to the Executive. In the same period, however, the Executive and the Health Education Board for Scotland spent directly £1.3 million on alcohol misuse.

In Donald Gorrie's debate and again today, Christine Grahame criticised the minister about the £2.5 million—a different figure—and he said that it is for "strategic development". In winding up Donald Gorrie's debate, Malcolm Chisholm said that

"much more money than that is being used. There are services in each health board area to help with alcohol problems, while health education programmes are in place and there has been action on the criminal justice side to address public disorder issues."

I am glad to see that he has now come back into the chamber. Will the minister who is winding up today tell us exactly how much more money is being spent, or will we have to submit detailed written questions, which will no doubt take weeks to answer, as they normally do? My being ill made no difference; it took the Executive longer than the period I was away to answer a written question. We need a breakdown of that spending so that we are not in the dark. I very much doubt if the money being spent by the Executive on tackling alcohol misuse comes remotely close to what is being spent on drug misuse.

Treatment facilities have been mentioned. According to the Carstairs index, 17 times as many people from deprived areas as from affluent ones are being admitted to hospital for drug-related problems. For alcohol problems, the figure

is 10 times higher. The resources allocated to health boards do not seem to reflect that. There are woefully few residential beds: 120 for drug misuse in Scotland as a whole and, I think, just short of 300 for drug and alcohol misuse. Earlier today, I said, perhaps rather unkindly, that Florence Nightingale had more beds at her disposal during the Crimean war than we have for tackling the very serious problem of drug and alcohol misuse.

The motion says that

"the Parliament endorses the Executive's plans to work towards"

a strategy. God! I have never seen anything so tentative in my life. It does not exactly have the smack of firm government or a sense of urgency about it. The minister's predecessor, Iain Gray, who is sitting next to him, told me on 1 June that the Executive will take "18 months or so" to draw up a strategy. It is going to consult, then give us a draft strategy, then consult again.

I know that ministers have set targets, which I welcome, in "Towards a Healthier Scotland", but we need a strategy and so far it seems to be in an embryonic state. I raised that question with the minister before. I know that he was short of time, but perhaps he can give us an answer this afternoon. Are ministers still considering a joint alcohol and drug misuse strategy, or not? Malcolm Chisholm is right to say that there is a relationship between drugs and alcohol. There is cross-addiction and alcohol is seen as a gateway drug to the use of hard drugs. He is also right to say that several drug action teams deal with alcohol within their remit. However, during Donald Gorrie's debate, he said, somewhat mystifyingly, that

"we should recognise the value of addressing drugs and alcohol misuse jointly at local level in some parts of the country."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2000; Vol 8, c 1623.]

What is the value of addressing the problems jointly, and why should we do it in some parts of the country and not others? Those are elementary questions, dear Chisholm, elementary. Let us have some elementary answers.

I said earlier today that the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report into drug misuse and deprived communities, which has been published today, is a wake-up call to the Executive. I hope that the same is true of this debate.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move now to the open part of the debate. A large number of members have indicated that they wish to speak, so I ask members to keep their contributions to four minutes.

16:05

**Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** I am concerned that we give out mixed messages on this issue. As adults, we often say that it is okay to have the odd drink, as long as it is in moderation. However, we do not define what we mean by moderation. One day we might think that it is quite amusing if someone has had a bit too much to drink and is playing around. However, the next day we might be irritated and appalled by the fact that somebody—perhaps a young person who is not as used to alcohol as an older person—has had too much to drink.

We are inconsistent in our attitudes. Headlines such as “Snifter makes brains brighter”, which appeared in *The Herald* this morning, do not help. The headline suggested that people who drink are brainier than those who do not. A fuller explanation was given in the report, which indicated that moderate drinking has been shown to help brain cells. However, even the term “moderate drinking” is ambiguous. Moderate drinking is not the same to one person as it is to another. For physiological and other reasons, tolerance of alcohol differs from one individual to the next.

I know that advertising is not one of Parliament’s responsibilities, but we are also inconsistent in that regard because we give out mixed messages. A high percentage of TV adverts, particularly at this time of year, relate to alcohol. Many people find that in sport there are too many references to alcohol. Far too many of our sports teams are sponsored by drinks companies, which indicates to young people that it is okay to drink. How do we stop that message going out to people who get caught up in drinking too much?

Despite recent price increases, alcohol is still very available. Gone are the days when it was available only in a pub or off-licence that had restricted opening hours. I am a little worried that the Conservative amendment might suggest that we remove all restrictions. One has only to walk into a supermarket or local corner shop to see that alcohol is readily available. That is fine if a person is what is termed a social drinker. However, if a person is not mature enough to handle the effects of alcohol, or if they have dependency problems, the pressures of being faced with that on a daily basis, when they are in a shop buying their bread and milk, can be huge. As legislators, we have just as much responsibility for protecting such people as we have for making alcohol more available.

A recent example of availability going too far comes from my area, which is West Lothian. An application was made to the licensing board for alcohol to be sold in the shop at a petrol station. The council turned it down, but there might be an appeal. We are all clear about the fact that alcohol

and driving do not mix. For those who can take alcohol in reasonable measures, that may not be an issue, but if we put alcohol in a place where it is available to people who are driving, that might prove too great a temptation to some. We should not put people in that position. One alcohol-related accident, particularly one in which there are serious injuries or fatalities, is one too many.

There is a role in this for education. Children and young people should be taught how to use alcohol and they should be given all the information that is available on its effects. Recently, I visited the West Lothian Drug and Alcohol Service. It is doing excellent work in education projects, but it shares the concerns that have been expressed about the resources that are available for alcohol-specific projects. I hope that any working group that considers the matter will recognise that those projects will have difficulties in achieving their aims if they do not have the resources to take their work forward.

16:10

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I apologise for my sore throat.

I welcome the minister’s announcements, but I would have liked more money to have been made available. Perhaps he could persuade the drinks companies that they should, as Shona Robison said, put some of their profits into an advertising campaign or give it to the Executive. They have a responsibility to the consumers of their products.

We all know that alcohol abuse is a serious problem in Scotland—there is no denying that. We have the facts and figures. Colleagues will give the chamber those facts and figures, which relate to crime, illness, age groups and so on. However, I will talk about the human suffering that is caused by over-indulgence—as I call it—in drink.

Most members will have been affected—personally or in their constituency—in one way or another by the consequences of somebody having a drink problem. We must ask why Scotland has this terrible drink problem and this culture of heavy drinking. In pubs, many men—young and not so young, as Malcolm Chisholm mentioned—buy round for round. Is that done to uphold a macho image? Are they too scared to say no to their friends and colleagues? Something must be done about it.

Why do women—young and old—drink over the limit? Why do they drink constantly and abuse their health and that of the people around them? Are they trying to hide something? Is it for comfort? Is it to try to emulate men? We must find out the facts and figures. I hope that the information that we get from the strategy will produce answers to those questions. As

colleagues have said, we will never be able to tackle the problem until we get to the root of it, which I sincerely hope we will do.

Misuse of alcohol affects not only the person who drinks; it affects those around them, sometimes in terrible ways. Take the example of families who cower in their homes because they are terrified of somebody who misuses drink coming home at night. It could be a parent or even a child. They are terrified and do not know what to expect, but they know for sure that what they are going to get will not be pleasant.

Consider the child whose parents have an alcohol problem. That child cannot tell parents, teachers or their friends about what is happening at home. The child might under perform at school. Who can they go to? They cannot cope. They are frightened to bring their friends home because one of their parents might be drunk. What sort of future does that offer young children? We have those problems in Scotland and we must tackle them.

Many people lose their jobs through abuse of alcohol. Consider the people who lose their houses through alcohol abuse. It affects not only them, but their families. People lose their jobs, their homes and their self-respect.

Unlike Keith Raffan, I welcome the strategy, even if it is 18 months late. If we can get this right in Scotland, Parliament will have something to be proud of. I will endorse the strategy happily and I hope that we can stop this scourge.

16:13

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)**  
(**Con**): I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate, in support of Keith Harding's amendment, which seeks to add to the minister's motion. The difference is between the words "endorses" and "notes". I hope that the minister understands that we found it difficult to accept "endorses" because, at that point, we did not know what we might be called on to endorse.

I look forward to hearing whether the minister feels able to accept the amendment. This is a serious subject, but it also has its lighter side. We must strike a balance between examining the ramifications of alcohol abuse and recognising that many people enjoy a good dram, a good pint, an advocaat and lemonade or whatever is their tipple.

**Malcolm Chisholm**: It would probably be courteous to respond briefly to the amendment now. Although we are pleased that Tory members welcome the announcement of the review, we think that the last six words of the amendment will mean quite different things to different people. Furthermore, we feel that the reason that is outlined in the amendment for conducting the

review should not be the only reason. Health and public order considerations are also very important. However, although we do not accept the amendment, we welcome the fact that there is agreement on the substantive issue of the review.

**Mr Monteith**: I thank the minister for clarifying that point and I am sure that Bill Aitken will pick up on it when he closes for the Conservatives. I noticed that, when the debate opened, the Minister for Health and Community Care was sitting on the front benches, which led me to wonder whether there might be further announcements about some kind of tsar—we have, after all, a drugs tsar and a fat tsar. I was a little concerned that we might end up with a booze tsar, which would allow people to say, "It's all right, hen—I'm off to the boozier." We should not give people such an easy excuse to abuse alcohol.

Members should forgive me if I concentrate on licensing, which is the subject of our amendment. However, I do so for the simple reason that licensing laws represent our culture written into legislation and it is the culture that we must change. If we can do that, many of the problems that are associated with alcohol abuse might at least be alleviated.

The current licensing system is quite complicated. As the Scottish Parliament information centre research note points out, there are many different types of licence. There are public house licences; off-sales licences; hotel licences; restricted hotel licences; restaurant licences; and refreshment and entertainment licences. I am sure that we can simplify that range of licences.

On top of that, licensees are also required to seek environmental health and fire licences. As the Executive has suggested, it might be possible to reduce the amount of regulation and bureaucracy if a way can be found to simplify the incorporation of those licences in applications from public houses or restaurants.

There is also the question whether a licence can be refused because of overprovision. Many people will have found in cities abroad that certain areas become famous for their range of restaurants and public houses—although in a sense, restaurants and public houses can often merge. The market is better able to decide that issue, because there are other aspects within the licensing system that would allow restrictions with regard to loss of amenity. Moreover, the issue of permitted hours certainly bears exploration. Because licensees are restricted in those hours, they have to apply for extensions. That is a situation that we should review.

We should also review the application of licensing restrictions to sports grounds. There is a

considerable difference in this respect between Scotland and England. Drinking is still permitted in English sports grounds and there do not seem to be the same accompanying problems.

I support Keith Harding's amendment. By changing our licensing system, we can change cultural attitudes within the law, which would have the benefit of reducing the sad impact of alcohol misuse on some people.

16:19

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** I am sure that it will be no surprise to members to find that alcohol has been a significant factor in Scotland's economic, social and cultural spheres for many decades. It seems ironic that we are, as a nation, proud to support and welcome the revenue that the Treasury receives from the production of alcohol in Scotland. We claim to be the world leaders in the field and we identify the industry as being in the premier league of Scottish exporters—a proud record indeed.

However, we look with blinkered vision on the problems that are associated with the misuse of alcohol. I am sure that it has occurred to many members—it has occurred to me on several occasions—that we should encourage more exportation of our alcoholic products. That would reduce the amount that was available for consumption in Scotland, which would lead to less abuse and misuse of alcohol.

It is estimated that 90 per cent of Scottish adults drink to some extent. We must be prepared to accept that the abuse and misuse of alcohol is not confined to any specific sector of society, social group or area. It invades every community, both urban and rural. It is evident in our cities and on the streets of our quiet villages. It destroys homes, families and marriages daily and creates an unacceptable burden on our social services, our police and our hospital and medical services.

The latest statistics show that alcohol abuse contributes to at least 25 times as many deaths as drug abuse in the United Kingdom, but it receives far less attention from the Government. We must as a priority address—in the context of the level of funding that is allocated to addressing drug misuse—the level of funding that is allocated to addressing alcohol abuse. The latest figures, which were collated in 1998, suggest that we spent £1.275 million centrally to support cases of alcohol misuse. However, we spent a staggering £143.5 million on tackling drugs misuse, which is a disproportionate allocation of funds.

I speak with a little experience, as someone who has succumbed to alcohol abuse in the past. Happily—or miraculously—I survived. As a

consequence, I am pleased to support the Executive's initiative to develop a national strategy to address the issue of alcohol abuse. That strategy must be supported by a guarantee of substantial and appropriate funding. I would like Parliament to move ahead with diligence and enthusiasm, so that we can secure a national strategy sooner rather than later. I am pleased to support the Executive's initiative.

16:23

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** Years ago, I worked in a laboratory in London. On one occasion, I had a conversation with a colleague from Peshawar, in Pakistan, about another gentleman from the Indian subcontinent—I suppose that we were gossiping. My colleague said that the gentleman drank quite a lot, but I expressed some doubt because of the man's religious background. To that, and to my shock, my colleague replied, "Nonsense. He drinks like a Scot." My colleague was immediately embarrassed at having made such a racist remark concerning my nationality.

Even 17 years later, I remember that incident, because it drove home to me the international reputation that Scots have as alcohol abusers. It is not just a Scottish problem; there is a problem with binge drinking in the United Kingdom—as other members have said—which seems to be shared with other far northern countries. I do not know whether that is a result of the climate or the fact that we have few hours of light in the winter, but we seem to have that problem. I am concerned that binge drinking appears to be culturally acceptable here. It worries me that television and radio programmes that are aimed specifically at young audiences often promote alcohol abuse and binge drinking, implying that it is cool to be out of one's face or to have a hangover.

Being very drunk has long been seen as a rite of passage among young men and, as Shona Robison said, it is increasingly regarded as such among young women. It is extremely important to recognise that most alcoholics start off as binge drinkers, therefore binge drinking should not be regarded as cool or as a natural part of growing up. It can lead to violence and severe illness in the unfortunate partaker.

I know from the alcohol liaison committee in my constituency that a significant number of young people end up in casualty because they have been binge drinking. In the long term, drunkenness also leads to a load of other equally bad or worse consequences—accidents, fires, vandalism, street fighting, anti-social behaviour, neglect of children, domestic strife, domestic violence, unwanted sexual activity, depression and suicide.

Alcohol and drug-related problems are often discussed in my surgery and I am sure that I am not the only member of the Scottish Parliament for whom that is true. I will not forget in a hurry the older couple who sat in my surgery in tears, begging me to find some treatment for their alcoholic and frequently suicidal son, before he was successful in attempting to take his own life. He got into Castle Craig and I hope that he managed to get the treatment that he needed.

We cannot tackle the other issues that I mentioned without tackling alcohol abuse. We talk a lot about youth crime, but it cannot be tackled unless we examine society's attitudes and the examples that adults set for young people.

It is important for the Government to provide leadership and education and there must be a review of the licensing laws. There must also be action on anti-social behaviour and local authorities must examine their byelaws. However, many of those measures address the problem, not the cause. It is important for us to examine our cultural attitudes and to look within ourselves to see why we have this problem. Alcohol misuse is a curse on individuals and families. It corrodes our communities and is a blot on our national dignity and on our national identity.

I welcome the Executive's strategy and the minister's announcement.

16:26

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I am glad that Iain Gray is here, because on 20 January this year I raised the issue of alcohol misuse with him. He gave his word then that we would have a debate. It is wee bit late, but he has kept his word, which is a good thing for a man. It is a start, and I am allowed to be sexist.

I thank Donald Gorrie. We both lodged motions on this subject. There was an interesting members' business debate about a month ago, which many members here present were at.

In the previous debate, I referred to the estimated 200,000 people in Scotland who misuse alcohol. I am sure that members will agree that that figure is the tip of a very large iceberg. I was told this week in a written answer:

"There were 340 drug-related deaths and 1,103 alcohol-related deaths in Scotland during 1999." — [*Official Report, Written Answers*, 4 December 2000; Vol 9, p 190.]

Alcohol-related deaths are coded under the international classification of diseases, which covers illnesses such as alcohol psychoses, alcohol dependence syndrome, non-dependent abuse of alcohol and so on. It does not, however, take account of the many deaths that occur in

Scotland because of over-consumption of alcohol, but which do not have that specified on the death certificate. It has been estimated that almost a third of hospital beds are occupied by people who landed there after abusing alcohol. That is a measure of the problem. We all know about it and we have all talked about it. In honesty, the minister must see that, unless he is going to come up with other figures, the funding does not even begin to approach the size of that aspect of the problem in Scotland, let alone the other aspects.

I want to let others speak in the debate, so I will say a few brief things about the national strategy. More money must be made available. On the membership of the Scottish Advisory Committee on Alcohol Misuse, I have looked at the papers and see that the police are represented, but that there are no other representatives of the justice system. It would have been useful to give sheriffs or justices of the peace an input. They deal with the consequences of alcohol misuse all day in court. Prison officers also see people who are involved in alcohol misuse in prison and could have an input to alcohol programmes.

Local authorities are mentioned in the strategy. Will the strategy home in on social work departments, which must be involved, and education authorities?

From the justice perspective, I welcome drugs councils. Is there any thinking along those lines for people with alcohol problems who get themselves into the criminal justice system? Perhaps such people should be dealt with a little differently from the way that they are dealt with at the moment. In short, I welcome the steps that are being taken. Many members want much more to be done. We are too politically correct about drugs. We are keen to get involved in other drugs issues, which are serious, but we keep quiet about this other rather large issue that Scotland faces. Other European nations do not have to face it—they enjoy their drink, but do not abuse it.

16:30

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I welcome this debate, but I hope that we do not spend too much time developing the detail of the strategy at the expense of beginning to deal with some of the problems.

People have talked about severe alcohol-related harm, as indicated by deaths, admissions to hospital and diagnoses of alcohol-related brain damage, which have risen markedly in the past 20 years. Many people who suffer from those diseases—problem drinkers—are admitted to acute psychiatric beds, where they are treated by general psychiatric staff who might or might not have specialist interest or expertise in alcohol

dependence. There is a question about whether people who suffer from the more acute forms of alcohol dependency are getting the most appropriate treatment and whether that is available everywhere that it should be.

In the north of Glasgow, the drug epidemic has resulted in a squeezing of the availability of resources for the treatment of people who suffer from acute alcohol dependency and alcohol-related disease. It would be unfortunate if the existence of a serious drugs problem in a city led to a lack of emphasis on alcohol services. I am pleased that the Greater Glasgow Health Board has anticipated the Executive and has produced a detailed alcohol strategy document that identifies the problems comprehensively. Its activities and strategy should be supported by the Scottish Executive in advance of the Executive completing its work.

The question is not simply one of treating people who suffer from the advanced stages of alcohol-related disease. We must think of the range of services that are offered for people who suffer from alcohol problems. There is a requirement for us to direct services more specifically at younger people. Currently, limited services are available for younger people who might think that they have a drink problem and there is insufficient targeted work in the environments within which those services operate. Through television, cinema, billboards and so on, young people are exposed constantly to adverts that show alcoholic substances in environments that make alcohol seem glamorous and attractive. However, we know that many of our young people, by engaging in excessive consumption or consumption that might become excessive and might lead to disease, are at risk. We need to get more information to young people about the risks to which they expose themselves through drink.

We must strike an appropriate balance in relation to the emphasis that is given to drugs and tobacco. Alcohol, drugs and tobacco are great threats to people's lives and we must take alcohol seriously.

Some cost-effective mechanisms could be operated. When people end up in accident and emergency departments because of alcohol-related incidents, what steps are taken to provide them with health advice? Are people in that situation given advice about drink? Do we provide adequate training for nurses? Do we provide the opportunities for people who are in hospital with alcohol-related problems to get access to information on leading a healthier lifestyle? There is evidence that short interventions—five or 10 minutes of health advice on drink consumption and alternatives to alcohol consumption—can be a cost-effective way of providing people with a

greater awareness of some of the dangerous consequences of the excessive consumption of alcohol. We should think about the training of nurses and other health professionals in that context and encourage them to provide advice as they do in relation to tobacco and drug abuse.

Drink is a serious issue. The Scottish Parliament must support people who are beginning to deal with that issue and provide them with positive encouragement.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now come to the closing speeches in this debate. I apologise to those members whom I was not able to call. Mr Gorrie has four minutes in which to close for the Liberal Democrats.

16:35

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** There are two underlying issues. First, there must be funding, not just good words. Secondly, we have the huge task of shifting attitudes and the way in which we conduct ourselves—that is a great task for any Parliament.

I see this as a three-stage operation. In the long term, the Executive has agreed to set up a Clayson-type commission, which various members have been pressing for. That is good news and the Executive deserves great credit for it. We look forward to the commission's deliberations, although it will obviously take some years. In the medium term, the Executive is working out an alcohol strategy, which will take a year or so to come to fruition.

In the short term, my research and the polls that have been carried out by a magazine that circulates among people who deal with licensing—as well as what has been said in this debate and in the recent members' business debate on alcohol—show a consensus on a number of points, which could rapidly be incorporated into a bill and which would offer a quick improvement to our whole attitude to alcohol. It is important that we pursue that; we could show that we are in earnest by having a bill dealing with alcohol as soon as possible. There is a lot of support for that among all parts of the licensed trade, lawyers, licensing people and the groups involved in trying to reduce the amount of alcohol that is consumed. That would send a strong message to the public. I have been pursuing that matter with the Executive.

I am going to be allowed to talk to some civil servants—I do not think that I have ever been allowed to do so before, so it is a first, and I was pleased that it was arranged. In a few days' time, Iain Gray and some civil servants are to explain to me exactly what is to be included in the various Executive measures. We will then have a list of any gaps and of things that we could push more



rapidly. I hope that, in the new year, we will have a meeting of members who have shown in this and previous debates—and on other occasions—real interest in the issue of alcohol. We could then put together a bill that would have widespread support and push it forward as a member's bill in the new year.

**Dr Simpson:** First, should such a bill be a committee bill? There would probably be a wide measure of cross-party support for that if the Executive has not got the matter covered in its timetable. Secondly, I would be interested to know whether Donald Gorrie feels that the people involved in selling drink, including the licensees, should have some duty of care.

**Donald Gorrie:** It is important that we proceed with a bill. I am under the new dispensation that I believe we are to have imposed on us, in that I will be only on the Finance Committee. It is difficult to see how finance committees can produce such bills. Perhaps another committee could do so.

On duty of care, I included on my shopping list to Jim Wallace the idea to take more seriously the rules that exist for selling to minors and to people who are already drunk. I suggested that that could be enforced through the introduction of a graduated off-licence licensing fee. At the moment, a corner shop that sells a few miniatures pays the same licensing fee as Asda or Safeway, which is ridiculous.

There are issues in addition to those that have been raised, such as the licensing of door stewards and a possible duty on councils and health boards to offer various kinds of support to people with alcohol problems. There is a whole list of such issues, but other members have already made good lists. I hope that we can make real progress with this matter over the next few months.

16:41

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** This has been a good and welcome debate, which, as Christine Grahame said, has been a long time coming. Perhaps the reason for the delay is that, as many members have pointed out, alcohol misuse is not given the political priority that it deserves, given the devastating impact that it has on so many individuals, families and communities in Scotland. According to some analyses, it has a greater impact than does drug abuse, which, obviously and rightly, is high up the political agenda.

To give a flavour of just how deep a concern alcohol misuse is in Scotland, it is worth reiterating some of the statistics that have been cited this afternoon. Shona Robison said that one in five people in Scotland worries about their own or

someone else's drinking and that 85,000 children in Scotland live with a problem drinker. For every one drug death in Scotland, there are three alcohol deaths. Those are raw statistics, but they paint all too graphic a picture of the misery that alcohol abuse inflicts on people.

The question that we have to address is what politicians can do about the problem. As Malcolm Chisholm said, much good work is already being done. I welcome all the speeches that members have made. Although I welcome the central suggestion in the Tory amendment and am glad that the Executive has agreed to a review of the licensing law, I, like Malcolm Chisholm, have some concern with its last few words. Perhaps, in summing up, Bill Aitken will clarify those words.

We must recognise that no one suggestion that has been made today is a solution to the problem that alcohol poses in our society. With the greatest respect to Malcolm Chisholm, if past practice and experience is anything to go by, even expensive television adverts will not make a world of difference by themselves. We should recognise that the challenge that we face is to change the culture in Scotland that celebrates and glorifies overindulgence in alcohol.

I will focus on a few areas in which we must do more to change that culture fundamentally. First, I will discuss ambition. Malcolm Chisholm referred to the Scottish health survey, which showed that 32 per cent of males and 14 per cent of females drink more than the recommended limit. Those are extremely worrying statistics, but the target reductions are only 1 per cent and 2 per cent in five years, and 3 per cent in 10 years. Those are hardly ambitious or challenging targets. We must set our sights higher and push ourselves further. There is an old adage: "If you don't try, you won't succeed." I hope that in the strategy that the minister has discussed today those targets will be revised so that we set our sights higher. Of course, we might not succeed at the first attempt, but if we aim low we will certainly not deliver as much as we could.

Secondly, the message that comes from politicians and Government must be clear and consistent, as Mary Mulligan rightly said, but it must also be meaningful. Of course, recommended limits for alcohol consumption are useful. The move from weekly to daily expressions of those units is welcome and might address the problem of binge drinking but, as Shona Robison said, we must focus more on educating people to recognise signs in their own lives of excessive drinking. Many people may drink less than the recommended limit, but drink too much in terms of the effect on their behaviour, relationships and working lives. Rather than referring always to statistical limits, a strategy must encourage people

to examine themselves and become more responsible for their habits.

Thirdly, I will discuss briefly the question of resources, which has been raised by several members, including Sandra White. Far more is spent on action against drug abuse than is spent on dealing with alcohol misuse. No one would argue with the £100 million that is being spent over three years on drug services, but there is no similar commitment to dealing with alcohol misuse. The Government must address that point.

**Dr Simpson:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

We need a cross-cutting approach to dealing with alcohol that goes across education, health, justice and social inclusion and that looks at the links between alcohol misuse and other drug abuse. I ask the Executive to implement recommendation 36 of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report, which calls for a cross-party commission to look into the broader problems of substance misuse.

If this debate signals a change in the political attitude towards alcohol abuse, it is welcome. Unless we have that change and are prepared to give alcohol misuse political priority, we will not change the culture in Scotland in the way that is so desperately needed.

16:46

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** Perhaps uncharacteristically, I am approaching this matter with a more optimistic outlook than members of other parties are. However, my party recognises the gravity and severity of the situation. To put it simply, drink destroys lives. People are right to raise the problems. The arguments suggest that the problem can be dealt with under three headings: enforcement, health and culture.

I will deal first with culture. We must change our attitude towards drink. It seems to be part of the Scottish psyche to believe that heavy drinking is something to be proud of or a demonstration of machismo. That is far from the case.

On health, the question of resources arises. Resources must be made available for the treatment of those suffering from alcoholism and for counselling those likely to find themselves in that position.

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Does Bill Aitken agree that funding for alcohol counselling groups is woefully inadequate, especially in rural areas? For example, the Islay and Jura council on alcohol has to rely on funding

of £1,200 a year for all its counselling.

**Bill Aitken:** I agree. When we were working on the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report on drug abuse, we found great disparity throughout Scotland in the funding that was available for drugs groups. I have no doubt that that is the case for groups dealing with alcohol abuse. Especially in areas where there is a significantly greater problem with alcohol abuse, as is shown in the figures for the Western Isles, that problem must be looked at.

On what my party wishes to see in the review, we do not recommend a laissez-faire attitude, because we recognise the problems. However, we would go back to 1976 when the Clayson recommendations, which Donald Gorrie referred to, came into force, because that represented a positive approach. We started treating people like adults. I was convener of the licensing committee in Glasgow in the late 1970s and we took chances—we took a more liberal attitude and it paid off. We no longer had the same distressing street cabaret in Glasgow on Friday and Saturday nights. People were given a longer time to drink and they drank less—that may seem contradictory, but it was what happened. There was a more responsible attitude towards drink. We involved all parts of the community in what we were trying to do. We involved the licensing trade and made it more responsive to what people wanted. A stick-and-carrot approach was used. If the trade demonstrated that it was prepared to bring public houses up to standard, and particularly to attract women to accompany men to public houses to moderate their behaviour, as undoubtedly they did, that approach worked.

We would like various ideas on the trade to be introduced—for example, that the individual, rather than the establishment, should be licensed, and that temporary extensions should be controlled by the police rather than by the licensing board. We would like to consider the issue of opening hours to see whether we can bring our thinking on licensing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Christine Grahame made a telling point, building on something that Keith Harding had said: whoever considers this issue should compare and contrast our situation with that of some of our European colleagues. Statistics prove that where a more prohibitive attitude towards drink is adopted—as in some Scandinavian countries—alcoholism is manifestly worse. It is worse there than it is, for example, in the Mediterranean countries. Possibly there is a lesson to be learned from that.

We have to look into the problem of under-age drinking, and do so in the knowledge that there are difficulties. The trade—or some irresponsible elements within it—advertise with a view to entrapping youngsters into an alcohol lifestyle. We

especially deplore the way in which alcopop products are aimed specifically at teenagers. We ask that that be clamped down on and we ask that the difficulties in corroboration that arise over the sale of drink to under-age people be considered. I suggest that, to ensure corroboration, those producing drink be required to register each drink container so that it can be traced back to the retailer. That would obviate the problem. We must also consider the age at which drink can legally be consumed. We are not suggesting that the age limit be reduced, but let us consider that limit in the light of European experience.

This has been a good debate. It is encouraging that the Executive largely accepts what we have to say on the matter. Conservative members look forward to having an opportunity to contribute to the deliberations that will take place.

16:52

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Iain Gray):**

As Bill Aitken suggests, this has not been a partisan debate, and I make no partisan point when I remind members that this is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Labour Party. In that vein, the Secretary of State for Scotland is fond of pointing out that our founder, Keir Hardie, stood on a four-point platform 100 years ago. The first three points were a Scottish Parliament, reform of the House of Lords and a guaranteed wage, all of which the current Labour Government has delivered. The punch line is that Keir Hardie's fourth election pledge was temperance. We will not deliver on that, as Neddy Scrymgeour did not deliver on it in Dundee.

I make that point lightly, but with the serious intent of underlining the fact that alcohol—its effects, its control and its production—is a strand that has always run through reformist Scottish politics. Indeed, it runs through the history of civic Scotland. My father, when a boy, was a member of the Band of Hope, which was an abstinence movement then active in Leith. That is in the constituency of my colleague Mr Chisholm, although I am referring to a time a little before Mr Chisholm's, of course.

Alcohol is a theme that also runs through Scottish culture, as in Burns, who says:

"Wi' usquabae, we'll face the devil!"

The trouble is that, too often, usquabae is the devil. As many members have made clear, it takes a toll in undermining our people's health and happiness and in fuelling disorder. Members' speeches have also served to demonstrate the complexities of the issues and to reinforce the need for our strategy to be sufficiently wide-ranging and flexible.

**Mr Gibson:** Has the Executive endorsed the European alcohol action plan 2000-2005, as the World Health Organisation has done? If so, will the Executive make representations to Westminster on lower blood alcohol limits, on monitoring alcohol consumption and on alcohol tax levels, all of which are unfortunately reserved to Westminster?

**Iain Gray:** One of the reasons for our taking some time to develop a strategy—for which we have suffered some criticism—is that we have to place it in the context of international thinking on alcohol misuse. That international thinking ought to be considered as we develop our strategy over the next year or so.

The strategy must be realistic and practical. As many members have pointed out, it must recognise that the majority of people who drink do so responsibly, with little harm to themselves or others. As Shona Robison said, the strategy must deal with the messages on alcohol, which are sometimes mixed. Mary Mulligan illustrated that point from today's press. The strategy must also address the binge culture, which is often encouraged in young people—as Elaine Murray pointed out—not only by the media, but by the way in which some drinks are promoted.

The strategy must also address the issue of adequate resourcing. However, we should examine what is already being spent. Malcolm Chisholm was honest in pointing out how difficult it is to garner information on how much is spent on dealing with the effects of alcohol. For example, Des McNulty spoke of alcohol-related brain damage in Glasgow. Greater Glasgow Health Board estimates that it spends £3.3 million directly on that problem. Clearly, that sum is not included in the figure of £2.5 million that was mentioned. An exercise needs to be done to ascertain how resources are being spent.

Both my department, with its responsibilities for criminal justice and licensing matters, and the health department have a significant role to play in reducing alcohol-related harm. Mr Chisholm, who chairs SACAM, has undertaken to note Christine Grahame's point and to consider the lack of criminal justice input into the advisory committee.

I also have specific responsibility for drugs strategy. A number of members have commented on the priority that is given to drugs. The misuse of alcohol and the misuse of drugs are major health and social problems. However, we must recognise that they are different. On one hand, we are dealing with a legal and socially acceptable activity controlled by regulation, where the pattern of consumption is probably the central and most harmful issue. On the other hand, we have an illegal activity that causes widespread misery to individuals and communities through consumption

itself and the crime that funds that consumption.

I make no apologies for the priority attached to tackling drug misuse. However, that does not—and must not—diminish our desire to address alcohol misuse. The Executive believes that it is right to keep the national strategies separate. However, we need to ensure that there are links—particularly at local level, where drugs and alcohol overlap—in the planning and delivery of some services. Mary Mulligan gave the example of such work in West Lothian and there are other examples to be found throughout Scotland.

**Mr Raffan:** In terms of linking alcohol and drugs, what is the Executive's advice on drug action teams? Three or four of the 23 DATs are joint drug and alcohol teams, one is a substance team and the rest focus on drugs. At the moment, there is a right hotch-potch.

**Iain Gray:** It is not a hotch-potch, but an example of just the kind of local decision making in the planning and delivery of services that we intend to encourage. Some of the services benefit from joint delivery on alcohol and drug misuse, but that is not the case for all services.

I am pleased at the support expressed for a review of licensing. There is no doubt that the time is ripe for us to take another good look at the regulatory framework. It is 30 years since that was done and our world has changed, as Keith Harding said.

I came across a quote recently, which might be of interest to members:

"I am continually brought up against the damage that is done to Scotland as a nation by misuse of alcohol and alcohol-related crime. I pore over cases relating to the release of life-sentence prisoners and am amazed at the number of times that the original crime was related to alcohol." —[Official Report, Written House of Commons, Scottish Grand Committee, 15 April 1975; c 6.]

Those words are from Willie Ross's opening address, as Secretary of State for Scotland, to the Scottish Grand Committee on the consideration of the Clayson report in the early 1970s. It is clear that we have not come far enough, particularly when we pore over the unacceptably high levels of violent death in 1999, as shown in the figures published yesterday.

The review needs to be thorough and I say quite clearly that it will take some time. We need to consider its remit carefully, but it will certainly have to consider issues both of public health and of public order. As Malcolm Chisholm indicated, that is why we feel unable to accept the Conservative amendment, because it pre-empts the scope of the review, although I am happy to acknowledge that there is no disagreement with its intent.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Will the minister give way?

**Iain Gray:** I am out of time.

Several members have indicated the importance of tackling under-age drinking; I can only agree with them. The local community newspaper in my constituency features that problem and I expect that every member could produce similar evidence from their own constituencies. The strategy and the licensing review must both address that difficult issue.

Today's debate has been short but important, first, because it has finally allowed me to make good the promise that I made to Christine Grahame and, secondly, because it has to be the tip of the iceberg. From today flows the development of the action plan, the review of the licensing laws and the further engagement of the Parliament and its committees with this issue, which has been at the centre of reform in Scotland for so many years.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions. There are four of these, and they are set out in the business bulletin: S1M-1430, S1M-1431, S1M-1432 and S1M-1438. Mr McCabe, will you move them? If there is no objection, I will allow them to be moved together.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that Mrs Margaret Ewing be appointed to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee following the resignation of Ms Nicola Sturgeon.

That the Parliament agrees that the following Orders be approved:

The draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc) (No 2) Order 2000;

The draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2000;

The draft Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Adaptation of Functions etc) (No 2) Order 2000;

The Mink Keeping (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/400); and

The draft Welfare of Farmed Animals (Scotland) Regulations 2000.

That the Parliament agrees that between 8 January 2001 and 11 January 2002 (inclusive) the office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 13 April, 16 April, 7 May, 25 May, 28 May, 30 November, 24 December (pm), 25 December, 26 December 2001, 1 January 2002 and 2 January 2002.

That the Parliament agrees that Bill Butler be appointed to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee following the resignation of John Home Robertson.—[*Mr McCabe.*]

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** There are eight questions as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-1433.1, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1433, in the name of Ross Finnie, on sea fisheries, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)

Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 28, Against 75, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S1M-1433, in the name of Ross Finnie, on sea fisheries, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament calls upon the Scottish Executive to seek from the negotiations leading up to the December Fisheries Council the best available outcome for the Scottish fishing industry consistent with

sustainability of fish stocks.

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S1M-1434.1, in the name of Keith Harding, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1434, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on the development of a national alcohol misuse strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**AGAINST**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 18, Against 60, Abstentions 25.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that motion S1M-1434, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on the development of a national alcohol misuse strategy, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament endorses the Executive's plans to work towards the publication of a national action plan to tackle alcohol misuse.

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that motion S1M-1430, in the name of Tom McCabe, on membership of committees, be

agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that Mrs Margaret Ewing be appointed to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee following the resignation of Ms Nicola Sturgeon.

**The Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that motion S1M-1431, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the following Orders be approved:

The draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc) (No 2) Order 2000;

The draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2000;

The draft Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Adaptation of Functions etc) (No 2) Order 2000;

The Mink Keeping (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/400); and

The draft Welfare of Farmed Animals (Scotland) Regulations 2000.

**The Presiding Officer:** The seventh question is, that motion S1M-1432, in the name of Tom McCabe, on sitting days, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that between 8 January 2001 and 11 January 2002 (inclusive) the office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 13 April, 16 April, 7 May, 25 May, 28 May, 30 November, 24 December (pm), 25 December, 26 December 2001, 1 January 2002 and 2 January 2002.

**The Presiding Officer:** The eighth question is, that motion S1M-1438, on membership of committees, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that Bill Butler be appointed to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee following the resignation of John Home Robertson.

## Bullying and Harassment

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We come now to this afternoon's members' business debate on motion S1M-1363, in the name of Scott Barrie, on "Let's Keep Safe". I ask members who would like to take part in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now, so that I can get an idea of how many want to be called.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the widespread harassment that people with learning difficulties can be subjected to in Scotland; further notes the work undertaken by MENCAP and ENABLE to highlight this problem; congratulates Values Into Action for producing the A to Z booklets *Let's Keep Safe* and *Let's Report It* to assist people in dealing with and overcoming such bullying and harassment; further notes the successful launch of these booklets in Edinburgh on 15 November 2000, and commends them to local authorities, NHS Trusts and voluntary groups as a guide to best practice in this area.

17:05

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** First, I thank those members of the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats and my own party who signed motion S1M-1363 and allowed what I believe is the 100<sup>th</sup> members' business debate to take place in our Parliament.

For several decades, it has been the policy of successive Governments to reduce the number of people with disabilities who live in inappropriate institutions and to encourage a greater use of community-based living situations. That has become especially common since the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 was passed. There are many examples throughout Scotland of innovative living situations based in our communities, which have replaced long-stay hospitals and Victorian institutions.

As I represent a constituency in which there is a long-stay hospital, which at one time accommodated 500 people, and as I was a social worker 15 years ago, when I worked with some of the people detained there, I whole-heartedly support the policy. Despite the clearly more enlightened policy, one of the indicators of success in community care will be whether we have communities that wish to care—whether we have communities that will welcome people who may appear different or odd or whose behaviour may at times be slightly unusual.

People with a learning disability live and work in ordinary communities. As with any other members of our society, their activities are varied. People live in group residential homes, on housing estates, alone, or with carers or family relatives.

People with a learning disability participate in leisure activities, local clubs, social groups and day centres. They are employed in a variety of settings. More than ever before, people with a learning disability are living in the community. They have been able to learn about the tasks of daily living, strengthen their social skills and lead increasingly independent lives.

However, it appears that society has not adapted to that change. In June last year, Mencap published its "Living In Fear" report, based on extensive research from throughout the UK. It gave an idea of the scale and nature of the bullying and harassment that people with learning difficulties face. The report makes salutary reading and is an indictment of what many believe to be a caring society.

I will give two quotes as illustration. The report contains many examples of what many of our fellow citizens face, some on a daily basis. One woman says:

"When Phil my boyfriend and I are on the bus, we are often told to get off the bus by other passengers. They say 'you're a spastic, you can't look after yourself or go anywhere by yourself, you're a spastic and spastic people should have people looking after you'".

Another says:

"We had stones thrown at our windows and yoghurts and bad eggs. They used to put fishing wire across the gate so when we went out we fell over the line. After a period things got even worse. They threatened that they would burn our house down and we had dog shit through the letterbox. They said people like you should be put down at birth."

Harrowing as those direct quotes are, the statistics collated by Mencap make uncomfortable reading. Its research showed that nearly nine out of 10 people with a learning disability had been bullied in the past year and that nearly a third were bullied daily or weekly. Half were being called names in a public place, and quarter claimed to have been physically attacked. Seventy-three per cent were bullied in a public place, and two out of three were bullied by more than one person. Thirty per cent were bullied at a day centre, 26 per cent were bullied in a home setting and 25 per cent were bullied on the bus.

Despite the high levels of crime and harassment that those people are experiencing, little appears to be being done. The report indicates that in three quarters of the cases, the victim had told someone what had happened, yet only 17 per cent of those people went on to report the incident to the police.

Following on from the report, Values Into Action, working in close consultation with people with learning difficulties, developed two booklets: "Let's Keep Safe" and "Let's Report It". These handily sized documents provide people with learning



difficulties with valuable information on keeping safe from harassment and crime and reporting incidents once they occur.

The pilot period in Scotland involved close consultation with residents and staff at Alanmor and Erccall Road in Falkirk. That group of people had similar experiences to many people with learning difficulties in Scotland—that is, they had histories of institutionalisation in long-stay hospitals. A lot of work was required with residents to raise their awareness of their basic legal and human rights. Sadly, people often regarded victimisation in communities as less severe than their previous experiences of abuse in long-stay hospitals and therefore felt that such victimisation should be tolerated. The booklets became an important tool in that awareness raising process.

I was honoured to be asked to launch the booklets at the Scottish Parliament last month. The event was attended by individuals and groups from throughout Scotland and followed similar launches at Westminster and in Belfast and Cardiff. Thanks should be extended to all those who participated in the production of the booklets, particularly Hannah Sharp of VIA.

I believe that the booklets can assist those who have learning difficulties to keep safe from crime and to report it. As such, and as the motion says, I see the booklets as a guide to best practice in those areas and commend them to local authorities, health trusts and voluntary organisations. The Scottish Executive has already recognised the importance of anti-bullying strategies, on which it commented in the document, “The Same as You?”.

Only yesterday, I found out from ENABLE Scotland about an anti-bullying project in Scotland, Portugal and Denmark that is funded by the European Commission. That project involves people with learning difficulties going into schools to deliver anti-bullying presentations. It is innovative and much more powerful to have people with learning difficulties, rather than professionals, deliver the message. The project will now be able to continue for a further three years, thanks to a £85,000 grant that was received yesterday from the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.

That project is only one example of the work that is going on in Scotland. However, perhaps we need to go further. In England and Wales, the Association of Chief Police Officers has been doing valuable work in addressing police awareness training in learning disability, police use of anti-harassment legislation and police awareness of the resources and supports that exist to assist people with learning difficulties to report crimes. Our police forces in Scotland must address those issues urgently.

Not only will the booklets help people to remain safe and to report crime when it occurs, they could also assist the police by increasing police contact with people who have learning difficulties and therefore raise police awareness of the issues. In addition, the booklets will raise awareness of the levels of crime and harassment that are experienced by people with learning difficulties and therefore raise awareness of the urgent need for an increased police response.

People with learning difficulties are not asking to be treated differently. They are asking to be treated the same as the rest of society—to be allowed to live without fear of violence or discrimination and to be allowed to get on with their lives. Surely we owe them that.

**The Presiding Officer:** Four members want to take part in the debate before I call the minister. I will be able to call all four members if they restrict their speeches to three to four minutes each.

17:13

**Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** My speech will be brief.

I congratulate Scott Barrie on lodging the motion that we are debating today. I agree with him that the closure of the large institutions could not have come fast enough. People with learning difficulties who are settled in the community have positive experiences and success stories. No one wants to return to the bad old days of the big institutions.

However, as Scott Barrie said, many people with learning difficulties have experienced bullying and harassment in their community, which is shocking. I had not heard the figure of nine out of 10 people before—that figure should be a wake-up call for us all, given that little action is taken and few incidents are reported to the police.

When I worked in community care in the Springburn area of Glasgow, a huge number of issues in relation to harassment of people with learning difficulties were brought to us. I had the opportunity of helping a group of self-advocates—people with learning difficulties who supported other people with learning difficulties to make progress on some of that huge number of issues. They met the police, looked at reporting procedures and set up a system in which advocates were on hand to assist someone to go to the police and file a complaint. That was successful in Springburn, but much more has to be done throughout Scotland. I certainly support Scott Barrie’s call for more police training and I welcome the “Let’s Keep Safe” booklet as a start.

17:15

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am grateful to Scott Barrie for securing this

debate. I have signed the motion and I would like him to know that the Conservatives are committed to the issues that he has raised.

We are all grateful that we now live in a society that does not tolerate bullying. For that reason, the booklets are extremely welcome. It is important for the organisations mentioned in Scott Barrie's motion to work and talk through those booklets with vulnerable groups of all ages, in the community and in supported care.

It needs to be stressed that reporting bullying does not help only the individual. If people had reported bullying many years ago and if it had been taken seriously, not only would it have helped the individuals concerned, but it would have helped others by sending out a clear message that bullying is not tolerated; it should never have been.

It can be difficult to address bullying, because bullies make it difficult. It may be perceived as a sign of weakness, or childish, to report bullying. In the case of the mentally ill and those with learning disabilities, it may send a message of being unable to cope. When it comes to care in the community, I imagine that there is sometimes a fear that people may lose the precious independence that they are working towards. It is also the case that parents and carers take on a guilt for not tackling bullying. They feel that they should have noticed and they therefore feel anger and frustration.

The booklet seems to assume that most bullying and harassment will be from those waiting at bus stops and in public places. I was pleased that Scott Barrie pointed out that more emphasis should be given to those in responsible positions and those with responsibility for caring and supporting. There was a recent and very sad case in Inverness of the headmaster of a local special needs school who was found guilty on four charges of assaulting young, vulnerable pupils. He was fined £1,000.

The climate under which those assaults happened gives serious cause for concern. The sheriff stated:

"You failed yourself as a teacher of many years' experience, failed your colleagues round about you, failed your children and their parents and relatives."

There is a need for staff to ensure that people are not bullied, harassed or mistreated in their presence. Press reports on the case make shocking reading, but they epitomise the points that Scott Barrie raised. According to the local press, teachers talked of

"a culture of intimidation and bullying at the school and . . . felt isolated and fearful. Most staff said they did not officially report the incidents at the time because they did not know who to turn to. The headmaster had to be informed of all

incidents."

The press went on to say:

"Nobody from the education authority had any contact with the school. The authority was showing absolutely no interest in Drummond School."

It is my belief that bullies also need help. There should be someone whom they can talk to about understanding their own behaviour. It may be that redeployment or retraining can be offered, but confidential counselling should be offered to people who may not be coping with the full pressures of their job and responsibilities, and who are allowing that frustration to be taken out on the most vulnerable members of our society. I feel that that would encourage people to take responsibility for their actions and recognise the problem and address it.

17:19

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I congratulate Scott Barrie on securing this debate—the 100<sup>th</sup> since our Parliament began again. I know that this is a matter that Scott takes a deep and well-informed interest in.

Just the other day I had to become involved as an MSP in a case of bullying in a school. The case involved one child being thumped by another. After a meeting at which we managed to sort out the problem, I thought back to my childhood, when bullying was much more common. I remember people waiting for me to come out of school to give me a good belting round the back. It was more tolerated in those days. We need think only of the culture of comics when some of us were growing up, which was all about kids fighting. That has changed in a big way. It is important to remember that we have made considerable advances since my childhood. The glorification of bullying is behind us, thank goodness. However, we still have some way to go.

I was quite moved by what Scott Barrie told us. It is absolutely appalling that someone should be tripped up for a piece of fish. Close working between social work and education is needed if this problem is to be tackled. We still have some way to go to achieve that. As councils bring the services together, we may see an improvement.

I accept totally the point that Scott Barrie made about the police. The more they can be trained and made aware of this problem, the better.

I read both of these excellent booklets with great interest. They are very well laid out and the people behind them are to be complimented on making them so approachable. One of the booklets describes how to avoid bullying—by being on a bus that the bullies are not on, by not going to

places where the bullies are and so on—but at the end of the day the bullies are still around. If we want to get to the heart of this issue, the people who inflict fear on others must be sorted out. This is all about sheer, naked fear. All of us can remember that from our past. Why should today's generation and future generations have to deal with that? Bullying strikes at a fundamental human right—we have the right to live without fear.

It is important that we tackle the people who are responsible for bullying. I do not know quite how we can do that, without straying into bullying ourselves. When we see a kid bullying another kid, we tend to feel pretty hot tempered and to want to ensure that the bully gets the fright of their life, so that they never bully anyone again. It is the hallmark of a civilised society that we should move to eradicate this problem. We still have some way to go before we achieve that.

This is the 100<sup>th</sup> members' debate in this Parliament. I have found these contemplative debates at the end of the day extremely useful. They are almost always cross-party debates, in which we speak with one voice. If there is something noble and rather special about the Scottish Parliament, this is it. Like time for reflection, members' business is a time of rather cooler temperatures, when people can make considered statements.

17:23

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** I would like to make a few brief comments and, like other members, to congratulate Scott Barrie on securing this debate.

As a former social worker, who has been involved over the years in working with carers of people with learning difficulties, among other problems, I would like to say a few words about issues that carers have raised with me recently. They relate to the community care strategy to which we are all committed.

Scott Barrie asked whether our communities are the caring communities that we would like them to be. One of the biggest fears for carers and the relatives of people who are currently in the residential facilities that we hope to move people out of is that their relatives will not be welcome in the community. We must continue to work to allay their fears and to ensure that the bullying and harassment that takes place is stopped.

Jamie Stone asked how we can do that without becoming bullies ourselves. There are good and positive examples of how it can be done. For years I worked with young people, many of whom had problems. Some of them were responsible for bullying, harassment and intimidating behaviour, simply because nobody had worked to bring to

their attention the fact that such behaviour was inappropriate or to help them understand what it felt like to be on the receiving end. Some of the most productive work that was done to tackle those problems involved bringing together bullies and the victims of bullying through outings, arts and crafts and other activities. As a result, the bullies were able to see people with learning disabilities as people first and foremost and their learning disabilities as secondary.

I have read through the booklets to which the motion refers. They would be a useful tool in working with people with learning disabilities and with people who may be at risk of causing harassment and intimidation.

I am glad that we have had this debate. It is fitting that such an important issue should be the topic of debate for the 100<sup>th</sup> members' business debate. I congratulate Scott Barrie again on a fine speech. I hope that we are able to make progress on this matter in a spirit of consensus.

17:25

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** I congratulate Scott Barrie on securing this debate today. As several members have said, it is an ideal topic to mark the Scottish Parliament's 100th members' business debate. I am sure that we all agree that this has been one of many outstanding successes in the Scottish Parliament.

It is a sobering thought for me that when I dealt with health and community care on the front bench at Westminster, I got to discuss these matters for one and a half hours—one debate—in 10 months before the 1997 general election; in the past four weeks, I have had six members' business debates and three main debates.

The motion reflects the interest that many of us share in ensuring that people with learning disabilities live a more healthy, enriched and integrated lives and play a fuller part in Scottish society. When I say integrated, I refer to the closing down of institutions and the increasing opportunities for people with learning disabilities to live along with their peers in ordinary society. We look forward to the time when all the institutions are closed. I hope that people being more integrated will help to deal with some of the problems that we have heard about today.

Like Jamie Stone, I was moved by what Scott Barrie said. Like Shona Robison, I was shocked by some of the figures that he gave. They are shocking. The bullying and harassment of people with learning disabilities that he described is unacceptable and it must be tackled.

Initiatives on bullying in general are taking place in schools. I was pleased to hear about the

specific example given by Scott Barrie. There is a general bullying in school initiative, co-ordinated by the national Anti-Bullying Network, which has been set up to share good practice in tackling bullying across Scotland. Moray House Institute of Education is running the network and Professor Pamela Munn is managing it. The strategy, which Cathy Jamieson outlined, of bringing bullies and bullied together should be part of the overall approach.

In May this year, Iain Gray launched the learning disability review report. Two things stand out. First, it is without doubt the most inclusive piece of policy making that the Scottish Executive has ever conducted. It involved stakeholders and especially users and carers. Secondly, the review started out in the traditional route of looking at services—especially health and social care services. However, it quickly shifted to considering peoples' lifestyles—into which services should fit. The clear message emerged that we all need a better understanding of people with learning disabilities and the potential that they possess to play a constructive role in society.

The review made 29 recommendations. I have time to touch on only one, which is especially relevant—the setting up of the new Scottish centre for learning disabilities. It will provide a resource to service users, carers and agencies and will promote public awareness and understanding about learning disabilities through changing negative attitudes and perceptions. That is a big challenge for the centre, but it will be one of the key elements in its remit. It will work with organisations such as Enable and the Disability Rights Commission to share knowledge and improve information services. The centre will also encourage the development of local independent advocacy services. Those could be very useful in helping to deal with the problems that we are discussing today, although the point that Mary Scanlon made about counselling services is also highly relevant.

Scott Barrie also made a point about the police. Police training, both general equal opportunity awareness training and specific learning disabilities awareness training, is clearly an issue. Although such training does take place to some extent, there is always room for development and I am sure that members will have heard Scott Barrie's points on that issue.

It is also relevant to the debate to report briefly on the progress that is being made. We want to keep the momentum going. Further consultation on how best to implement the report's recommendations has now been concluded. As we are currently analysing the responses, it is not yet possible to give a full summary of the outcomes at this stage.

However, I can say two things. First, we have made a start on setting up the Scottish centre for learning disabilities. Applications from organisations to run the centre have now been received and we hope to make an announcement on the successful bidder early in the new year.

Secondly, I remind members that we will support implementation of the recommendations over the next three years through a £36 million change fund. Although the detail of how the fund will be applied is still under consideration, we hope to make an announcement on that soon.

Like all of us, people with learning disabilities wish to be seen as valued members of society, respected and acknowledged for their contribution. The Scottish Executive is committed to making this happen. Today, I want to pay tribute to everyone who supports people with learning disabilities, many of whom are in the voluntary sector and who, as sufferers or carers, have seen and experienced the harm that intolerance and prejudice can cause to people who are vulnerable.

I congratulate Values Into Action on producing and launching its A-to-Z booklets "Let's Keep Safe" and "Let's Report It". In addition to being user friendly, they contain valuable advice for service providers to consult. Like other members, I read—and was impressed by—both documents. I am sure that the new Scottish centre will find their production helpful as it takes forward its own awareness-raising activities. I commend these booklets to all agencies responsible for providing the person-centred care and services that people with learning disabilities have a right to expect in the new century.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the 100<sup>th</sup> members' debate and from the chair I want to endorse what all members have said about the distinctively useful role of these short debates in the life of the Scottish Parliament. I thank all members who have participated in these 100 debates.

*Meeting closed at 17:32.*

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