

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 3 October 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2001.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The
Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 3 October 2001

Debates

Col.

TIME FOR REFLECTION	3021
“A FORWARD STRATEGY FOR SCOTTISH AGRICULTURE”	3023
<i>Motion moved—[Ross Finnie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Fergus Ewing].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Fergusson].</i>	
The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie)	3023
Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)	3029
Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con)	3034
Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)	3039
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	3043
Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con)	3045
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)	3046
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	3048
Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	3050
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)	3052
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)	3053
John Scott (Ayr) (Con)	3056
Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)	3057
John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)	3059
Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)	3060
Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)	3062
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	3064
Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP)	3067
The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin)	3071
BUSINESS MOTION	3075
<i>Motion moved—[Euan Robson]—and agreed to.</i>	
DECISION TIME	3076
OXFAM	3082
<i>Motion debated—[Mrs Mary Mulligan].</i>	
Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)	3082
Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)	3084
Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con)	3085
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	3087
Iain Gray (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)	3088
Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)	3089
Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)	3090
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)	3091
Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)	3092
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)	3093
Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)	3094
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)	3095
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)	3096
The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran)	3097

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 3 October 2001

(Afternoon)

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): To lead our time for reflection, we welcome Mr Muhammad Farogh Ahmad, the high priest of the World Islamic Mission in Glasgow.

Muhammad Farogh Ahmad (High Priest, World Islamic Mission, Glasgow): Sir David and members of the Scottish Parliament, I thank you for inviting me and giving me the absolute honour of offering my thoughts at time for reflection on behalf of the Islamic community in Scotland.

First, I condemn the terror attacks on the World Trade Center in the US on 11 September. That was an attack on integrity, on civilisation and on humankind. I embrace and extend my deep sorrow and sympathies to the people who were killed, their families, the American people and the British people.

In the 7th century of the Christian era, there was a perfect, final and binding revelation addressed to all mankind and all times—that humanity should become one family. That revelation set the seal on unity in the religion of Islam.

The Islamic religion believes that from the unity of the creator proceeds the unity of the universe—that is, the unity of creation and the unity of purpose. In unity, any differentiation between religious and secular people is irrelevant. In Islam, we live and grow in accordance with true human nature and in harmony with the nature around us. Islam means conformity to the nature of law.

The word “salaam”, which means peace, has close roots with the word “Islam” and peace forms an integral part of Islam itself. One of the ideals in Islam is the attainment of peace at all levels—peace with self-realisation, peace with fellow creatures, and co-operation, which is essential. In Scotland today, co-operation means promoting a wider acceptance of each other’s roles in society and respect for differing views.

Islam considers the love of God’s creation in general and of the human family. We can focus on the words of the holy prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—who said:

“The best of you is he who is best to God’s family.”

If God grant that you can keep and help his children, you are blessed. Islam regards all humanity as one, where all distinctions of caste and race are obliterated.

According to Islam, human intellect, though a great and powerful asset, has its natural limits, and therefore neither the theoretical nor empirical sciences that humans have developed can lead to knowledge. The only source of true knowledge is divine guidance. That source has been open ever since the beginning of human life on earth.

Thank you very much.

“A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture”

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our next item of business is the debate on motion S1M-2278, in the name of Ross Finnie, on “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture”, and two amendments to the motion.

14:34

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Members will be aware that in our policy statement “Working together for Scotland: A Programme for Government”, the Executive committed itself to placing rural issues at the heart of policy making. An important part of that commitment was a specific undertaking to produce a new agriculture strategy, which would set out a vision for a sustainable Scottish farming industry that would play a key role in rural areas. As members know, in June this year, I honoured that commitment by publishing “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture.” At the time of its launch, I gave an undertaking that the Parliament should have the opportunity to debate the strategy. I am pleased that that opportunity arises today.

As everyone in the chamber is aware, the farming industry in Scotland has been going through a very difficult phase for a long time now. That is no surprise, as farming has always been a volatile business and history records it constantly going through a series of peaks and troughs.

However, the current crisis is much more widespread; it is deeper and more persistent than any that there has been in this country for a very long time. Most commentators agree that the current position dates back to March 1996 when BSE was publicly acknowledged as a threat to human life. Since then, the industry has faced a series of difficulties as overseas markets have been lost and imports have competed for domestic markets. The combination of a weak euro and a strong pound has been a significant factor. Most recently, we have been faced with the hugely damaging foot-and-mouth outbreak, which has compounded those problems. The overall effect is that agricultural incomes have declined over the past five years. Clearly, that is not a sustainable position.

After the experience of recent months, it would be all too easy to focus solely on the immediate problems and perhaps even to lose heart. However, that is not the attitude of the industry or the Executive. We know that Scotland can come through this crisis, but we need to be clear about where our farming industry is going. Long before

foot-and-mouth, I was acutely aware that agriculture in Scotland has to change if it is to survive as a viable national business. That is why, in the spring of last year, I initiated a wide-ranging discussion on the way forward for farming in Scotland. In June this year, that extensive work led to the launch of the forward strategy. I hope that many members will have taken the opportunity to read it.

The strategy is a first for several reasons. It is the first time that the Government has tried to develop a vision and a way ahead for Scottish farming. It is also the first time that such an important and potentially controversial task has been carried out with such wide-ranging consultation and in partnership with so many key stakeholders across the entire agricultural and rural sector. That did not always make for easy progress in the development of the strategy, but it means that we have a strategy that has been subjected to detailed third party scrutiny and which enjoys a broad measure of success and support.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): Does the minister accept that, when considering a long-term strategy, many organisations and farming and croft businesses have made repeated points about the pressures that businesses are currently under? In that context, does the minister recognise that the less favoured areas scheme needs drastic change if it is to give businesses longer-term opportunities that will allow them to take advantage of the strategy? Will the minister look again at the ideas that have come out of Shetland agriculture, which include adding an island element to a revised LFA scheme?

Ross Finnie: The point that Tavish Scott makes about LFAs is valid. The problem is not just LFAs—there are a number of acute short-term problems. As I have made clear, the difficulties arise from our having worked the LFA scheme so much to Scotland’s advantage when it was linked to numbers. It proved extraordinarily difficult to find something similar when it slipped to a headage basis. We will re-examine the LFA scheme.

I stress that I fully recognise that there are many short-term problems, with which I, and others, have to deal. However, there is a time for us to consider what underlies Scottish agriculture; the focus and purpose of today’s debate is to do just that.

The strategy acknowledges that Scotland needs a successful, profitable farming business. Agriculture has three important roles to play: economic, social and environmental. The strategy considers each and assesses what can be done to improve them. However, because those roles are interrelated, the strategy has to be read as a whole to understand what is being said about the future direction of farming in Scotland.

The strategy will not only shape our domestic policies over the next few years but will make a significant contribution to the review and reform of the common agricultural policy. The CAP cannot solve Scotland's problems, but it remains a key component of farming. We must strive to make it work better for Scotland. One way in which I hope that might happen is through the development of land management contracts. The type of farming and the circumstances in which farming is undertaken vary greatly throughout the country—Tavish Scott mentioned islands. We need support schemes that are flexible enough to reflect that fact; we need support that rewards the economic, social and environmental benefits valued by society and takes account of the very different circumstances under which those benefits are delivered.

Anyone who has followed the less favoured area scheme will know that it is exceedingly difficult to change, at the stroke of a pen, from a scheme that was wholly designed to be based on numbers of animals to something based on acreage; nor is it sensible to do so. Under the rural development regulation, that has been the only option open to us over the past few years, but the strategy highlights widespread support for land management contracts, which offer an interesting alternative. A precedent for that type of approach exists in France, where such a scheme was recently introduced.

We have already indicated our preliminary intentions on land management contracts to the European Commission, but further engagement is required. Although I do not necessarily wish to replicate the French system, I believe that land management contracts, tailored to Scottish needs, could be an exciting alternative to the traditional production-based support.

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): Will land management contracts, as envisaged in the document, be open to all farms and all farm businesses, regardless of size?

Ross Finnie: Indeed. We have still to develop the detail. Ideally, however, not only will land management contracts be open to all farm types but, if Europe is minded—as part of the CAP reform—to uncouple further some of the production subsidies, if the vast proportion of support is channelled into agriculture as a whole and if we are able to develop more flexible support to take account of the economic, social and environmental circumstances throughout Scotland, we will begin to see support that will be ideally suited to the vast range of different circumstances of Scottish farming.

Land management contracts will also allow us to merge with agri-environment and other schemes and give a more comprehensive view. That is not

only my view, as it was widely supported by those we consulted. There is much to do to take forward that initiative. As the strategy indicates, we aim to introduce it in two or three years' time. I intend to set up a steering group to oversee that work with all interested parties throughout the industry and the country.

Foot-and-mouth disease has illustrated to the general public—some people knew it long before—the vital link between farming and the wider rural economy. Farming and non-farming enterprises are inextricably bound together in a way that is vital to the sustainability of our rural areas. Already, many family farms gain income from a wide variety of sources and farming businesses provide jobs directly and indirectly to many people. We must recognise that farmers are responsible for the backdrop that makes Scotland so attractive to tourists from home and abroad. We tend to take that for granted or expect the public purse to reward farmers. That is all right, but we need to do more to recognise that linkage.

Farmers can, of course, seek to earn income from the direct provision of goods and services to the tourism industry and an increasing number do so. However, that is another area where there is scope for us to do more. The strategy identifies and emphasises real opportunities for farming and other rural activities to develop together for the benefit of both. It highlights the role of local enterprise companies, local authorities, planning authorities and tourism bodies, which need to work much more closely together if that is to be achieved. Tomorrow, I will attend a meeting with enterprise companies from all over Scotland to look in detail at how they can develop that aspect of the work.

The strategy also contains initiatives on rates relief and planning consents to help farm businesses to adapt and diversify. Last week, the Executive launched a consultation exercise seeking views on removing the special protection given to prime agricultural land under the planning system. We propose to remove that blanket national protection for the best quality land and, instead, to give local authorities greater flexibility to decide whether such land should be used for new development. That will encourage the rural economy to diversify, consistent with action point 36 of the strategy.

I have mentioned the importance of the landscape. More generally, public awareness and concerns about the environment have meant that farming activities are increasingly under the spotlight. The strategy signals a determination to address those concerns through a more co-ordinated approach. Work is already being done by a new agriculture and environment working group, which will address the major environmental

issues that will impact on farming and food-processing businesses over the next five to 10 years. The group will identify the issues that we need to address and will advise on how we can best tackle them.

There are no easy answers, but public sector funding of environmental activity can no longer be the only answer. In future, we must work together to look for solutions that are good for the environment and good for agricultural business. A central thrust of the strategy is to involve stakeholders in devising approaches that result in sustainable development. One action point in the strategy is to establish an adviser post, funded by the Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage and RSPB Scotland, to work with farmers to help them ensure higher levels of biodiversity on their land.

I am also announcing today that the Executive has agreed with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, WWF Scotland, the Scottish Agricultural College and the National Farmers Union of Scotland to create a post at the college to co-ordinate advice on water management for farmers. I hope that that will help farmers to manage pollution risks by using inexpensive methods developed using the knowledge and experience of all those organisations. That kind of advice should result in a win-win situation, in which our environment will benefit from a reduction in the microbiological pollution in our bathing waters and farmers will gain from simpler and more consistent advice in an area that has proved difficult for them in the past. That is a good example of what combining the expertise of all stakeholders can achieve.

Last, but by no means least, I turn to what is, for many, the most important element of the strategy: the creation of a more prosperous farming sector in Scotland. There is no questioning the fact that farming has to be a successful business venture if it is to survive. Although CAP subsidies are important, they cannot and should not be relied on to provide a viable income for the average farming family. Therefore, it is imperative that farm businesses find new ways either of reducing inputs and costs or of generating more income from the market.

A successful farm business needs to be highly competitive. It needs to have a better understanding of its customers. It needs to deliver the right product, at the right time, to the right standard and at the right price. It also needs to make the best use of its human and technical resources. The strategy outlines a number of ways in which that could be achieved. It points to ways of reviewing cost structures and market returns to ensure maximum business potential, shortening the supply chain, co-operating both horizontally and vertically, making better use of

computerisation and improving quality production. Farmers cannot be expected to do that in isolation. A wide range of organisations needs to be involved in helping them to deliver and to ensure success. The enterprise companies, industry bodies, training providers, research organisations and others will all be needed to provide a comprehensive and co-ordinated package of assistance and support.

Scotland has an excellent tradition of quality food production, family businesses, respected research institutes, certified quality assurance and extensive farming systems. We must build on that tradition to make farming more profitable. The strategy offers 30 pointers that are designed to assist in that respect.

In the time that is available to me, I can do no more than give a brief insight into the thinking behind the strategy and its 54 action points. As I have said, work has already started on those points. The strategy calls for all interested parties to engage in their delivery.

"A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" is a strategy document and not a full compendium on how to run a farm. It gives an overarching view of the direction in which the industry must go forward. The strategy has the support of all the people who were engaged in putting it together.

Over the next few years, delivery of the strategy must remain the core objective of farming policy. There will continue to be short-term problems, which we must tackle as they arise. However, we must always keep our eye on the underlying and imperative need to improve the viability of the industry as a whole over a longer period—that is why the strategy is so important.

I have no difficulty in accepting the Conservative amendment. The motion probably covered the importance of integration and farming's effect on the wider community, but for the avoidance of doubt, I am happy to accept the amendment.

I would be kind to say that the SNP amendment leaves me almost speechless. We could say that it is strategically inept. It is certainly intellectually bankrupt. I have rarely seen an amendment that makes so little contribution to solving the real problems that Scottish agriculture faces.

We can have a strong and prosperous rural Scotland. To achieve that, the Government must set an overarching strategy and it should not pretend that it can run individual industries. The Executive is committed to working with all the key stakeholders and must keep its eye on the ball of the overarching strategic aim to deliver a strong and prosperous farming industry. The strategy paves the way for that.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Executive's commitment, as set out in *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, to secure a more profitable and sustainable future for Scottish agriculture, to integrate farming into the economic and social development of rural communities, including the development of Land Management Contracts, and to protect and enhance the environment in partnership with farmers, and approves the actions set out in the strategy for achieving these objectives in partnership with other agencies.

The Presiding Officer: Again, I remind members who would like to take part in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:53

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): We warmly welcome the opportunity to debate the forward strategy for Scottish agriculture. The Rural Development Committee has taken a great deal of evidence and I hope that all members recognise that there is a need for a forward strategy. I also hope that members recognise that it is important that any strategy document gets things right. I say that not just because of the minister's somewhat frosty reception of the SNP amendment, but because it behoves all members to remember that the document sets out a future map and future aims for Scotland's agricultural industry not only for the next months ahead—or even for the next two or three years ahead—but for the long term.

We have lodged an amendment that offers substantive, positive and valuable criticism because we do not think that the Executive has got things right. I believe that, of the communities in Scotland, farmers and crofters are those who would most like the Parliament to work together for a plan that is for the good of their communities. I say that because I heard one or two guffaws from the Liberal Democrats.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): There was not one.

Fergus Ewing: Those seats used to be Labour seats—one is never sure.

I remind Mr Rumbles and other members that the foot-and-mouth crisis earlier this year was dealt with by all parties with a degree of co-operation that served us well. All the parties responded to the need of the farming community at that time. I hope that even Mr Rumbles recognises that in a democracy it is vital to have robust debate, which is what we will get.

Mr Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: I have hardly started so I will give way later.

The strategy document has been summarised

by one of the commentators as being encapsulated in the following ideas: first, farmers must become more competitive, which they can do by cutting costs and increasing revenue by becoming more efficient; secondly, farmers must diversify; and thirdly—the other option in the document—farmers can leave or quit.

The document does not mention the possibility of increased resources in respect of the subsidies and it does not give consideration to a reallocation of the existing subsidies in Scotland, which amount to a great deal of money. The document does not make reference to the number of farms in Scotland or to the number of employees on those farms.

Ross Finnie: Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: I will give way in a minute, certainly.

In a strategy document on agriculture, surely we would expect a clear statement of the number of people working in agriculture. Surely we would expect a projection of where the Executive believes agriculture will be in five or 10 years' time. Surely in any such strategy document we would expect the Executive to say how many employees are in farming now and how many it expects to be in farming once the strategy document has been implemented in five years' time.

I am happy to give way to the minister if he still wishes to make an intervention—perhaps not.

In the document there is no analysis of information that we would expect to receive. That information was in one of the previous documents on the rural economy.

Ross Finnie: I find the member's line of attack extraordinary. Surely he is not suggesting that it is helpful to members to publish the strategy and then also to publish the previous document, which was published as a prelude to the strategy and was circulated to all parties—a document that set out an analysis of the industry, which said that any strategy must be based on a realistic assessment. That really is a bit too far.

Fergus Ewing: I repeat that there is no projection in the strategy of where we expect to be after the strategy has been implemented. How many farmers will be left in Scotland in five years' time? How many employees will there be? The point is serious and not in any way political.

My wife's father was a ploughman who won the championship for the straightness of his line of plough on many occasions. His job became redundant because of technology. Many other jobs have become redundant because of technology. We cannot go back—progress is to be welcomed and valued. Nonetheless, we have a responsibility

to look into the future. That is what a strategy document sets out to do.

Secondly, there is no consideration whatever in the document of the reform of existing schemes. Yesterday, the Rural Development Committee debated one of those schemes—the rural stewardship scheme, which replaces the environmentally sensitive area scheme and the countryside premium scheme. The CPS was an agri-environment scheme. It included one aspect that I hope we would all agree was valuable: it had a ceiling. No single unit could receive more than £30,000 under that scheme but the ceiling has been removed under its successor, the rural stewardship scheme.

We understand from one of the civil servants who gave evidence to the committee yesterday that one farmer or land occupier has put in an application for £500,000. The money that is available is about £5 million, so if that application were to be granted, one farmer or landowner would get 10 per cent of all the money that is available. Yesterday, we argued and Mike Rumbles—to whom I will be happy to give way in a moment if he still has the desire—argued that that was wrong in principle. I pray in aid the critique of the Scottish Crofters Union.

Mr Rumbles: I was trying to intervene earlier because I believe that Fergus Ewing's amendment—and the minister referred to this earlier—is very negative, as is his speech. He is delivering a negative and unsupportive speech.

The SNP amendment states that the document

“does not contain an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses ... does not consider the policies ... does not provide ... nor does it provide...”

By no measure can the amendment be construed to be constructive opposition in practice. All that the SNP is doing is carping; it is not being helpful to the agricultural industry.

Fergus Ewing: Has Mike Rumbles finished? I do not know whether I should take that point seriously. I am not sure whether it is worth while.

When we develop our strategy, we should consider what other countries do. That was one of the criticisms made by Donald MacRae. He is not somebody to whom the minister would use the language that he chose to use to refer to my amendment earlier. Donald MacRae said that a major weakness of the document is that it does not have an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats—a SWOT analysis—and that another major weakness is that it does not include international comparisons. He referred to many positive examples that we should consider such as Switzerland, Austria and Ireland. The document does not even compare what happens in our farming industry to what happens

south of the border. Donald MacRae and Fergus Ewing are united in this criticism.

Ross Finnie: I did not hear Donald MacRae's evidence, but this criticism seems extraordinary as one of the first things that we did when we embarked on the exercise was to go to Ireland and take receipt of the Irish policy document and their strategy document and feed those into the process. We visited France and also took account of practices in Germany. In the previous year, Andrew Dewar-Durie brought back with him enormously useful information from New Zealand. It is fatuous to suggest that we did not take account of international practice.

Fergus Ewing: I do not know what work the minister has been doing behind the scenes, but I know that it has not found its way into the document. The document has not been informed by any other country's experience except that of France—one appendix provides some information on France. I hope that the minister will publish the additional research to which he has referred. That would be helpful.

I referred to the rural stewardship scheme for one reason. The Scottish Parliament has certain power and influence; it surely has the power to achieve fairness in the way in which grant schemes distribute millions of pounds. The Scottish Crofters Union has argued—I believe with force—that such schemes should contain a ceiling on the amount of financial assistance that should be received. The level of the ceiling is a matter for debate, but it is wrong that one unit can receive £500,000 or perhaps even more—some people have suggested that one unit could receive £1 million from the rural stewardship scheme, which has a budget of £5 million. It is wrong that that benefit should go to one person when thousands of farmers face bankruptcy in our island communities and in the Highlands.

Alex Fergusson *rose—*

Fergus Ewing: Before I take the intervention, I will ask one question. Where in the document is there any recognition that this Parliament should be making such schemes fairer? The answer is that that is recognised nowhere. That is extremely unfortunate. I hope that this debate will remedy that.

Alex Fergusson: Although the debate over whether there should be a ceiling on such grant schemes is for another occasion, does Fergus Ewing accept the principle that no scheme should be ruled by the size of the business that is applying under it? It is not always the case that very large applicants should be ruled out, because very often such applicants employ a large number of people in an area where employment is often hard to come by.

Fergus Ewing: One of the criteria for such schemes should be the applicant's financial standing. I did not say that people should be excluded. Regard should also be paid to the benefits such as job creation that will flow from investment in agri-environment schemes.

Where I disagree with Alex Fergusson is that I think that this issue is germane to today's debate. I have mentioned the rural stewardship scheme. There is also the less favoured areas scheme, which was supposed to move from production-based to area-based payments and recognise the problems faced daily by the farmers and crofters who farm the most difficult upland terrain that forms the 85 per cent of Scotland classified as less favoured area. The result of that deal has been met with widespread dismay by almost all the players. Even today, we are not sure whether the 90 per cent safety net has been secured.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: In a second. If that safety net is reduced to 50 per cent, what is the future for crofters and small farmers? The basic question that the strategy document does not address is whether there is a sustainable future for the small farmer and crofter in Scotland.

My party will not support today's motion because if one reads the strategy document with care, as I have done, it is clear that not only does it not give assurance to those people, but it should be greeted with great concern by crofters and small farmers. It says that no one owes a farmer a living, which is true, but does not really provide much comfort. It points out that there will many fewer farmers in the dairy sector and that smaller farms will go to the wall.

I was in a farmer's kitchen when he talked about stopping his milk production the following week and doing something else if he could. We all know the real dilemmas and problems that farmers face; some members who are also farmers will know them far better than I do. However, the document's major defect is that it does not offer reassurance, hope or positive measures for the small farmer and crofter in Scotland.

I wish to move on to discuss land management contracts, which is the other idea contained in the document.

The Presiding Officer: Can you do so in 10 seconds?

Fergus Ewing: Although we support such contracts in principle, we have severe reservations about them in practice. Above all, farmers might feel that they form a new bureaucracy, and that they are a new form of contract that leaves them very little bargaining power, imposes duties upon

them and gives them very few rights. Although we welcome the concept, the devil will be very much in the detail.

I move amendment S1M-2278.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"believes that the Scottish Executive's *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture* does not contain an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector, does not consider the policies implemented in other European countries, does not provide or suggest any mechanism by which the aims described in the document can be achieved, nor does it provide any assurance to the small farmer or crofter that they have a sustainable long term future in agriculture."

15:09

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): In rising to propose the Conservatives' amendment to the Executive's motion, I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests, which suggests that I still maintain an active farming interest. That is not the case, and it must be some measure of the state of Scottish agriculture today that my instant reaction to no longer being involved in daily farming after almost 30 years is profound relief.

The truth of the matter is that, out there in the real world, the morale of farmers and the profitability of farming are at an all-time low. Is it any wonder that morale is at rock bottom when, at the height of the greatest foot-and-mouth epidemic that this country has ever faced, a Prime Minister tells farming leaders that the Government stands four-square behind the agricultural industry and then, in the next breath, tells the wider electorate that farming does not even feature in his top priorities?

Is it any wonder that that morale is so low when, prior to the general election in June, the Government pledged that it would discuss a recovery package for the agriculture industry in the wake of foot-and-mouth disease only to express, following the election, no intention even to consider—never mind discuss—such a package? That package could easily have included such initiatives as an outgoers scheme for those who want or need to leave farming.

In 1997, Lord Sewel, who was then the minister with responsibility for agriculture at the former Scottish Office, set out his new rural policy for Scotland. He said:

"I want to signal a new approach to rural development policy in Scotland, one based on sustainable development, and one which places the rural citizen at the heart of the process."

Four years on, we are still talking and consulting on the same theme. Never have farmers and farming been left so long without any clear direction as to what the Government expects of

them. Farmers have always and will always respond to what the Government expects of them. As they receive significant sums of public money, it is right that that should be so; it is equally right that the recipients of that money should have a clear idea of what they should do with it.

The minister will argue—as he has argued—that the forward strategy sets out a clear framework for the future of Scottish agriculture. In the long term, that may well prove to be correct. However, we cannot address the long-term situation without considering the current situation and the short-term problems that require action now. Foremost among those must be the need to continue into the second year the 90 per cent safety net for the LFA support scheme.

I remind members that 85 per cent of Scotland is classified as LFA, and most of those who farm in that area have been net losers under that hastily introduced and ill-thought-out scheme. The minister has recently made all the right noises on maintaining the safety net of 90 per cent. However, given the tight time schedule for European approval of such a move, perhaps he could enlighten us later on what progress has been made in that direction.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Given the litany of criticisms of the Executive, I wonder why Mr Fergusson has lodged such a tepid amendment. If all the issues that he is addressing are so important, why are they not contained in his amendment?

Alex Fergusson: As I explained, we cannot consider the future of agriculture—which is what the strategy is doing—without considering the short-term problems. The motion is on the strategy for agriculture and our amendment is to the motion. If Mr Hamilton waits until I am further into my speech, he will hear me explain my position.

Because of foot-and-mouth disease, no sheepmeat has been exported this year from Scotland, England or Wales. That has led to a significant increase in prices for lamb throughout Europe, which in turn has led to an estimated drop in the sheep annual premium of 38 per cent to £6.68 per head. National top-up of sheep annual premium is permitted under European Union regulations, and there has surely never been a more pressing time for such a top-up. I hope to hear from the Executive later that that option is being vigorously pursued.

Agrimonetary compensation for cereal farmers, continued funding for milk promotion and a foot-and-mouth disease recovery package, which I mentioned earlier, are some of the short-term measures that desperately need to be considered before we turn our full attention to the long-term strategy. If those issues are not addressed

promptly, there is a real danger that there will not be much agriculture left for which a forward strategy will be necessary. From my history lessons, I recall that Emperor Nero fiddled while Rome burned. I hope that, in 20 years' time, we will not look back and say that Emperor Finnie consulted while Scottish agriculture was destroyed—not by fire, but by political neglect.

Ross Finnie: I understand what Mr Fergusson is saying. In making the six points that he has made, he has read very well from the parliamentary briefing that was prepared by the NFUS. Does he not think that it is important for us to take two and a half hours to consider a serious issue of long-term strategy? Would he have preferred me to have simply repeated the debate on the short-term issues?

I take seriously the issues that Mr Fergusson has raised—and I hope that he takes seriously my assurance that they are being addressed—but there is a need for us to get beyond the immediate crisis and make a decision on where we want agriculture to go. Would he at least be gracious enough to accept that?

Alex Fergusson: I have no problem whatsoever in accepting that, minister, although I make no apology for repeating some points made by the NFUS. I do not disagree with what the minister says but, as I have pointed out, until the important short-term problems are addressed, it is difficult to consider the long-term strategy seriously.

It is impossible to disagree with a motion such as that moved by the Executive today—unless, like the Scottish National Party, we turn to pure negativity. As ever, that is useful to no one other than to those who produce the SNP's press releases. In lodging our amendment, Conservatives do not seek to disagree with the motion; rather we seek to secure the place of profitable agriculture at the heart of a successful rural economy. Conservatives have long maintained that it is not possible to have one without the other. I am delighted that the new shadow cabinet at Westminster includes a minister specifically for agriculture. That is a clear recognition of the fact that Conservatives continue to recognise—even when some other parties do not—the vital role that agriculture plays in the rural economy.

The Executive's strategy document acknowledges that precept. Its first headline issue on page 3 states that

“a healthy rural economy needs a healthy farming industry.”

Our amendment seeks merely to highlight that importance in a way that the motion does not. I am delighted to hear that the Executive is able to agree with it.

As has been said, the Rural Development Committee recently spent a day taking evidence on the strategy. At the end of that day, the consensus was that, although the strategy document provides a useful starting point for discussions, much fleshing-out of the detail is needed. I think that the minister acknowledged that earlier. I presume that the next group that he sets up will do that fleshing-out.

One or two elements of the strategy are dangerously misleading, if not simply wrong. By way of example, I draw members' attention to "Action 11", which states that, following the foot-and-mouth epidemic, the Executive will

"develop a framework for livestock movements in Scotland which substantially reduces the risk of disease".

To me, that implies that the current system of livestock marketing caused the disease; it appears to blur the fact that we imported the disease. Part of the answer must be a clear labelling system and proper control of imports. Like the strategy itself, such things have been talked about for too long when decisive action could have led to their being initiated.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Alex Fergusson has criticised what has happened in the past, and he has criticised the SNP for negativity in its amendment, yet he is now making specific negative criticisms of the strategy. He has to make his mind up: is he in favour of the strategy or is he entirely against it? We are hearing a mixed message from the Tories—a bit like their usual position.

Alex Fergusson: I have no difficulty in answering that. I support the strategy and Conservatives will support the strategy today, especially as the importance of profitable agriculture has now been accepted by the Executive. It is possible to accept something but still criticise parts of it. I do not see any difficulty with that. If one could not do that, one could not have much of a debate.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Will the member give way?

Alex Fergusson: I am extremely sorry. I am going to run out of time.

The strategy talks at length about reducing bureaucracy and red tape and about simplifying procedures for farmers. Then, at "Action 29", we read the dreaded words:

"Local Enterprise Companies, local authorities, the Executive and other local agencies must identify and develop the economic potential from better links between farming businesses and other rural businesses in their area."

That is fine as far as it goes but, Presiding Officer, anyone who has been involved—as Dumfries and

Galloway and the Borders begin the slow process of recovering from foot-and-mouth disease—will tell us clearly that the involvement of many of the aforementioned bodies virtually guarantees a significant increase in bureaucracy and red tape, rather than the decrease that is undoubtedly preferred. The full economic potential of agricultural businesses and farms must, of course, be unlocked, but let us be very wary of drowning that potential in a sea of consultants and bureaucrats who will simply stifle the innovation and initiative that already exist in rural Scotland.

As others have said, the biggest talking point to come out of this strategy is, without doubt, the concept of land management contracts—a system of whole-farm support to which, I can now acknowledge, all farmers will be able to apply equally and without discrimination. That being the case, I welcome the principle of those contracts as a reversal of the trend of current schemes—such as the rural stewardship scheme, which is funded by all farmers via modulation but benefits only a few, and the LFA support scheme, which I have already described as hurried and ill-thought-out. The result of both those schemes is the transfer of considerable amounts of money from some geographical areas to others, which I have long believed to be detrimental. It is a trend that shows signs of increasing rather than decreasing.

On that basis, I give land management contracts a cautious welcome, although there remains a niggling doubt in my mind that the end result may well be to lessen overall support for agriculture. I hope that I am wrong on that point, although I suspect that I may not be.

If the strategy is to have relevance in Scotland and as part of the future reform as the CAP, as the minister has indicated, vital short-term issues have to be addressed now for the agriculture industry to survive. If it can survive, the strategy may well have a significant part to play.

I make a final effort to bring a more cheerful note to the speech. I could not help but notice when reading the strategy the beauty of many of the pictures and the impressive case studies of various entrepreneurs and enterprises throughout Scotland. They suggest strongly that not all is bad in Scottish farming and that not all of it needs fixing. We must take care not to try to put right those areas that already work very well. Many examples of businesses from which much can be learned already exist. If the strategy is to be the success that Scottish agriculture so desperately needs, it must include the appropriate lessons.

I repeat my pleasure that the Executive accepts the amendment in my name, which in turn allows us to support the motion fully.

I move amendment S1M-2278.2, to insert at end:

"while recognising that a profitable farming industry is fundamental to a successful rural economy."

15:21

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I intend to talk about the forward strategy rather than the problems with the CAP. Labour's manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections in 1999 made a commitment to

"build a modern sustainable farming industry able to compete successfully in changing world markets."

That, of course, is much easier to say than to do. Major changes have to be made to achieve that aim. The Executive's forward strategy is a starting point in the debate that has to happen for that aim to be achieved.

The foot-and-mouth epidemic forced us to recognise a number of factors, to which the minister alluded. It proved for ever that agriculture is inextricably linked to the rural economy. It forced us to realise the importance of the countryside to our nation. It also gave rise to a more widespread discussion about why agriculture attracts public support and what that support is expected to achieve.

Why does agriculture receive a level of support that has not been available to sustain other traditional Scottish industries, such as mining, shipbuilding or textiles? One answer, which was given to me by Jim Walker of the NFUS when I asked him that question at the Rural Development Committee, is that we are obliged to give that support under European Union rules. The farmers unions in Europe have been more successful in pressing their cases than many other unions have been. Certainly, there is no reason why Scottish farmers should not be entitled to public subsidy under the CAP in the same way as their counterparts elsewhere in Europe.

Agriculture supports a plethora of other businesses in rural areas. It supports a valuable food and drinks industry, in which Scotland can and should achieve a level of excellence and which is worth £417 million a year to the Scottish economy. Mr Walker pointed out to the Rural Development Committee that every £1 that is spent on agriculture generates £3.16 in other sectors of the economy. Agriculture plays an important role in the rural infrastructure. It is vital to rural development and the growth of rural businesses.

There is also the land. Three quarters of the landmass of Scotland is farmed. The land management role of farming will be increasingly important. It is not always appreciated that the

rural landscape that we know and love is the product of centuries of land management, predominantly by farmers. The casual observer of the countryside may presume that the landscape is somehow a natural phenomenon, but it is not. The public would not appreciate all that land being left to revert to the wild. We need only think about the complaints that we get if grass verges or untended plots of land become overgrown. The public do not want three quarters of Scotland to revert to weeds.

The problem with public subsidy is that, over most of the past 50 years, it has been concentrated on production rather than on the other roles of agriculture. In the Common Market, that was exemplified by the creation of wine lakes and butter mountains. Even when the problems with that method of subsidy were recognised, the successor scheme still concentrated on production by subsidising headage of stock.

One consequence of that focus is that it has rewarded farming practices that have damaged the environment. Over the past 50 years, we have seen the destruction of rare habitats and a significant reduction in the populations of many birds and mammals, including many songbirds that were common in the time of our grandparents.

Schemes such as the rural stewardship scheme, on which we have had some discussion today, are intended to address some of those issues. The mechanics of the scheme have been criticised, but we should not lose sight of the scheme's intent, which is to reward farmers for preserving the environment or for creating environments that will improve the situation for the increasingly rare wildlife in parts of Scotland.

It is not fair to blame farmers for all the problems, because farming has been directed by public policy. However, we have to take stock of the situation as it exists. Scotland will not be able to compete in the cheap market. Our climate is too harsh compared to that of New Zealand, Argentina, Botswana or even eastern Europe. Our hill sheep, for example, are unable to be finished on the holding of their birth.

In the longer term, there is little point in subsidising production over and above what the market can sustain. Why should the Scottish public accept the need to subsidise products that they do not want to buy?

Rory Dutton of the Scottish Crofters Union said in his evidence to the Rural Development Committee a couple of weeks ago:

"It is necessary to justify where the money is going."

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Does the member accept that it is not the British public who have to subsidise the farmers in that respect? Farmers

believe that they are entitled to be in European markets, but those markets have been closed for almost five years to beef and one year to lamb. That is where the real problem lies.

Dr Murray: I accept that there has been a major problem in markets post-BSE. However, I am talking about the level of support. We are dealing with supporting an industry. The people of this country and the people of the European Union support the industry. That has to go with an acceptance of what the industry is about. We are talking about the way in which we value agriculture and why. We are not just talking about whether the markets are open or closed.

I return to what Rory Dutton told us. He said:

"The issue is no longer simply about maximising food production. We would argue that it is about maximising broader benefits. If the money is being spent to support agriculture, let us get as many other benefits as possible from it, such as socioeconomic or environmental benefits."—[*Official Report, Rural Development Committee*, 18 September 2001; c 2145.].

Agriculture has a huge role to play in improving the environment and in regenerating habitats that are now in decline. Scotland's countryside is one of its most valuable assets. We may not have the weather, but we have the scenery. Our natural heritage is the basis of much of Scottish tourism. Every year, walking tourism is worth £488 million to our economy; cycling is worth £73 million; field sports are worth £53 million; and wildlife watching is worth £57 million.

The new rural development regulation provides more flexibility to support economic, social and environmental benefits, rather than simply paying for production. By the next financial year, more than £110 million of support will be paid in that way, compared to just over £400 million paid for production.

I am aware that there is a view that we do not make the best use of the rural development regulation in Scotland. As the minister knows, I have some sympathy with that view. The Scottish Labour Party is committed to fundamental change in European policy and further movement away from supporting production through price guarantees towards rewarding farmers for their stewardship role.

The current application of the less favoured area scheme seems to have little cross-party support. We all agree that it needs to be reviewed. There also needs to be more transparency in the way in which subsidies are given.

The rural development regulation is already stimulating discussion of how multifunctional farming can be promoted. As has been mentioned, "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" highlights the way in which the French

Government uses the rural development regulation for land management contracts, which support economic, environmental, employment and land use objectives through one scheme, rather than making farmers apply for a mixture of subsidy packages. The Scottish Executive's intention to develop a similar scheme in Scotland has been widely welcomed—although it did not seem to be welcomed by Fergus Ewing.

That is not to say that production is not important. Scotland should be able to compete successfully at the high-quality end of the market. That includes the important export markets of Europe and beyond. John Scott made an important point about the closure of those markets.

Costs have to be kept down and the strategy suggests how business advice might be improved, how the enterprise network could help farming industries to improve their competitiveness and how co-operation and schemes such as machinery rings could help to reduce expenditure. Attention is also given to how the food supply chain might be reduced and how farmers and retailers can better identify their customers' needs. For example, farmers markets have already gained valuable experience in direct selling and through links with local shops and tourism; others can learn from that experience.

Whenever the Scottish Executive produces a strategy document, there are those whose prime objective is to state all that they think wrong with it, whether that be its content, its form or the paper on which it is printed. Opposition parties may indeed see blanket criticism as their role—the SNP amendment seems to be a classic example of that approach and it is no wonder that the minister struggled to find the parliamentary language to describe it.

I note that the minister has accepted Mr Fergusson's amendment. Indeed, I do not think that anyone could disagree with it. However, I remind Mr Fergusson that BSE did not do much to improve farmers' morale. Some of the rather Europhobic policies that are outlined in the Tory document "A Fair Deal for Farmers" would do little to help. In fact, they would leave a funding gap of about £472 million, which I do not think would help farmers' morale much either.

It would be a pity were the SNP's blanket criticism allowed to mask genuinely constructive—but possibly critical—comment on the content of the document. Any progress has to involve critical friends. For example, there are concerns that the role of crofting and organic farming is not sufficiently emphasised. My colleague Rhoda Grant will expand on those sectors. There are also regrets that the trade unions involved in agriculture were not represented on the steering group—I

should add that there were also no women on it. My colleague Elaine Smith will say more about the trade union response to the document, as well as talking about health and safety matters. Sylvia Jackson will draw on the experiences of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park campaign and on how working together will promote environmental and economic progress.

How “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture” links with other Executive strategies on tourism, cultural heritage and forestry is unclear, but the articulation of such concerns does not detract from the fact that the document contains 54 action points, illustrations of successful case studies, a number of radical proposals and a commitment to creating a prosperous farming industry that promotes rural development and sustains and enhances our environment.

I am surprised that the SNP finds that difficult to accept. The document and the debate that it has stimulated are to be welcomed and I will be pleased to support the Executive’s motion as amended.

15:32

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture” is a rattling good read: light, frothy and unchallenging. It might have come from the Mills & Boon school of strategy. As the minister highlighted, the report outlines 54 action points, although he asks us to read it as a whole. I suspect that I know why he does not want us to focus on the detail.

I have been responsible for strategy in a major company and I would apply a number of tests to assess the value of any strategy. Those tests are very simple. Will the strategy change anything? Does it give a timetable over which any change will take place? Does it provide resources for change? Does it allocate responsibility to the parties who must make the changes? Does it have agreement to action? On all those tests, the Executive’s forward strategy, in so far as it may be described as a strategy at all, fails. The minister described it as a vision. Perhaps wisely, he avoided using the word “strategy” in many of his remarks.

The strategy reminds me of the reply that a hot-air balloon pilot got when, on descending through cloud, he asked a farmer in the field below, “Where am I?” The farmer replied, “You’re 100ft above my field.” In other words, it is accurate, but not much use. If only the Executive strategy was a mere 100ft away from the answer. We need less hot air, more action, a great deal more urgency and more relevance.

Let us consider some of the detail underpinning the Executive’s strategy—the 54 action points. Five of them address beasts, four address sheep but none addresses pigs, fowl or crops. In fact, pigs are not mentioned until an annexe at page 49 of the 60 pages. Fourteen of the action points are for farmers to take, 15 indicate further reviews and 21 tell us that people and organisations other than the Executive will be taking action.

Most frightening, there are eight action points that I can categorise only as motherhood and apple pie. Let me give members an example. Action point 45 states:

“The farming, food and environment sectors must work together to identify new ways of protecting and enhancing our environment while ensuring the competitiveness of our farming businesses.”

Even the SNP cannot disagree with that. However, the document contains no action, no resources and no timetable. It is motherhood, plain and simple. Those who are agin it should stand up now.

I concede that there is one action point with a date. Action point 41 would establish another working group, to report six months after having been set up. I am delighted by the minister’s announcement that the group has now been set up and I expect its report to be delivered to us by the end of March.

Ross Finnie said that we must not merely focus on immediate problems. I agree. However, unless we can travel round the current problems we will not reach the future—there will be nae farms for the future. A vision for the future—which the document might just be, sometimes—provides only a context for a strategy. It does not deliver one.

In answer to Alex Fergusson, the minister stated that the Executive still had to develop detail on land management contracts. That is typical of the way in which the document deals with things.

I am delighted to hear that the minister will meet local enterprise companies tomorrow. In that area, at least, we are moving ahead.

We share the minister’s objective of delivering a viable farming sector. I do not doubt his good faith, but I doubt that this document represents a strategy. I doubt that we know when it will deliver. The document does not suggest that action will be taken with the sense of urgency that the industry requires. To be kind—a word that the minister used—I wish that I could share the minister’s optimism, but I cannot. Many people in the industry remain dispirited and downhearted.

15:37

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

I begin by drawing members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

I welcome the broad thrust of the document. It covers a number of issues that require to be addressed. However, farmers who have received a summary of the document have complained to me that not enough farmers were involved in its preparation. That is a warning for the future, which can be applied to the implementation of the strategy. Although I fully acknowledge the importance of top-level contacts with the NFUS, the Scottish Crofters Union and the Scottish Landowners Federation, the Executive must in future be fully aware that the farming industry cannot be treated in the same way as others have been. Individual farmers' views must continue to be sought whenever possible during the implementation of the strategy.

I suspect that the Executive continues to confuse agriculture with farming. It fails to realise that agriculture is a science, but that farming is still very much a business. The research and education base for agriculture in Scotland is being eroded. I admit that the minister made an important concession in his speech, but the Executive's failure to underpin the science base in agriculture has produced a generation that is voting with its feet and seeking education or training that may lead to more financially rewarding employment than that afforded by the farming industry.

There are those who believe that the proposals in the document do not go far enough. However, Conservative members understand that the Executive walks a fine line, deviation from which could result in catastrophe for the industry in one way or another. First, we could be led towards a future in which farming is done by a few enormous farming companies that are able to push efficiency to the limit, resulting in an industry more like that in the American midwest or parts of Australia. Alternatively, we could end up as a nation of small farmers and crofters whose incomes are determined entirely by the level of state subsidy to which they are entitled—a prospect that is already alienating the next generation of farmers, who see no dignity in a life as Ross Finnie's retainer.

The future of the rural economy must be based on a model that retains the existing patchwork of independent businesses, some small and some large. Some businesses would be exclusively involved in the primary industry of farming, some would be involved in processing farm produce and some would exist to serve the farming industry.

In our traditional farming areas, such as the

Howe of the Mearns, where I come from, there is a mix of small farms and family farms that are run by the self-employed and larger farms that can provide paid employment. The message that the Executive gives out today must be that both groups of farms are of equal value and are equally deserving of support.

I understand from Fergus Ewing's speech that at yesterday's Rural Development Committee attempts were made to suggest that support must be targeted at small farmers and crofters. At best, that approach is naive and, at worst, it is an appeal for political support. Above all, it is misguided, as not only would it undermine the jobs of those who are employed on larger farms, but it could have a further knock-on effect. In the past, we have called for a level playing field in Europe; indeed, we will continue to do so. If the proposed targeting were applied on a pan-European basis, it might well end up as an argument for the removal of support from Scotland, where the farms are larger, in order to concentrate support on countries such as Greece or Italy or perhaps some of the applicant countries.

I will introduce two further points that are not covered in the strategy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Please do so briefly, Mr Johnstone.

Alex Johnstone: The land reform process must be given priority. It could be argued that the draft land reform bill will have a negative influence on Scotland's farming industry. However, the potential exists for the regulations on agricultural holdings to be reviewed in such a way that they would contribute to the well-being of our farmers. I understand from the land reform action plan, which has been published to update us on progress, that we can expect a draft agricultural holdings bill this autumn; I look forward to such a bill with some optimism.

The Executive motion, reinforced by the amendment in the name of Alex Fergusson, will underpin the future of the farming industry in Scotland, but the SNP amendment will undermine it.

15:42

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): The document "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture", which was published in June 2001, is a first, not only in the way in which it sets out a direction for Government in relation to agriculture but because it was developed in partnership with key stakeholders in the industry. I was pleased to be invited to meetings in my constituency where the document was discussed in detail at grass-roots level. Whatever the strategy's failings, that is the basis of its strengths. It sets out a plan for action

that people have bought—and can buy—into and it sets the industry in its proper context as part of the wider rural economy.

Foot-and-mouth caused an interesting fact to emerge. Although tourism accounts for a much bigger slice of the economy than agriculture does, it is inextricably linked to agriculture to a degree that might not have been fully recognised by those who looked at separate sets of statistics; people did not realise how closely the industries were married together. Having said that, I believe that it has always been recognised that farming, whatever its market slice in the rural economy, has always been a fundamental element of that economy. When farmers are doing well, things are usually okay. Unfortunately, the reverse also holds true.

The Scottish Parliament has enabled much more political attention to be directed towards agriculture, which is a more significant part of the Scottish economy than it is of the UK economy as a whole. That has happened at a crucial time. Increasingly, we are competing in a global marketplace. We will shortly be operating in an enlarged European Union market. Other players, with geographic and climatic advantages over us, will enter the game. We will have to identify where we have the advantage and make changes to how we operate accordingly.

Our society has subsidised the production of food. As an aside, I reiterate the view that, when we talk about subsidising farmers, we mean that we are subsidising consumers. The way in which those subsidies are applied was inevitably going to change as different players entered the game. That pressure will increase as part of the consequences of 11 September because we will have to take a wider and less exclusive attitude towards access to markets.

The other wind of change that is blowing is the increasing emphasis on how activities impact on the environment. The basis of agricultural subsidy and support is already moving from production to environmental protection. I see that as an opportunity, not a threat. That view is validated by what has been said to me by farmers in my constituency and elsewhere who are farming in ways that are more environmentally aware and—this is the bottom line—economically viable. Such farming can also be more interesting and satisfying for the farmers, their families, neighbours, visitors and passers-by, who enjoy the increased biodiversity, to use the jargon—in lay terms, that means more flowers and more birds.

Let me come back to financial viability. There are some excellent schemes to support environmentally friendly farming, but it would almost be an understatement to say that they are heavily oversubscribed. With the whole agriculture

budget under such severe strain, it is not easy to see how to address that situation immediately. In my view, the Treasury has cheated the industry of resources that could have been available to it through agrimonetary compensation. It is not within the Parliament's powers to do anything about that directly, but I hope that we are dancing on the carpet in London on the issue. Perhaps if those millions were drawn down, other resources would be freed up that could be put into the rural stewardship scheme or support the land management contracts, which are the strategy's main innovation and which have been a long-standing Liberal Democrat policy.

The farming industry is being buffeted by winds of change and has been rocked to its foundations by foot-and-mouth. Being a positive person, I argue that an industry that has been so shaken can turn the situation to its advantage. The industry is not in a state that we would have chosen it to be in, but change should be more possible. To capitalise on and make the best of the current situation, a sense of direction and some idea of desirable outcomes are needed. The forward strategy is a pretty reasonable first stab at signposting a destination.

I commend the strategy and support the motion. The SNP amendment is wholly negative and offers nothing in place of the strategy that it pulls apart. The Conservative amendment reiterates what is in the motion anyway, but perhaps it bears repeating. Let me briefly welcome—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must wind up.

Nora Radcliffe: I will leave out my final point.

15:47

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Today's debate is extremely important, not only for farmers and crofters but for the whole of rural Scotland. If crofting did not exist, many of the villages and townships in the crofting counties would not survive. Such is the interdependence of agriculture and rural Scotland.

We need to create a vision of what we want from farming and crofting and follow it through with policies. It is obvious that EU enlargement and pressure from the World Trade Organisation will mean less investment by way of subsidies, which will have to be decoupled from production. We need to work towards that now, not just at the last minute. When we react at the last minute, we get schemes such as the less favoured areas scheme, which was the wrong policy and which was adopted because of lack of time. We are now left trying to lobby Brussels for changes to a scheme that should not have been introduced in the way that it was.

Farming and crofting cannot be divorced from the greater rural economy. Crofting provides social benefits, such as low-cost housing that would be unachievable without the crofting counties building grants and loans scheme. The environmental benefits of crofting agriculture can be seen in the way that it maintains habitats in the countryside, which can then be sold to tourists.

Consumers want more information on the food that they eat and on how it is reared, but crofting has never exploited that market to the full. We need to tap that market to gain the full resources that that can deliver.

For those who farm on the periphery, it is difficult to access information on new processes and on what is required to diversify into other sectors of agriculture. It is extremely important that that is addressed and that advice is provided locally to crofters and small farmers.

Mr Hamilton: Given that we are talking about crofting, will the member comment on the view of the Scottish Crofters Union, which continues to try to establish precisely what the strategy document says, what new ideas it brings to the debate, what its role is and how it fits in with earlier strategic rural statements? Does she agree with the union?

Rhoda Grant: I have listened to the union's concerns and understand that it is working with others on a strategy for crofting.

We need to learn much about crofting through co-operative working. Crofting has always worked co-operatively. In townships, people who have crofts in those areas work together. They need the advice that those townships can use, which they can access and build on.

The strategy talks about the environment but does not deal directly with organic farming, which is a growing sector. Much of our organic food is imported—Scotland has a large market that we are not supplying. Our farmers need a strategy to give the correct advice on organic farming in order for them to meet the home market's demands. I would welcome assistance from the Executive for small farmers and crofters in my area who have difficulty accessing that market because of the quality of their ground.

Animals are normally sold on to farms for finishing. As a result, small farmers are greatly disadvantaged unless organic farmers purchase those animals directly from them. We require more research into organic techniques that will allow people at the periphery to finish animals and attain that market in their own right.

The strategy also talks about land management contracts, through which we will be able to decouple financial support from production. However, before we can enter into those

contracts, we need to know what we want from agriculture in the future. Drawing up an overarching policy will be difficult, because agreement is difficult to reach in a diverse farming industry. Small and large farmers seem to want conflicting results.

Our policy needs to recognise the social and economic benefits of farming. Unless our policy addresses that, it will not work in a rural development framework.

15:52

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I enjoyed Rhoda Grant's attempt to reconcile promotion of the crofting interest with distancing herself from the Scottish Crofters Union's criticisms of the Executive's strategy. I recognise that that horse is difficult to ride, but I will return to that matter in a couple of minutes.

I will comment on the allegation that the SNP's amendment is negative. I suggest that we are seeing two views of opposition. Why do the Conservatives say that they cannot support the SNP's amendment? The SNP's amendment makes four suggestions. We say that we want

"an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses"

of the farming sector, to consider what other European countries are doing, to see the mechanisms for implementing the document's proposals and to have assurances that small farmers and crofters will have a sustainable long-term future.

I would be interested to know whether the Conservatives' agriculture spoketeam will put on record its opposition to any of those objectives. Real opposition involves making proposals, as we have. In contrast, we have heard a litany of criticisms of the Executive's strategy to date and an unpicking of the forward strategy. The Conservatives have not shown the courage to lodge an amendment that would go beyond that.

Alex Fergusson *rose—*

Mr Rumbles *rose—*

Mr Hamilton: I say to Mike Rumbles that I would much rather take an intervention from Mr Fergusson.

Alex Fergusson: I do not blame Mr Hamilton for that.

The position is simple. The SNP's position and amendment are aimed at rejecting the strategy. We have no desire to reject the strategy. We wish to improve it.

Mr Hamilton: The SNP's amendment states that we want to implement the Executive's document and find some practical means of doing

something rather than passing matters on to another set of consultations.

I will make two points from a Highlands and Islands perspective on some of the arguments that the forward strategy makes. Land management contracts, which Fergus Ewing mentioned, may turn out to be a good idea, but when the centrepiece of a much-trumpeted document is so vague and lacking in detail or a long-term promise of sustainability, that undermines the whole document.

Mr Finnie cited the example of France, but said that we do not want to follow it. He tells us that it may be two or three years before we go down that route. What would he say to those who will struggle to survive for two to three years under the current regime? What would he say to those who want to know more about the relative balance in weighting between the social and economic benefit to the local community, on the agricultural side? There is a range of unanswered questions.

The strategy has been hailed as the way forward, but has as its centrepiece an argument that is so vague as to be utterly vacuous. That is why the Opposition is right to criticise it. That is especially true when we look at the problems of the rural stewardship scheme that we have already discussed. Rory Dutton of the Scottish Crofters Union says it all when he states:

"An indication of how RSS is failing ... can be seen from an example of a croft in North Uist. This particular croft lies within an SSSI, a machair SAC, a RAMSAR wetland of international importance, an SPA for wading birds and corncrakes, forms part of an RSPB reserve and is currently managed under the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme."

If that croft does not qualify, what on earth does someone have to do to qualify?

Those crofters are suffering—

Ross Finnie *rose*—

Mr Hamilton: Given the time, minister—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is time for interventions.

Mr Hamilton: With an invitation like that, I will let the minister intervene.

Ross Finnie: Why does Mr Hamilton not read on? Does not Mr Dutton's statement go on to say that that decision has not been finalised?

Mr Hamilton: No. If the minister wants me to read on, I am delighted to do so. The next paragraph states:

"The Scottish Crofters Union is calling on the Scottish Executive to review the allocation system"

That is because the system is fundamentally flawed. If the minister is going to intervene, he

should remember the press release accurately.

I will make one final point on the range of positive suggestions that we are proposing today, and that is for the minister to look at the idea of a minimum guaranteed income for farms. That suggestion, which has been proposed by the NFU and others in Scotland, would have substantial advantages. In the period of transition and change that we have entered into, a minimum guaranteed income would give people the opportunity to know that their investment had a long-term secure future. It would also give us time to put in place all the relative balances on the index to ensure that the allocation of resources would be appropriate to the Scottish need. It would allow us to ensure that, in the long term, there is a sustainable future for all of Scotland's farming and crofting communities.

If that is not a way forward, if that is not a real strategy, and if that is not real vision—I do not know what is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a little time in hand and, where members allow interventions, I will allow extra time for dialogue.

15:57

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I declare an interest in the development of the organic food and farming targets bill, which is currently in the expert hands of the non-Executive bills unit—it may be there for some time.

When the intention to produce a strategy for agriculture was announced, I thought that I might withdraw the organics bill if the Executive came up with strong proposals to support and develop organic farming. Unfortunately for organic food producers and farmers, the Scottish economy, the Scottish people and the 38 members who signed the original proposal for an organic food and farming targets bill, that was not to be. What appears to be lacking in the forward strategy, and in the ensuing debate, is an appreciation of exactly where organic farming practice might fit in and help make real the vision as outlined in the introduction to the strategy document.

Unfortunately, the forward strategy does not identify any new, specific Executive support for organic farming. That is despite the fact that a recent major study on the development of organic farming in Europe has shown that only a balance of market-driven pull and Government-driven push policies will work if the sector is to be developed.

My main worry is that organic agriculture is not properly understood, as it is sometimes naively perceived to be "farming without chemicals". However, organics takes a holistic view of our place in the environment and of how we sustain it, and is made up of just the kind of theories and

practices that we should be looking at seriously. Organic agriculture is a forward-looking, modern research-driven approach—although we need a lot more money for research. It incorporates the sort of joined-up practice that the forward strategy subscribes to, but fails to deliver. Organics categorically must not be seen as a niche market for the better-off sections of the community. Every person has the right to good health through a healthy diet and to contribute to and benefit from a healthy environment. Organic agriculture and the concepts behind it, which address the whole food chain, must be supported and encouraged.

It is of great concern that Scottish farmers will soon be at a competitive disadvantage to farmers from 11 other countries in Europe that have action plans and targets for organic farming. Wales has an action plan, Northern Ireland is developing one and England may have one soon. There is a real prospect that Scotland could be isolated in Europe and even in the UK as a result of its lack of support for organics.

Furthermore, it is important that the minister's working parties on the future of agriculture and the environment expand their horizons and seek greater input from those with knowledge of what organic farming could contribute. I do not oppose today's motion, but the strategy needs to be rethought as far as organic agriculture is concerned. I would appreciate the support of the many colleagues who signed the organic targets bill proposal and look forward to their assistance in taking that bill through the Parliament in due course.

I remind the minister that he mentioned, as targets, "shortening the supply chain", "improving quality production" and looking for "solutions that are good for the environment" and "higher levels of biodiversity". Organic farming delivers all those targets better than anything else that I can think of, yet there are no specific proposals in the strategy document.

I view with great concern the proposal to take away the restrictions on the development of prime agricultural land. Will the minister concede that if we start to develop more prime agricultural land the consequence will be greater intensification of farming on what is left? Of course, the consolation would be that only organics would be able to provide the improvements in soil quality on poorer quality land to make up for the prime quality land that the minister intends to dispose of for building and industry.

16:02

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I start by saying that I am a member of the Transport and General Workers Union and I have

a declared interest.

I welcome the forward strategy for agriculture. Agriculture is not the only issue for rural Scotland, but it is fair to say that it is at the heart of rural Scotland. As we have heard, around three quarters of our land area is farmland. Agricultural employment is vital to many rural areas and remote ones in particular. It is right that the Labour-led Executive is conducting a radical reappraisal of how our citizens live and work in the countryside. I will focus on three issues—the role of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, gender discrimination, and health and safety—relating to the forward strategy and make what I hope will be seen as constructive suggestions from the back benches to the ministers.

In considering the Executive's document, I was disappointed to note that there was no trade union representation on the steering group. At its meeting on 26 June, I requested that the Rural Development Committee consider taking evidence from the STUC. The STUC made a written submission, but, for some reason, was unfortunately not asked to give oral evidence. At the end of its submission, the STUC said:

"We believe that by working together on a shared agenda, the key stakeholders can secure a better future for Scottish agriculture and those whose jobs depend upon it."

It went on to say that the fact that

"the Executive appears, on this occasion, to have failed to recognise that Scotland's trade unions have a role to play in this respect is an oversight that we hope will be rectified at the earliest opportunity."

Ross Finnie: I do not wish in any way to antagonise the member, but perhaps she might explain why, in the course of the extensive—and I mean extensive—consultation on the strategy document, regrettably we received no response at all from the STUC or indeed from her own union.

Elaine Smith: I thank the minister for his intervention.

That is a question that the STUC and the TGWU would have to answer. I will pose a question in return. How extensively was it known that the document existed? When the committee asked for input from the STUC, it was forthcoming.

I asked the minister on 18 September about trade union representation, but I did not receive a definite response. We can put that behind us, but I hope that I can have an assurance today that there will be trade union representation on the cross-sector group that will continue to meet to advise on the implementation of the strategy, as detailed in action point 54.

At the meeting on 18 September, I also raised the issue of equality and gender balance, particularly in relation to the steering group. As

part of his response, the minister said:

"It is right that Elaine Smith should pursue the questions of equality and gender balance, but because of the history of the agriculture industry, the agricultural community is sadly wanting in that regard. I do not for a moment suggest that that may be anything other than entirely wrong."—*[Official Report, Rural Development Committee, 18 September 2001; c 2166-2167.]*

We could talk about the history of discrimination and under-representation of women in many fields, not least in public bodies. Indeed, I could talk about that all day, but we do not have time. I am glad that the minister recognises that it is wrong, but I would like an indication of how the issue of gender imbalance could be addressed through the forward strategy, including the make-up of the cross-sector group.

In considering the future of agriculture in Scotland, I would like the Parliament to take a few minutes to remember the forgotten cost of that essential enterprise, which is too important to be left solely to food producers, retailers and landowners. The forgotten cost that I want to talk about is noticeable by its absence from the forward strategy statement. It is the cost, not in pounds and pence, but in lives that are blighted by accident and injury in the workplace.

As I said, it is regrettable that no invitation to give oral evidence to the Rural Development Committee was tendered to the STUC, because the STUC has long campaigned on safety for agricultural workers. Evidence from the STUC might, at the very least, have allowed some recognition of the need for improved safety measures—through training for safety, for example. Unfortunately, in the training section of the document, as elsewhere, there is no mention of the need for increased efforts to tackle the continuing scourge of unnecessary death and injury, particularly on farms. The Transport and General Workers Union, which represents the bulk of farm workers, has continually highlighted the rising rate of injury and death, which indicates that agricultural workers risk greater hazards than those in any other industry, including construction. Some of those accidents are truly horrific.

I would have gone into more detail about farm safety but, having taken an intervention, I am a bit short of time. However, I particularly want to raise the issue of safety for children on farms. As part of a total package for the future of Scottish agriculture, along with the many important economic and environmental suggestions, the Scottish Executive places greater stress on keeping the country safe. It is not enough to say that the importance of safety is recognised and inherent. The need to follow safe practices must be regularly and clearly spelled out as one of our main aims in the on-going evolution and development of our agriculture industry.

I also wanted to talk about organophosphate pesticides, but I do not have time. I hope that, when the strategy is acted on, it will be amended to reflect health and safety practices and the other issues that I have raised.

16:08

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer and as a recipient of payments under the ESA scheme. For the benefit of Mr Hamilton, who has now left the chamber, I point out that, in the example that he cited, a person's being in receipt of ESA payments would in itself preclude that person from getting benefits under the rural stewardship scheme.

I welcome today's motion in principle, but I shall support Alex Fergusson's amendment, which reinforces the need for profitability to return to farming if there is to be a sustainable future for Scotland's rural areas. At the moment, people throughout Scotland are farming without hope or income. Farm borrowings are at an all-time high and, despite £450 million of public support, most farmers will make a loss in this financial year.

The Executive motion is fine and "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" is fine, but there is nothing particularly new or revealing in either. Land management contracts are not a new idea. In fact, I and others wrote a paper for the NFU in 1997, partly on that subject. My fear then, as now, was that, as Alex Fergusson said, such contracts would mean less support in the end for agriculture. I hope that the minister will prove me wrong in that respect, but that is my fear.

In 1996-97, when we considered land management contracts, Scottish net farm incomes were £470 million, and the support levels were similar to those of today. As the minister and Elaine Murray said, BSE and the foot-and-mouth outbreak have cut those incomes to less than a tenth of that figure. Last year, I believe that net Scottish farm incomes—I do not mean profit—totalled around £35 million. Members will understand why farmers are in despair.

A forward strategy as a wish list is fine, but where are the proposals that will return profitability to the industry? Where is the cash to deliver the much-vaunted agri-environment schemes?

The reality of hands-on farming is more and more paperwork, increasing costs in the livestock sector in tagging animals, extra transport and not enough hours in the day to complete movement licences or wash out floats or trailers.

Despite Ross Finnie's best intentions, which I do not doubt, almost every source of income in the industry is declining. Export markets are firmly closed and are likely to remain so for the

forseeable future—if the minister tells me otherwise, I will be delighted. As a result, returns from the marketplace cannot be found. Export markets that have been built up patiently over the past 30 years have all gone. Unless and until those markets are reopened, all the strategies—forward or otherwise—will not make a jot of difference.

Indeed, such strategies are little short of insulting to many farmers as they do not confront the real problems of day-to-day farming. They are certainly insulting in respect of improving the environment. The Scottish rural stewardship scheme is heavily over-subscribed. Of the £30 million that has been earmarked for agri-environment schemes this year, my estimate is that only around £3.5 million will be left for the new rural stewardship scheme.

Environmental enhancement, which is much desired by everyone in the industry, cannot be delivered by farmers who are fighting to put food on the family table. Environmental enhancement will not be delivered by farmers who have their backs to the wall and face the metaphorical firing squad in the shape of their bank manager.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member explain why he will vote for a strategy that he labels as insulting to the farmers?

John Scott: One must vote for the strategy because that is the future. It must be obvious from what I have said that I am worried about farmers' survival until the strategy kicks in. The debate is about the strategy, which is why I am supporting it.

I was talking about day-to-day problems. The Executive is not delivering on its environmental promises. Only £3.5 million to fund a new scheme is a ridiculously low figure at a time when the rural affairs budget is £66 million underspent, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Where does that leave the industry? Until exports are resumed, we will face a continuing spiral of reducing incomes and minimal environmental enhancement. Scotland's unique and identifiable landscapes and products, which are attractive to tourists and consumers, are all under threat.

It is in the Executive's gift to retrieve the situation. However, unless and until the Executive puts its money where its mouth is, the farming industry and our environment will lurch from crisis to crisis for the foreseeable future.

16:13

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): It is good that there is recognition on page 36 of the forward strategy document that the

problem of climate change exists. Given that agriculture, land use change and forestry account for at least 25 per cent of Scotland's carbon emissions, it is startlingly obvious that farming must play a crucial part in reducing Scotland's carbon emissions. Therefore, it is not good enough that action point 52 says only that more research will be carried out and that help will be provided to farmers with more flood risk planning. That is good, but not good enough.

The Executive's review work estimates that the real cost of the farming system to the UK economy is around £2.3 billion. BSE and new variant CJD cost around £607 million and greenhouse gases cost around £1.1 billion. However, there is no real comment on those figures, despite the fact that they represent 48 per cent of agriculture's total external costs. Given that the major emissions of climate change gases come from agriculture, forestry or land use change, the minister must tell us what further practical action the Executive proposes to take to begin to reduce those emissions. For instance, what action does it intend to take to protect high-carbon soils, such as Scotland's peat reserves, from exploitation?

Scotland could learn a thing or two from New Zealand, where the options that are currently under review include converting agriculture to forestry, improving livestock nutrition, using selective breeding of animals for reduced methane production and reducing direct fossil fuel use. The Executive should consider those options and I am surprised that the strategy does not contain more about them.

I turn to agri-environment measures. In comments about the lack of resources allocated to agri-environment measures, the National Farmers Union of Scotland said:

"Farmers are now coming up with good ideas and want to make environmental improvements. But the funding is not there. Our Government simply isn't taking the environment seriously enough. This needs to be put right."

Many farmers have benefited from the measures, but when Scotland is compared to other countries in Europe, it does not fare well. The combined budget for the old and new schemes, including organic conversion aid, comes to about £30 million a year. In comparison, Ireland invested £100 million in agri-environment measures, Wales invested £80 million and, from what we are led to believe, England has virtually an open cheque book. The World Wildlife Fund's submission on the strategy suggested—as did Robin Harper—that Scotland has the lowest level of support in Europe for farmers who convert to organic production.

An examination of the important rural stewardship scheme, which was discussed earlier, reveals difficulties. In 2001, the number of

applications to the scheme has been understandably and inevitably low, as a result of the delayed launch and of foot-and-mouth disease, but there have been 476 applications for a total of £28.5 million. However, a maximum of only £5 million has been made available. Therefore, it is likely that the level of success among applicants will be low—around 10 to 15 per cent.

It is patently obvious that the scheme, which is designed to help the environment, will be inaccessible to most farmers. The position is exacerbated for hill farmers and small tenant crofters because of the system used to rank rural stewardship scheme applications, which favours mixed or arable farms by giving credit for undertaking management options specific to arable farming. None of the credits is helpful to hill farmers or small crofters. Therefore, the rural stewardship scheme is likely to be skewed towards the Lothians, Fife and the Borders to the disadvantage of, for example, the Stirlingshire or Perthshire hill farmers, or the crofters in the Highlands or on the west coast of Scotland.

In conclusion, we need more action on climate change. That is a crucial area for the future of the planet and it needs more action from the Executive. We need action so that we can be the best in Europe through the rural stewardship scheme and to get spending up to the level in the rest of the United Kingdom. We do not need more consultation, more review, more research or more delay; we need more action. We call for that today.

16:18

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): At the outset, I declare an interest—I am a poor, depressed crofter from the west Highlands of Scotland.

I welcome the content and the context of the forward strategy for agriculture, which—once the industry has recovered from its present problems—will be a building block for sustainable agriculture. Implementing any new policies in the current economic crisis will cause more confusion. We need to address the short-term problem before we move on.

An overall reduction in subsidies across the whole industry is inevitable. Naturally, larger and larger agricultural units will benefit, as they can compete more effectively on prices in a global marketplace. We heard comment about that earlier. As a result, marginal units—the number of which is increasing—will be progressively squeezed out. That must not be allowed to happen, as 85 per cent of Scotland is marginal land and has less favoured area status.

I welcome the minister's recent commitments on

maintaining the 90 per cent safety net for another year. I cannot emphasise enough how vital it is that he makes the strongest possible case to the European Commission. Owing to the current economic crisis, which resulted from the foot-and-mouth outbreak, it is necessary that the 90 per cent safety net be maintained. The change from the hill livestock compensatory allowance to LFA status last year resulted in a 10 per cent decline in lifeline payments. A further 10 per cent decline this year cannot be accepted.

The minister must be encouraged to consider other agricultural payments that seem to be in decline again this year, such as the sheep annual premium, which is a payment tied to market prices and which compensates for low prices in the market. The export ban has excluded our farmers from the European markets, which has boosted prices on mainland Europe and cut the sheep annual premium. Our farmers have not benefited from the situation as it leads to a reduction in payments. I ask the minister to seek agreement from Europe that for the time being the sheep annual premium will be based on the average UK price, not the average EU price.

There are reports that the Executive's rural stewardship scheme has been vastly over-subscribed. If that is the case, it shows a resounding acceptance by the industry of the move to a more sustainable environmental footing. That must be welcomed and the minister must find ways round the problem of the scheme's success. I appreciate that resources are finite, but if the industry has given its vote of confidence to the scheme, it should be given a higher priority for monetary resources.

I welcome the idea of land management contracts that would offer payments on an economic, social and environmental basis. They recognise that farming is a diverse business and I hope that they would prevent farmers from having to apply to a raft of disjointed schemes on a multitude of complex forms. The Executive must develop the scheme so that it can be introduced fully as soon as possible. It should be welcomed across the board.

Scotland needs a successful, profitable and sustainable agricultural industry. That is why I am pleased to support the motion in the name of Ross Finnie.

16:23

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I do not think that anybody would disagree with much of what Ross Finnie said. I am sure that nobody would disagree with his comments that farming is a volatile business, going through difficult times, and that the current difficulties are deeper and

more persistent than ever before. Neither would anybody disagree with his comments that we need to have a sustainable agricultural policy and a vision of the way ahead.

It is encouraging to hear that wide-ranging consultation and discussion have taken place—and will continue—on the strategy. Given the comments that have been made about crofters, especially the points made by the Scottish Crofters Union, I ask the minister to reassure us that the SCU will be one of the stakeholders involved in the continuing negotiations.

Many members have spoken about the short-term problems that face the farming industry. Tavish Scott—who is not in the chamber at the moment—was one of the many members who spoke about the LFA scheme. My constituents have made the point—which Bruce Crawford also made—that there are a lot of losers.

I will raise an issue that is not related to the strategy, as other members have done so. This point was raised by John Maxwell of blackface sheep fame, with whom I know the minister is well acquainted. Sheep have been confined on the hillside for longer than they would have been, due to the restrictions caused by foot-and-mouth. John Maxwell informs me that there is an additional cost owing to the period of time that the sheep have been there and an increased cost, as farmers have been asked to pay more. The minister should take those issues on board, as they affect hill farmers generally.

I will return to the strategy. From information that I have received and from what members have said today, there seems to be support for land management contracts. I welcome the minister's comments about more flexible support and a move towards greater support for agri-environment schemes. However, I take on board all of Robin Harper's comments, particularly in relation to organic farming. The RSPB has consistently raised concerns that the rural stewardship scheme is underfunded. Another major concern is the narrow remit of the environment working group. I ask the minister to consider reviewing the remit, perhaps along the lines that Robin Harper suggested.

One of the main points of Ross Finnie's speech centred on new opportunities for farming and rural development. An assurance would be relevant to my constituency, which will form a large part of the new Trossachs national park. Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley is already actively addressing the issue. As MSPs who attended a recent meeting found out, there is the potential and a desire for business development in farming and for other leisure and recreational pursuits in the area. I hope that the national park authority advisory groups will continue to provide valuable debate

and action points for the development of farming as a business and for its contribution to the social fabric and environmental aspects of the national park. That builds on work that the interim committee and its advisory groups are already undertaking.

Unlike the SNP, which feels that no action is happening or will happen, I can assure the chamber that work is progressing along the lines suggested in the strategy document. I welcome the document's general thrust and I hope that it will be supported.

16:27

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The forward strategy document states:

"We want a prosperous farming industry, one of Scotland's success stories which benefits all the people of Scotland. It should

- be focused on producing food and other products that the customer wants;
- play a major role in sustainable rural development and help to maintain the prosperity of our rural communities;
- be a leading player in the protection and enhancement of our environment; and
- embrace change and new opportunities."

The document sets out a sorely needed vision of the future and a plan of action that the key stakeholders can buy into and, for the first time, seeks to develop agriculture within the wider rural economy. Such a partnership approach never happened in pre-devolution days under other Administrations.

At this point, I should say that the SNP's approach to the debate and to the wider issues of rural development must be regretted. I appreciate that it is the duty of the Opposition to keep the Government on its toes, but that does not mean that the SNP should be so consistently negative. If we take Fergus Ewing's amendment—somebody please take it—we find that it contains three phrases beginning with "does not": "does not contain", "does not consider" and "does not provide". I have not even mentioned the other phrase "nor does it provide".

The amendment is par for the course for the SNP; it is as though the party does not want anyone else in the Parliament to support its motions and amendments. Throughout the debate, SNP members have made few constructive comments. For example, Fergus Ewing spoke for a quarter of an hour and did not make one positive contribution.

Richard Lochhead: Mr Mike Rumbles has a terrible habit of spending the first half of every speech attacking the SNP. Will he tell us why he

does not think that a better strategy could have been presented to us?

Mr Rumbles: I shall do so in a moment. I know that Mr Lochhead does not like listening to this, but he will have to.

I am sorry that Duncan Hamilton has left the chamber. He suggested that the SNP amendment was very positive. I am in awe of Duncan Hamilton's debating skills—he convinced us that black was white and vice versa. Even if SNP members disagreed with elements of the strategy, I would have thought that they could welcome the fact that the Government's forward strategy for Scottish agriculture has been produced; after all, that is exactly what they called for in their manifesto for the general election on 7 June. Nineteen days later, the Scottish Executive produced the very document that the SNP had been calling for. Have we received a positive response from the SNP? No. Rather than engage in constructive debate on ways to improve the strategy, they have engaged in the usual carping. How predictable and how unfortunate.

The agricultural strategy steering group that was set up by Ross Finnie, which included 13 senior stakeholders in the agricultural industry, has endorsed the Executive's strategy document. I quote Jim Walker, the president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland. He said:

"Government has recognised the vital role of Scottish farmers"

in the strategy for agriculture that has been published by the Scottish Executive. He also said:

"MSPs of all parties must support the strategy and ensure the Executive puts resources into its implementation."

The document includes some 54 action points, which are designed to implement the strategy.

Stewart Stevenson *rose—*

Mr Rumbles: I am pleased that Stewart Stevenson is in the chamber. He said that eight of those 54 action points were apple pie; I assume that he feels that the other 46 are okay. Why could he not say so? Why could he not be positive?

Stewart Stevenson: I will give Mr Rumbles some further information. Twenty-nine of the 54 action points refer to the Executive. Of those, three or perhaps four talk about money and only nine refer to the Executive taking any action. The other phrases that are used in the Executive's proposals are: "we will prioritise"; "we will discuss"; "we will consider"; "we will consult"; and "we will look at".

Mr Rumbles: Stewart Stevenson does not appear to have read the document. He is more interested in the statistics. The whole point of the

document, which has been endorsed by 13 groups, is to ensure that everyone takes action, not just the Executive.

Because of time constraints, I shall focus on only one of those action points. Action point 2 states:

"The Executive, in partnership with the industry, will review over the next six months the business advice currently available to farmers in Scotland to ensure it is addressing the priorities in this Strategy."

On Monday, I was pleased to see an innovative rural business advice initiative for farmers, organised by Scottish Enterprise Grampian, taking place in Arbuthnott, in the Mearns, in my constituency. I went along to it and was impressed by the efforts that are being made to address the issue. That kind of business diversification initiative is exactly what I have been calling on the Executive to get to grips with, and I am delighted that such a real and practical example of the agricultural strategy in action is under way.

Initiatives and strategies can always be improved and a constructive Opposition would endeavour to do just that. The Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives and the Scottish Green Party support the motion. What a pity that the SNP has completely misjudged the mood and the situation again. It is clear that the forward strategy is an excellent step in the right direction. It is an innovative development that has been well received by key stakeholders in the industry and it is a welcome review of the priorities and direction of agriculture in post-devolution Scotland. That is why the motion deserves to be supported unanimously.

16:34

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On 25 May 2000, we debated "Rural Scotland: A New Approach". During the debate, Ross Finnie said that the Scottish Executive wanted

"to put rural Scotland at the heart of Scotland's future."

Later in the speech, he said:

"we want to create a rural Scotland that is

'integral to Scotland's success, dynamic in harnessing its traditional strengths'."—[*Official Report*, 25 May 2000; Vol 6, c 1079.]

I agree with the minister's aims. The traditional strength of rural Scotland lies in its agriculture. Scotch beef and lamb are famous worldwide. The quality of our product is recognised and the importance of regaining entry to export markets must be Scotland's No 1 priority. Much of the future of agriculture depends on that alone.

As a sheep farmer myself, I have seen the depression and dismay etched in the faces of

those whose livelihoods depend on the sheep sector. Only last week, I met some of those people, delivering light lambs to a collection centre at Dalmally market. Normally at this time of year, the place would be a hub of noise and a focal point for social interchange and for business; now, an eerie silence inhabits the place and speculation abounds over whether many auction markets will ever open again.

Although hill farmers and crofters are grateful for the welfare disposal scheme, in that it provides a bottom price, they are making every effort to sell their lambs using the auction companies as brokers. Their main worry is how they will find a market for cast ewes. I implore the minister to extend the disposal scheme to ewes as well, otherwise I fear that we will have a similar situation to that of two years ago, when owners were forced to shoot and bury their sheep.

The minister has previously talked of the importance of bringing value to the producer. It is vital that any forward strategy includes strategies for marketing not only Scottish lamb but Scottish mutton, which is a delicious and quality meat but which is practically unobtainable in United Kingdom butchers. As I have said, store lamb producers are struggling to sell lambs to finishers and the new tagging scheme is too complex and is putting off potential buyers. The only number required for traceability should be the flock number and not individual numbers for each lamb. One can only assume that the scheme was introduced by someone with little knowledge of the sheep farming industry.

I agree with John Farquhar Munro: in this year of devastation, a 90 per cent safety net for LFAs is essential. There should also be a national top-up of the sheep annual premium. The premium was designed to bolster low prices in bad years. Well, we have never had lower prices, yet the projected SAP level of £6.62 is one third of what it was a few years ago. That seems absurd. A few days ago, I heard Jim Walker of the National Farmers Union of Scotland saying that he was appalled by Margaret Beckett's lack of support on the SAP issue and on other agricultural issues.

It is important that a forward strategy considers standardising the SAP. Scottish farmers are bleeding to death while Irish farmers make fortunes exporting lambs to Europe and filling the gap left by the absence of Scottish lamb. There is a good future market for Scottish farmers so long as our Government removes the blocks to entering it.

The motion talks of integrating farming

"into the economic and social development of rural communities".

However, in most of rural Scotland, and certainly

in the Highlands and Islands, agriculture is already a keystone. As Rory Dutton of the Scottish Crofters Union has said, the Executive's strategy document

"does not consider the core role that is played by agriculture in sustaining fragile economies ... nor does it fully examine and integrate its role in providing environmental services."—[*Official Report, Rural Development Committee*, 18 September 2001; c 2137.]

That must be rectified in forthcoming deliberations.

The Executive motion also seeks to

"protect and enhance the environment in partnership with farmers, and ... other agencies."

That is a laudable aim. I would very much like to see agencies such as the enterprise companies getting more involved in agri-environmental advancement. However, I respectfully remind the Scottish Executive that modulation of farmers' subsidies already contributes to environmental schemes and that there is a strong feeling that farmers and crofters who live in rural Scotland are not being properly consulted before things are done by some of the agencies. Those people have practical knowledge of the area in which they and their families live. That knowledge tends to be more relevant than theory-driven policies from Government or other agencies, which are often perceived to be imposing solutions on communities without first seeking their views.

I recommend the submission to the Rural Development Committee from the Scottish Wildlife Trust. It says:

"Scotland should focus on quality and not quantity in order to be competitive. Let us use the skills of rural people to provide public goods—breathtaking scenery, biodiversity, and access—in addition to high quality food."

If the Scottish Executive is serious in promoting rural integration and policies that are beneficial to the environment, it is surely essential first to secure the good will of the people and families who make their livings in the areas concerned, and for those people to gain the confidence that such policies will be beneficial to their local communities. Otherwise, conflicts will spawn and suspicion will reign.

As I said, marketing Scottish products and making them competitive must be at the forefront of any strategy. For example, it is ludicrous that Scotland is importing meat—especially beef over 30 months old, which is not subject to our own rigorous standards. People from other countries, such as New Zealand, that value their agricultural reputation look on in horror at that policy. Foot-and-mouth disease very probably came from contaminated meat that was imported and yet, seven months later, controls on the imports of illegal animal and plant products have still not been tightened. I hope that the Scottish Executive

will support the petition—signed by 7,000 Scots—to stop illegal imports and will put pressure on the Westminster Government to do something about them.

Any forward strategy must take into account the fact that the move to make LFA money a hectare payment rather than a headage payment should produce a greater diversity of quality products in the Scottish meat sector. It should also take into account the fact that a policy of encouraging local abattoirs would greatly increase the potential for such products to be branded and marketed. I recommend that the minister take note of the recommendations in the report on the way forward for the sheep industry by Mr Dewar-Durie, which the minister commissioned in November 1999.

Although I welcome the strategy and am interested in the concept of land management contracts, discussions will continue for a further two years. During that time, the keystone of agriculture must not be allowed to disintegrate. That is why I support Alex Fergusson's amendment, which emphasises that agriculture

"is fundamental to a successful rural economy."

16:41

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): The debate has been useful and sometimes entertaining. The Conservatives started by attacking the Scottish National Party for attacking the Executive and then went on to attack the Executive, which was interesting. Mike Rumbles, not content with putting out a press release attacking the SNP before the debate—before even hearing what we have to say—spent two thirds of his speech attacking the SNP as well. That is rather regrettable for a chap who represents a farming constituency. He should represent those interests first.

Enormous challenges face the farming industry today. It is at a crossroads, and the Parliament has a crucial role to play in ensuring that the industry survives and prospers. The challenges are considerable but not insurmountable. The strategy that we are debating addresses some of those challenges, but pays little more than lip service to many of the real issues that face the farming industry, as was highlighted eloquently by my colleague Stewart Stevenson.

All parties have highlighted a number of areas that the Scottish Government must take more seriously and that should have commanded much greater prominence in the strategy documents. Profitability was often a theme in today's deliberations. If we are to increase profitability, we must address the fact that between the plough and the plate too many margins are taken by people

other than in the farming industry. That is hardly addressed in the document. According to Donald MacRae, an economist for Lloyds TSB, agricultural share from plough to plate is only 15p in the pound. Surely, if we are talking about increasing the profitability of the industry, that should be at the heart of the strategy document. That problem has always faced primary producers, but we must reverse that trend. That should have been a priority in the document.

Ross Finnie: Surely Richard Lochhead, who has clearly read the strategy carefully, will recognise that the references to understanding the food chain and to shortening the food chain are references to the area in which we address the question of where we take the margin out, as Donald MacRae—who spoke eloquently when he addressed the first consultation on the subject—said.

Richard Lochhead: The point that we are trying to make to the minister is that those references are far too shallow. We have been banging on for two years trying, for instance, to get the minister to meet the supermarkets more often. He refuses to do that.

Ross Finnie: That is absolute nonsense.

Richard Lochhead: The minister has met the supermarkets, but only after being pressed time and again by the Opposition. I can remember saying to the minister in the first few weeks of the Parliament that he should meet the supermarkets and ensure that the farmers get more of a margin. Only after a long time did he get round to doing that.

Ross Finnie: Will Richard Lochhead give way?

Richard Lochhead: No, I will not.

Ross Finnie: After that allegation, he should.

Richard Lochhead: Okay.

Ross Finnie: How can Richard Lochhead possibly make that allegation when I specifically invited on to the agricultural strategy group a key representative from one of the supermarkets, in order to address the problem to which Richard Lochhead refers?

Richard Lochhead: I said to the minister that I was talking about the two and half years since the Parliament was established. The fact is that five or six major retailers in Scotland command the bulk of food outlets—that is not acceptable. Only 100 farm co-operatives in Scotland command 30 per cent of farm output. We must reverse that. That could increase the profitability of so many farm businesses, yet it is deemed to be barely worth a mention in the document. The issue of co-operatives demands more attention. Co-operatives are a way in which we can help small farms and

increase the profitability of the sector.

There has been much talk about gearing farming activity toward the market. We must gear farmers toward the market, rather than to the rules and incentives that are laid down by the common agricultural policy. However, our farming industry needs a lot of support to do that. We must ensure that our farms are producing for the marketplace and not just for the common agricultural policy. However, we welcome some moves toward that objective, which are mentioned in the document.

Robin Harper referred in particular to reacting to the demand for organic products. No promise has been made on that in terms of trying to get farmers to react to the marketplace. The subject receives scant attention in the strategy document. Action point 18 is completely shallow and promises no firm action to address the matter.

We must accept the point that public support will always be required in some form, especially in remote areas of Scotland. We must ensure that the whole industry, not just part of it, survives. That is why we welcome the move toward paying our farmers for environmental stewardship; we all support more subsidy going to that. We do not want everything to be geared toward production so the industry must be geared toward guarding the environment. As has been referred to in the debate, the WTO allows for more subsidy for such projects. Guarding the environment is perhaps the biggest challenge that faces agriculture in Scotland today, yet it receives scant attention in the strategy document.

The rural stewardship scheme has been referred to time and again in the chamber—for example, by Bruce Crawford, John Farquhar Munro and Sylvia Jackson. There is much unhappiness in all the parties with agri-environment schemes that demand more resources and attention. Once again, that is paid no attention in the document.

The spirit of the rural development regulations is that subsidies should be spread more evenly for the benefit of smaller farms. That theme has been returned to time and again in the debate, but it does not receive enough attention from the strategy document.

Members from all parties have raised the issue of the less favoured area scheme and the Minister for Rural Development must respond to those concerns.

The SNP welcomes the move toward land management contracts, but such a sea change requires enormous preparation. We must not get bogged down by bureaucracy.

Integration has not been addressed by the strategy. Agriculture cannot be considered in isolation in the rural economy; there is a range of

issues that must be addressed if we are to boost agriculture in Scotland. Those include transport, the processing sector, forestry and tourism, which are barely mentioned in the strategy document.

I want to turn to the Scottish Executive's role in moving forward the agriculture industry in Scotland. It is worth having a long-term strategy only if we tackle the short-term crisis in farming. The livestock industry in north-east Scotland is being strangled as a result of the regulations that were introduced to deal with foot-and-mouth disease. Not content with the 21-day standstill on the movement of livestock, which brought many problems to the industry in the north-east, and despite the fact that there have been no cases of foot-and-mouth disease in Scotland for four months, the Executive brought in new regulations this month. The industry is grinding to a halt because of the introduction of inappropriate regulations.

Ross Finnie: I hope that Mr Lochhead is not seriously suggesting that the regulations that came in this week, which apply to the movement of stock and the number of pick-ups, are an additional bureaucratic burden. Those regulations are specifically designed to meet the needs of, and have been welcomed by, the meat livestock industry throughout Scotland. They have been welcomed by all those who recognise that such regulations represent a proportionate amount of additional control over disease spread.

Richard Lochhead: Can I recommend that the minister speak to the industry in north-east Scotland and the Highlands and Islands, which is grinding to a halt because of the regulations. Even the sheep-tagging regulations are causing severe problems. I spoke to the industry this morning and was told that it has conducted a trial in which it took two men two hours to check the tags of 140 sheep in a lorry that might have contained as many as 600 sheep. The industry simply cannot deal with that increased burden, and the minister has to accept that.

I turn to the minister's promise that he can influence the CAP. In fact, the whole strategy is in danger of being undermined because the minister does not have much influence over the CAP. Jim Walker, the president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland, spoke to the Rural Development Committee last week. He said:

"There is a fundamental weakness in the political set-up in this country, as we seem unable to influence—we cannot influence—at the highest level the negotiations that take place in Europe".

The Executive's strategy will be undermined by the lack of a voice for our industry in the places that matter, where the decisions are taken—London, Europe and even at the WTO. It will not be our minister who will be taking the decisions; it

will be the minister from London. Jim Walker also said:

"The fact that Margaret Beckett is the minister who will negotiate on our behalf in Brussels fills me with terror." — [Official Report, Rural Development Committee, 18 September 2001; c 2147-48.]

Scotland needs its farmers. We should aim to become a leading farming nation; we should not downsize the industry. We cannot reconcile the notion of survival of the fittest with the special role that the industry plays in rural Scotland. If the Scottish Government is serious about developing its strategy and taking the industry forward, the Deputy Minister for Rural Development, in her reply, must give the Parliament answers to the many questions that have been asked this afternoon.

16:51

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): I am grateful for the opportunity to wind up the debate. I thank members for their many and varied contributions. It is important that our farming and rural communities know that their legitimate concerns are being taken seriously by the Parliament, and that action is in hand. The publication of the agriculture strategy is a clear indication that action is very much in hand, but it is just the start of the process.

The strategy requires action and I am pleased to report that action is progressing on many fronts. Ross Finnie mentioned the creation of the agriculture and environment working group, work on land management contracts and a consultation on proposals to ease planning restrictions on prime quality land. He could also have chosen to mention meetings that have taken place with the Scottish Crofters Union, the Crofters Commission and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to consider the implications for the Highlands and Islands and how best to proceed. A meeting will also be held tomorrow with local enterprise companies to consider about 20 action points on which LECs can help deliver. Visitscotland is to consider closer links with farming as part of its current review and we have advised the agriculture council of our interest in a voluntary sheep-quota buyout scheme. The implementation of the strategy is therefore well under way.

Bruce Crawford: Will the minister give way?

Alex Fergusson: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: I wish to carry on, please. I would like to deal with about 10 speeches from the debate, if members do not mind.

Many agencies and organisations are giving solid support to the process. That is extremely

encouraging and it is absolutely essential if we are to deliver the strategy successfully.

I will endeavour to reply to as many of the points that were raised in the debate as I can in the allotted time. Alex Johnstone and Elaine Smith suggested that the Executive did not consult enough key players in developing the strategy; I refute that absolutely. I wish to be helpful, by illustrating just how inclusive the process has been in practice. More than 3,000 copies of the agriculture strategy discussion document, which was launched in April 2000, were issued. Nearly 400 people took part in meetings that were held throughout the country and expressed their views on what should be in the strategy. Those people included about 170 people who attended a conference at Murrayfield. The strategy steering group comprised members of 13 different interest groups, all of which play a key role in representing farmers, crofters, food producers, retailers, consumers, environmental interests, the enterprise network and the financial sector—I could go on.

In addition to the 3,000 copies of the main strategy document, 28,000 copies of the summary document were issued. That is a pretty fair indication of the lengths to which the Executive has gone in an effort to ensure that all those who wished for it had a genuine opportunity to be involved in shaping the future of Scottish agriculture.

Bruce Crawford rose—

Elaine Smith rose—

Rhona Brankin: I will take an intervention from Elaine Smith.

Elaine Smith: The Transport and General Workers Union made a submission to the Executive, which I hope the minister will note and which I have in front of me. The submission was made on 20 August, so clearly it relates to the Executive's forward strategy for agriculture. In its submission the union states:

"Those working in the industry must have their voice heard, as it will be they whom that policy will ultimately effect."

Will the minister assure me that the trade unions will have a part to play?

Rhona Brankin: I am delighted that both the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Transport and General Workers Union have become engaged in the process.

I will now address some of the other points that have been made. What can I say about Mr Ewing? Seldom have we heard a more negative speech, even from the nationalists. To say that there is no vision in the strategy is absolute rubbish. This is a radical vision for Scottish agriculture, which the

Scottish Executive is absolutely committed to delivering.

Fergus Ewing *rose*—

Rhona Brankin: Once again, the nationalists are guilty of narrow, mean-minded carping and of taking a typically oppositional approach.

Alex Fergusson had the cheek to accuse the Executive of being slow to produce the strategy for agriculture. The Conservatives had 19 years to produce a strategy for Scottish agriculture, but failed to do it—[MEMBERS: “Eighteen years.”]

Rhona Brankin: The Conservatives did not even support the creation of a Scottish Parliament. We have delivered a Scottish Parliament and the first ever strategy for agriculture in Scotland.

Mr McGrigor *rose*—

John Scott *rose*—

Rhona Brankin: I will not take an intervention. The members should sit down.

The Presiding Officer: Order. The minister is not giving way.

Rhona Brankin: I will go on.

Rhoda Grant talked about the importance of agriculture in peripheral areas of Scotland. We accept that agriculture plays a central role in those areas; the Scottish Crofters Union was represented on the steering group. I assure Rhoda Grant that the crofting bodies in Scotland will be key to the delivery of the strategy.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): On a point of order. Presiding Officer, could you ask the minister to speak up? She is tending to mumble into the microphone.

The Presiding Officer: I ask members who have just come into the debate to keep quiet and to listen to the minister.

Rhona Brankin: I am worried that Mr Gallie did not get the earlier message—the Tories had 19 years to deliver a strategy on agriculture, and they failed to do it. Did you hear that, Mr Gallie?

John Scott: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: Duncan Hamilton’s speech was another petty, narrow-minded moan from the nationalists. Mr Hamilton complained that there is not enough money. If things were as simple as that, life would be a lot easier. All those who have an understanding of the agriculture sector know that things are not that simple. Mr Hamilton showed some rather touching naivety.

Mr Hamilton *rose*—

Rhona Brankin: I turn now to the organic sector, which was raised by Robin Harper and

Rhoda Grant and which we take very seriously. We recognise that the organic sector is increasingly important in Scottish agriculture and that there is a growing market for organic produce.

Elaine Smith mentioned health and safety. We take that issue very seriously, as does the Health and Safety Executive, which has responsibility for it.

Bruce Crawford raised some important environmental issues. However, I say to him that one of the four central sections of the strategy document is about protecting and enhancing our environment and we are committed to doing just that. He also mentioned climate change—

Bruce Crawford: Will the minister give way on that point?

Rhona Brankin: I can tell Mr Crawford that we are committed to playing our part in addressing climate change in Scotland.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The minister twice named members and twice those members tried to intervene—[MEMBERS: “Three times.”] I am sorry—it happened three times, yet she did not take those interventions. As she did not have the courtesy to acknowledge those interventions, will she tell us why she did not take them?

The Presiding Officer: That is not really a point of order. In any event, the minister is summing up and there should be no more interventions. We have already reached the beginning of decision time.

Rhona Brankin: I reiterate that we take our responsibility to the environment extremely seriously.

There should be no expectation that the strategy will provide a quick fix, because it will not. All those who are involved in rural land use know only too well that agriculture cannot change overnight. That is not an excuse for inactivity—it is simply a recognition of the fact that recovery will be progressive rather than immediate.

The Executive believes that delivery of the strategy is essential if farming is to have a meaningful future in Scotland and we are fully committed to that process. I hope that Parliament shares and supports that commitment.

Business Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S1M-2282, which is the timetabling motion for stage 3 of the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, at Stage 3 of the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Bill, debate on each part of the proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion by the time-limits indicated (each time-limit being calculated from when Stage 3 begins and excluding any periods when the meeting is suspended)—

Group 1 to Group 8 – no later than 2 hours 30 minutes

Motion to pass the Bill – no later than 3 hours.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are three questions to put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-2278.1, in the name of Fergus Ewing, which seeks to amend motion S1M-2278, in the name of Ross Finnie, on “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture”, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
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)
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
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, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (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, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 27, Against 77, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-2278.2, in the name of Alex Fergusson, which seeks to amend motion S1M-

2278, in the name of Ross Finnie, on "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West))
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (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, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 69, Against 9, Abstentions 27.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-2278, in the name of Ross Finnie, on “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture”, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 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, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (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, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)

Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 77, Against 26, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes the Executive's commitment, as set out in *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, to secure a more profitable and sustainable future for Scottish agriculture, to integrate farming into the economic and social development of rural communities, including the development of Land Management Contracts, and to protect and enhance the environment in partnership with farmers, and approves the actions set out in the strategy for achieving these objectives in partnership with other agencies while recognising that a profitable farming industry is fundamental to a successful rural economy.

Oxfam

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The members' business debate is on motion S1M-2118, in the name of Mary Mulligan, on Oxfam.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Linlithgow Oxfam Group on 26 years of fundraising and campaigning for poverty eradication and social justice throughout the world; recognises the contribution made by all Oxfam groups and individual supporters in Scotland in raising awareness of our role and responsibility in the world, and supports their efforts to increase action to meet the UN 2015 poverty action targets.

17:07

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I thank all those members who signed my motion and I welcome to the public gallery members of Oxfam, particularly those from my constituency.

The Linlithgow Oxfam group was founded in 1975 by 10 people who had previously been donors to Oxfam and some of whom had returned from volunteer work overseas. The group has now grown to the extent that more than 70 households and more than 100 people play some role in its busy activities each year. As well as running the shop, the group has held events such as folk nights, coffee mornings, car boot sales and collections. The supermarket collections and the annual house-to-house collection regularly yield in excess of £3,000 from the people of the town and the group consistently raises in excess of £10,000 a year for Oxfam. I am aware that there was a successful collection at one of the supermarkets just this weekend.

As well as raising funds for Oxfam's development programme, the group has regularly responded to appeals for emergency relief, most recently in Rwanda and Kosovo. The regular events and activities have allowed the group to raise awareness among the people of Linlithgow about some of the causes of global poverty. Exhibitions, talks and information stalls have covered topics such as debt and aid and trade. More recently, the group has covered conflict and education. Members of the group also write to and meet their MP and MSP to ensure that their representatives are kept informed of campaigns and issues.

The group in Linlithgow is part of a much wider network throughout Scotland. Last week, the Parliament debated—not for the first time—how volunteering contributes to the fabric of Scotland. Many people give of their time and expertise as well as of their money to support the causes that Oxfam highlights. In Scotland, Oxfam has around 40,000 committed supporters, including about

1,000 shop volunteers and about 70 Oxfam groups. Oxfam provides information on international affairs and anti-poverty strategies to many people and bodies. It also makes a financial contribution to the development of education for global citizenship within Scottish schools, a subject to which I will return.

It is important that people in Scotland understand Oxfam to be an organisation that is committed to working with others to overcome poverty wherever it exists, rather than simply a third-world development or emergency relief agency. That means that Oxfam in Scotland seeks ways to deal with poverty in Scotland and around the world and strives to make local-to-global linkages on tackling poverty and social exclusion. That highlights the fact that Oxfam in Scotland is relevant to the Scottish Parliament's efforts to address poverty and implement social justice.

Oxfam's programme of work covers a range of activities, including education for all primary-school-age children, considering ways of resolving conflict and campaigns on cancelling debt and on changing international trade rules, corporate practices and consumer behaviour. The UK poverty programme aims to bring Oxfam's international expertise and learning to a national and local context. In Scotland, Oxfam has been involved in some innovative work with asylum seekers. Other projects have included work with people to ensure that those who live in poverty can participate in the decision-making process. Oxfam is also working to address gender inequalities.

The traditional Oxfam role that most people recognise is that of providing an effective emergency response to a humanitarian emergency. We cannot be unaware of the developing crisis in Afghanistan. Oxfam and other relief agencies are in Pakistan, where they are attempting to deal with the masses of refugees and to be practical by providing a clean water supply to the refugee camps.

The network of Oxfam shops makes a direct and sustainable financial contribution to long-term development work. It provides a practical way in which the Scottish public can take action on global poverty.

I referred to Oxfam's involvement in the Scottish community. The three-year sustainable secondary schools project is funded by the heritage lottery fund to promote sustainable development as a key element in whole-school policies in Scottish secondary schools. The partnership comprises various environmental and development agencies and Learning and Teaching Scotland. At present, seven schools from around Scotland are involved in the initiative.

Oxfam also plays a valuable role in the new deal. Oxfam in Scotland has provided new deal placements for approximately 80 participants. Of those who completed the 26-week course, 89 per cent achieved their training goals. I mention those examples to show that Oxfam is active in the community here in Scotland.

What does the future hold? The 2015 international development targets are designed to provide milestones against which progress towards the goal of poverty elimination can be measured. A policy paper calling for a global partnership to pursue a new development strategy focused on six key goals. The first is to halve the proportion of people in extreme poverty. The second is to achieve universal primary education in all countries by 2015. The third is to show progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. The fourth is to reduce mortality rates for infants and children under five by two thirds. The fifth is to provide access to reproductive health services. The sixth is to have national strategies for sustainable development implemented by 2005.

I hope that I have shown that the successes of Oxfam in Linlithgow have come about because of sound principles, a clear strategy and much hard work by many people. Oxfam sets out to tackle the causes of poverty and to give people the dignity of taking control of their lives, instead of being just recipients of aid. The Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, said this week that

"to tackle the underlying roots of violence and conflict, we need a massive international effort to reduce poverty and injustice, and to promote development, democracy and human rights. There can be no global stability without global social justice."

That is what Oxfam has worked for. Because of that bigger goal, the people of Linlithgow—and no doubt others throughout Scotland, as we will hear in the debate—have given freely of their time to make a difference throughout the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I will allow the first three speakers three and a half minutes. All other speakers will have to keep to under three minutes.

17:15

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank Mary Mulligan for securing the debate.

I have never been hungry, I have never been bombed and my nation has never been invaded. I have never been driven from my home and I have not been required to take up arms to defend myself. The Government can be changed by the ballot box and the press has freedom of expression. We take all that for granted and we

become engrossed in what people in the developing world would rightly regard as trivia.

An irony of the current world situation is that it has fully revealed the extent of the misery in Afghanistan. That task was previously left to the efforts of charitable organisations. As Mary Mulligan said, Oxfam is in Pakistan and it is in the refugee camps, providing clean water—the fundamental of human existence.

Oxfam's representatives in Pakistan and in other crisis points at home and abroad are the cutting edge of an army of volunteers and supporters in Scotland. That army numbers 40,000 people who all contribute diverse skills and give time, money and commitment. They educate and inform—all for no personal gain. On behalf of the Scottish National Party, I thank them and exhort them to continue with their efforts.

I believe that the United Kingdom's international aid budget should be raised to recommended United Nations levels. Developing world debt should be cancelled, poverty should be eliminated and the 2015 international development targets should be met. The heavily indebted poor countries initiative should be reformed to allow for speedier and wider relief to all countries that are in need. International aid should be given in the form of grants or low-interest loans, which would avoid increasing the debt burden. Trade with a donor nation should not be a prerequisite for aid. That summarises the SNP's commitments on overseas development.

I am not sure whether it is appropriate to quote myself but, as that is a safe source, I am going to. In the week after the attack on the USA, I wrote my fortnightly column for the *Renfrewshire Gazette*. I found it hard to say what I thought but, noting that there would be retribution, I ended my column with these words:

"with it there have to be diplomatic efforts to bridge the gap that is widening amongst groups and nations in the world. Wooing rather than threatening. Aiding rather than obstructing. Sharing rather than taking. Educating rather than indoctrinating. And, most of all, building mutual respect and tolerance."

Since 1942, Oxfam and its volunteers have been in the forefront of such efforts. In the foreseeable future, I predict with sadness that there will be a constant challenge for them, as there will be for all of us. I wish Oxfam and its volunteers well. I take great pleasure in supporting the motion.

17:17

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): I too congratulate Mary Mulligan on securing today's debate.

In the light of the recent tragedy in America and the subsequent deterioration in the plight of

refugees in Afghanistan, it is apt that we should take this opportunity to acknowledge and support the work of Oxfam, whether that be in the form of the Linlithgow group or of individual supporters in Scotland who are working towards a shared goal of the eradication of poverty.

The Linlithgow Oxfam group is to be congratulated on the substantial contribution it has made to the work of Oxfam in Scotland over the past 26 years. This year, members of the Linlithgow group have raised £3,500 in a house-to-house collection that was part of Oxfam in Scotland's largest annual fundraising event, known as Oxfam week. That accounts for almost 10 per cent of the total that was raised in Scotland.

The vast array of work that Oxfam carries out in communities in Scotland and overseas is a cause for acknowledgement and celebration. In the region that I represent, six Oxfam shops provide a service to the local community and maintain a direct and sustainable financial contribution to long-term development overseas.

In schools across Scotland, Oxfam's development through education programme is working to ensure that Scottish schools address international issues and that they provide a curriculum that ensures that pupils are well versed in the challenges of sustainable development. At Braes High School in Falkirk, pupils and staff are learning about fair trade issues. By taking the idea of fair trade out of the classroom, they are attempting to let the issue permeate the school's ethos, pupil participation and the school's relationship with its community.

Those examples are a few among many, but they serve to illustrate the work that Oxfam does at local level. Through involvement in some of the areas that I have touched on, our community in Scotland can act in a positive way to alleviate poverty and to work towards social justice.

Oxfam works to raise funds for and awareness of projects at home and abroad. Even before the terrorist attacks of 11 September, Afghanistan faced a winter of severe shortages that might leave 5 million people at risk. Oxfam continues with much of its work, which is reaching approximately 750,000 people, but food distribution cannot continue without United Nations World Food Programme resupply from outside the country before the winter.

I acknowledge the international development targets for education, as set out in May 1996. Lack of education is a serious curb on development. There are 876 million illiterate people in the world and two thirds of them are women. We believe that developing countries should be encouraged to develop their own education sectors. We agree with the target of universal primary education by

2015, with the emphasis being on the role of national Governments in delivering education for their own citizens. I welcome Mary Mulligan's motion and the opportunity to acknowledge the work of Oxfam, particularly in Linlithgow.

17:21

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I congratulate Mary Mulligan on introducing the debate. The voluntary sector is one of the glories of Scottish life; the huge effort put into organisations such as Oxfam shows our fellow citizens at their best. The organisation that I am involved in in a small way is Christian Aid. It holds a book sale in my church in George Street, which I think claims to be the biggest book sale in the world. It takes over the church for several weeks and makes about £80,000 for Christian Aid. Members are welcome to come along—it is in May each year.

There are other aspects, such as fair trade. It is commendable that the Parliament has taken that up and drinks fair trade tea and coffee. Jubilee 2000—its new name escapes me—brought together a huge number of Scots. The voluntary approach—"lets try and do something about this problem"—is commendable.

People have come to the same conclusion in many organisations: that it is not enough only to do fundraising. The whole world system is so bad that we have to change it. Our great efforts at fundraising are puny compared with the problem. My main motivating force in politics—I am sure that many colleagues feel the same—is the gulf in circumstances between the rich and the poor in this country, but the gulf is even greater across the world. We have to help organisations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid in their campaigning as well as their fundraising. Oxfam is campaigning hard on issues such as debt.

The World Trade Organisation should be seriously reformed. With all due respect to our American friends, they in particular—as the world's richest and greatest nation—must consider their foreign and economic policy. The growing gulf between the rich and the poor is no longer just a moral issue but a practical one. The rich cannot continue to enjoy their standard of living and peace and so on when there are so many other people who are hopelessly deprived of all sorts of things. We have to put that right. Although the Parliament does not deal with foreign affairs it can do its bit and co-operate with those excellent voluntary organisations to start putting the world order right, so that it is something that we—as human beings—can all take pride in.

17:24

Iain Gray (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab): I am grateful to Mary Mulligan and Margaret Curran for agreeing to my participating in the debate from the back benches. I wanted to do so because I worked for Oxfam in Scotland for 12 years prior to being elected. Those years taught me the power of people in seemingly hopeless circumstances to transcend despair and make a collective effort to improve their lives and those of their families and neighbours.

Oxfam was started in the darkest of times—1942—by a handful of people determined to do something about the plight of people in occupied Europe. Indeed, sending aid to occupied Greece in 1942 was not popular with the Government of the day. The refusal to temper its humanitarian instinct to suit the circumstance has continued to characterise Oxfam throughout its life. From being the first aid agency into the nightmare of post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia to engaging in the moral maze that was Rwanda in 1994, Oxfam has never flinched from the most difficult theatres of humanitarianism. It does not do so today and, as many members have said, it is playing its part, as we speak, in the provision of aid to the people of Afghanistan.

Oxfam has long refused to respond only to emergencies. Rather, it engages with the structures of poverty and conflict that create them and is at the forefront of campaigning on issues such as debt. It is a leader in the development education movement in Scotland and I am pleased that Currie High School in my constituency is part of the sustainable schools project that Mary Mulligan referred to. Neither does Oxfam flinch from issues of poverty at home.

Oxfam's reach is astonishing. I once visited a relief programme in northern Mozambique, which saw supplies trucked from Malawi into Mozambique and back out again to Zimbabwe, where they were loaded on to the Beira railway and taken to a remote rail junction. They were then trucked to an airfield, airlifted to towns that could be reached only by air, and then trucked out again another 200km to camps that people had walked for a fortnight to reach. People who might have been thought to be geographically beyond help were not beyond Oxfam's determination to reach them.

Of course, that astonishing chain actually stretched all the way back to the groups of supporters and activists who have always been the driving force of that kind of effort. Those links are very real. Of those groups, there is no better example in Scotland than the Linlithgow Oxfam group. As we have heard, its members have raised a great deal of money but, more than that, they understand that the effectiveness of

international solidarity depends on the depth of the roots that we put down in our own communities. They have made themselves, and therefore their cause, a part of Linlithgow. They work in schools, campaign on the street and participate in annual marches—and they held their once-legendary raft races on Linlithgow loch. In contributing to the world, they contribute to their own town.

Someone once described Oxfam as a bridge of people. That is exactly what it is. It is a bridge built on the unshakeable belief that people acting together can overcome almost anything. The Linlithgow group is part of that bridge, and so are we for this hour at least—and so we should be.

17:27

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I congratulate Mary Mulligan on bringing this important subject to the chamber for debate. I am pleased to follow Iain Gray, who has experience of working for Oxfam. In fact, one of my first experiences at this Parliament, in the new consensus, was holding hands between Jack McConnell and Iain Gray at one of the cancel-the-debt events.

Overseas aid and development have always been very much part of my politics. When I first went to university, everyone was rushing to join the Labour students or the nationalists, but I joined Third World First. It was the first organisation I joined.

I add my congratulations to Linlithgow Oxfam group. As has been said, it is very much part of the town of Linlithgow. Before I even moved from Edinburgh out to Linlithgow, I had heard about Linlithgow Oxfam and the work that it was doing. The roots that it has planted in that town are very important. The work of Linlithgow Oxfam and of other voluntary organisations and local churches shows that the town has an awareness of international responsibilities.

We should reflect on the fact that Mary Mulligan's motion was lodged before the recent attacks on the World Trade Center. Because of that event, we have come to focus our attention on the problems of poverty and conflict. This evening's debate was relevant before those events and it is relevant now, but we have to reflect on what it means in today's perspective. Poverty fuels conflict, and any response from the west has to address the absolute importance of urgent international aid. The work of groups such as Linlithgow Oxfam is part of the consciousness of ensuring that our country is aware of that need. We must be ready to take our responsibilities.

When we talk of responsibilities, we have to decide what this Parliament can do. We know that hunger can harbour hate, but what can we as a Parliament do? Yes, we can have a minister for

voluntary organisations who can talk about the support we can give voluntary organisations. Yes, we have an important cross-party group on international development, but we have to ask what we can do as a country, as a nation.

We should reflect on what the Executive is doing and what it can do. What powers does it have? Of course, I am a nationalist and want to ensure that we have the powers and responsibility to meet international aid obligations. The Scottish Parliament does not yet have such powers, but in the weeks and months ahead there should be an effort and a contribution from the Executive to show that, hands across the nations of the world, this Parliament has a role to play.

I congratulate Mary Mulligan on securing the debate. I also congratulate Linlithgow Oxfam group. I remember its monthly sales in the Low Port hut—I used to take my young son there regularly during maternity time to ensure that I got toys and clothes. Linlithgow Oxfam group plays a valuable role in its contribution to Linlithgow's civic life. The group and Mary Mulligan's motion bring to members a sense of our duty and responsibilities as a Parliament.

17:30

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I too congratulate Mary Mulligan on her motion.

It is said that everybody will remember where they were on 11 September. That morning, I was at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in Australia. With members from South Africa and India and the deputy director of the Commonwealth Foundation, I presented a workshop on poverty. We discussed issues relating to poverty, including the United Nations definition of poverty. Over a billion people live on less than \$1 a day in a world with enough resources for everyone to be well looked after.

We considered ways to tackle poverty in countries that are relatively well off but that have pockets of poverty and people who are socially excluded and in countries that face real and absolute poverty as a result of war or conflict, environmental situations or the tragedy of HIV and AIDS. We considered how we must develop literacy programmes and provide women with opportunities through, for example, microcredit schemes. We also discussed opportunities for women to obtain employment to sustain their families. I was struck by the huge amount of international development work that has been done and by the many committed people in voluntary organisations who give their time in Scotland, the UK and abroad.

I attended the Labour party conference in

Brighton in the past couple of days. I was heartened by Clare Short's excellent speech, which gave the Government's commitment to continue a programme that targets the poorest countries, provides aid and supports organisations such as Oxfam in their valuable work.

One of Clare Short's most striking questions related to why millions of people continue to live in poverty, have nothing to eat, starve and have malnutrition, yet the rest of the world is on a permanent diet. If that does not sum things up, I do not know what will.

I was also pleased that Gordon Brown gave a commitment to use the UK Government's powers to work towards the target of free primary education for all children by 2015. That may seem a long way off, but much work must be done to ensure that that target is met.

I want to praise Oxfam for its work in development education. I used to work with young people and could always rely on Oxfam to provide resources and materials to allow me to work with young people and introduce them to problems in the wider world. That gave young people skills and confidence to discuss matters and take issues forward. I hope that Oxfam will keep up the good work—we appreciate it.

17:34

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I too congratulate Mary Mulligan on her motion, which is timely. It is well recognised—and rightly so—that Oxfam does a splendid job, often in difficult and trying circumstances. Like Clare Short, we are naturally anxious that aid should go to those for whom it is intended—that is why we support Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development anti-corruption legislation.

Oxfam has a long and distinguished record of assistance. For example, since 1973 it has worked in Pakistan and responded to emergencies, including floods, cyclones and drought. Currently, it is fully involved in dealing with an escalating humanitarian crisis in central Asia and Afghanistan.

A combination of drought, conflict and food shortages and the ban on all communication with the outside world mean that countless individuals in Afghanistan are under threat of starvation. Oxfam welcomed the World Food Programme's decision to get food supplies through. I warmly welcome the fact that Oxfam is continuing to work in Afghanistan and that it plans to help deliver food to hundreds of thousands of people who otherwise would not have it.

I hope that the minister will impart to her colleagues in the British Government the need for

food to get through before the full harshness of winter sets in. The effective work of non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam should be assisted even in the most troubled times. Linlithgow Oxfam group and other comparable groups in Scotland should be applauded for their work in support of Oxfam, which aims to drive back the frontiers of poverty, ignorance and disease.

17:35

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Mary Mulligan on bringing the debate to the chamber. I also congratulate Linlithgow Oxfam group on its 26 years' work. Like Fiona Hyslop, I heard of the work of the group some time ago. That work is important because Oxfam, like many voluntary organisations, works nationally but is sustained by work done by local volunteers working actively week in, week out. Those volunteers not only raise money, they raise awareness.

The work that Oxfam has done to raise awareness about fair trade is important. A few weeks ago, Berta Gomez, who is a banana trade union worker from South America, came to the Parliament. She told us about the living and working conditions of women there. They are fighting to make their lives better—fighting for workers' rights and against poverty and oppression. They are campaigning with the little that they have to set up a women's health clinic and they seek our support and our awareness of what is happening.

When I heard Berta Gomez, I felt guilty about how I do my shopping. My kids grew up knowing that they should not buy things from particular companies or shops. I asked her about fair trade: "What about fair trade bananas? I don't buy the bananas that your company produces." She thinks that the fair trade campaign is important, because if people like me in the richer part of the world continue to buy fair trade produce, her company will treat the workers in her area better.

We must remember the implications of the work that is done by Oxfam and other organisations. That is important. Awareness raising is important. As the constituency MSP for Falkirk East, I want to thank Oxfam for the work that is happening in Braes High School and in other schools.

Active citizenship is not just about what happens in schools; it is about what happens in the community—locally, nationally and internationally. Only by understanding what is happening to those of the same age in other parts of the world can youngsters start to appreciate what it means to be an active citizen. That work is important—it is how sustainability is supported.

Congratulations. Most of us would like to go on for at least the next half hour and praise the present work. We must remember that we all have a responsibility in supporting the work of Oxfam, raising awareness and fighting world poverty.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As things stand, two members are unlikely to be called. Therefore, I will accept a motion without notice to extend the debate until 6 o'clock, so that everybody can be involved.

Motion moved,

That the meeting be extended until 6 o'clock.—[*Fiona Hyslop.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:39

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am terribly relieved, as I thought that I would have to go at a rate of knots. I thank Mary Mulligan for securing the debate.

What we have heard about Linlithgow Oxfam group and all the other Oxfam groups across the country shows that every piece of input from an Oxfam activist taps into the wider picture of Oxfam's marvellous work across the world. I pay particular tribute to Oxfam workers working elsewhere in the world—Iain Gray referred to some in Mozambique. Every day they work with people in the greatest need.

I have met some wonderful Oxfam activists across the world. I remember when I was in East Timor a couple of years ago meeting some people who worked for Oxfam. They had worked in the region before, but all the NGOs were kicked out of East Timor when the troubles started a few years back, as the oppressors were trying to hide what was going on. It fascinated me that, because they felt so strongly about East Timor, those Oxfam workers had taken leave of absence from their jobs with Oxfam to go back to East Timor for the ballot—that is commitment.

When I was in Peru last year, I met other wonderful Oxfam people who were working in a shanty town just outside Lima. They were working on a women's health project and had done some fantastic work. They were working with other NGOs—Mary Mulligan mentioned the importance of working together—to promote a better quality of life for people in that town. It especially interested me that they were not working from the top down—everything that they did had a teaching element. Oxfam teaches citizenship in our schools and works worldwide to ensure that people have the tools to make their lives better.

I pay tribute to an initiative from Clare Short, who has done rather a good job in the Department for International Development, to take aid into

places such as Peru through NGOs such as Oxfam rather than through Governments. I am pleased that we are going down that road, because the NGOs are the people at the sharp end who know how to do that.

Fiona Hyslop asked what the Parliament can do and pointed out that we face certain difficulties. Donald Gorrie mentioned the World Trade Organisation. We should consider the major campaign that Oxfam is running on the agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property—TRIPS—which affects us by imposing a 20-year patent protection on all products and manufacturing processes. The 20-year rule is delaying the supply of equivalent but cheaper generic medicines to countries that need them. We all remember the publicity about the South African Government's great coup in winning its case on cheaper generic medicines. Oxfam is currently running a big campaign on the issue and is asking people to sign up to its global petition. I am being hurried up by the Presiding Officer, so I will close by asking every member to lobby friends and colleagues and get as many people as possible to sign up to Oxfam's global petition.

17:42

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Mary Mulligan is to be congratulated on securing the debate and congratulations are also due to Oxfam Linlithgow.

I attended a fringe meeting in Brighton last night, after the formal session of my party's conference. I sat beside a young man who spoke eloquently about the disengagement of many people—especially young people—from party political processes. It is not that they are not interested in politics, but that political processes sometimes seem uninterested in them and the issues that are important to them. On Sunday, he had been outside the security perimeter in Brighton with the demonstrators.

This kind of debate shows that if political parties want re-engagement to enable genuine and constructive working together, we must listen to the genuine concerns of activists and interested parties on issues such as international development.

Our success or failure as democratic politicians will in part turn on how much we are prepared to use democratic fora such as this chamber to empower voluntary associations, charities and others outside the chamber to make the case on the great progressive causes of our time, which include international development. We have ambitious aims and are prepared to engage with the structures of poverty at home and abroad. It is one of the wonders of the 21st century that it has taken us so long in the 20th century to articulate a

case for a global health fund for vaccines, research and development aids and tax credits. It should be one of the great ambitions of western civilisations to raise out of poverty a billion children throughout the world by 2015 and break the link between trade and aid.

I am heartened that our country is taking the lead on these issues. As our Prime Minister told the world community only yesterday, out of the shadow of the current evil should emerge lasting good. He then spelled out some of the elements of the good world that should emerge. In the short to medium term, we face the necessity of destroying the machinery of terrorism and we will not stint in achieving that end. Most important, we must bring to all nations the hope of a new beginning; a greater understanding that poverty is also an act of aggression; and an awareness that justice and prosperity for the dispossessed is the best guarantee of our collective security. For progressives, those are essential components of our collective purpose. We are making progress. Since 1997, aid for overseas development has increased by 50 per cent in real terms.

With Oxfam and other advocacy groups such as Save the Children, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and Christian Aid taking up the case of the dispossessed and the poor, those voices will be heard. Perhaps they need to be heard now more than ever. Of course we need to do more. In the meantime, I say well done to Linlithgow Oxfam.

17:46

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): One point has not been raised in the debate. As a lifelong supporter of Oxfam, I am proud of the fact that it is the most efficient charity of its size in the world. A very small amount of money is spent on administration and a very large amount of money is applied exactly where it is needed. Oxfam deserves congratulations on that.

I thank Mary Mulligan for securing the debate, as it allows us to assert our links to the rest of the world. Such occasions are very important to all members and particularly to those of us in the cross-party international development group.

I have fond memories of Linlithgow Oxfam. It has a lovely habit of calling politicians to account during election campaigns and asking them to present their policies alone. One has to be pretty well-briefed to face the Linlithgow Oxfam group and I congratulate its members on ensuring that, at every election, not only the people who stand but others are well-briefed on foreign affairs.

I will concentrate on education, which has been mentioned. I pay tribute to Currie High School. I have visited the school several times and the feed-

through from its engagement with a project led by Oxfam has been absolutely wonderful. However, it is a pity that so far only seven schools have managed to take part in the project. I would like the Executive to reflect on the fact that many other campaigning groups such as the World Development Movement—to which I also subscribe—all the groups within Scottish Environment LINK and other charities would love to take part in the kind of project in schools that Oxfam is leading.

Only yesterday, I visited Blackness Primary School. I advise anyone who wants to see the results of good teaching with a tiny class to do the same. The pupils were being taught about what is going on in the Amazon rainforests and it was fabulous to see the empathy that the little children had with their environment and people in other countries. I am quite sure that those results are reflected in the other schools involved in the project.

I warmly recommend that the Executive should do what it can to become a focus for educational development using all the voluntarism and good will that can be found in all the organisations in Scotland, especially Oxfam.

17:49

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I also congratulate Mary Mulligan and the Linlithgow Oxfam group.

Although Oxfam's name is synonymous with addressing the issues of poverty in developing countries, its newest development programme is the UK poverty programme, which focuses on poverty at home. I want to consider that programme this evening.

In 1999, the UN human development report ranked the UK as the third worst of 17 industrialised countries for its record on poverty and its combinations of high levels of poverty and inequality. Oxfam's programme and expertise can play a large part in the process of stamping out poverty in this country and can help with the Executive's aims and commitment in that regard.

The UK poverty programme was set up in the mid-1990s and was established in Scotland in 1997. The programme is aimed at developing ways of working that empower people who face poverty to find solutions and change the policies that have created poverty. The aim in Scotland is to establish working relationships and partnerships with organisations that are interested in tapping into Oxfam's vast international experience. A key objective of the work is to introduce international development practice and perspectives into anti-poverty work in Scotland. I shall mention two areas of practice that are used overseas but not

often applied here.

The first area of concern is what is called voice poverty, which is defined as the denial of people's rights to influence the decisions that affect their lives. The UK Coalition Against Poverty's commission on poverty, power and participation has identified many barriers to engaging in the decision-making process for people who are experiencing poverty. In addition to basic logistical barriers, those included a lack of respect for poor people, a lack of understanding of how participation should work and a lack of will to hand over any power for effective change. Oxfam's programme is working to increase the participation of people who are experiencing poverty in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, which is something that this inclusive people's Parliament should take a great interest in. It also has gender implications.

The second area of concern is that of gender poverty. Women constitute the majority in the poorest groups in Scotland. They still constitute 70 per cent of low earners and when they work part-time they earn 30 to 40 per cent less than men who are in similar part-time jobs. I have other data on the situation, but I think that we have heard them before and we do not have time to hear them again. To be effective, anti-poverty initiatives must be grounded in a deeper understanding of gender differences, household relations and other cross-cutting elements of discrimination. The Oxfam programme is working to increase awareness and understanding of how poverty impacts differently on men and women.

Although it is right to recognise and debate Oxfam's work abroad, and to congratulate the Linlithgow group, it is also right that we should recognise the work that is being done to tackle poverty in this country. Oxfam should be congratulated on that also.

17:52

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): I declare an interest, as I am a member of Oxfam. I am therefore pleased to have been asked to reply to tonight's debate. As many members have said, no one could have imagined, when Mary Mulligan lodged the motion, that we would be debating it in the present circumstances. Aid work is always on our agenda, but it has taken on a new resonance in recent weeks.

I add my congratulations to Mary Mulligan on bringing the issue to the attention of Parliament, so that we could have this debate, and I join other members in congratulating the Linlithgow Oxfam group. That group sounds like a pretty fierce one that is well worth paying attention to, if Robin Harper's experience is anything to go by. We

recognise that it has 26 years of experience in fundraising and campaigning for poverty eradication and social justice throughout the world and, as Elaine Smith said, at home as well.

It is important that we acknowledge the range of work that Oxfam undertakes, from fundraising for major emergencies in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kosovo and Mozambique to raising awareness of global poverty, debt aid and trade. The work of the organisation is a great example of the contribution that ordinary people and local communities can make to the continuing worldwide struggle against poverty.

I further add the Executive's thanks to Oxfam in Scotland and its supporters for their contribution to the promotion of social justice throughout the world. We appreciate Oxfam's 60 years of experience of working in developing countries. Iain Gray eloquently gave us an insight into the organisation's efforts and work. We welcome Oxfam's clear statements on its beliefs, identity and work with others, especially its work with local partners in the countries that are affected—which Linda Fabiani explained—to overcome the injustice of poverty and suffering. Oxfam has been progressive in developing experimental models of working, as it has helped people to help themselves, and in rejecting old-fashioned models of imposing solutions on people. Many people in the chamber will be aware of Oxfam's worldwide coverage: it works in more than 80 countries.

As has been said already, international development is a reserved matter. The responsibility for the Government's relationship with voluntary organisations that work overseas lies with the Department for International Development. As many members will know, the department has a base in Scotland.

The central focus of the policy of the UK government, as set out in the International Development Bill, which is currently in the House of Lords, is a commitment to an internationally agreed target to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

The second white paper on international development, published in December 2000, focuses on globalisation. It highlights the need to promote policies and measures to enhance the pro-poor impact of globalisation. International trade can make a crucial contribution to achieving that objective.

The Department for International Development's short-term humanitarian relief centres on its rapid onset emergency programme, which responds mainly to natural disasters but also to war situations. As has been said during the debate, grants are awarded to non-governmental organisations to provide assistance on the ground.

The spend reflects the assistance that is requested each year.

I would like to make a specific reference to Afghanistan. Brian Fitzpatrick has emphasised some points that needed to be made. Yesterday, the Prime Minister made clear the humanitarian issues that will be at the heart of the Government's approach. For the record, the European Commission's humanitarian aid office has to date announced €27.3 million for the crisis; and on 19 September, Clare Short agreed a £25 million aid package. The department has allocated funding to United Nations agencies and the Red Cross movement. A further £11 million was announced on 28 September for Pakistan. However, I wish to re-emphasise that we are not complacent in the face of the critical issues. We will work with our colleagues at Westminster to pursue the issues that have been raised.

I want now to refer specifically to Scotland. There are more than 100 voluntary organisations in Scotland that work on international issues. I was going to refer to Donald Gorrie's contribution but he has left. Scottish-based charities have delivered remarkable achievements in emergency relief and overseas development. For example, there have been Edinburgh Direct Aid's convoys to Bosnia, the Scottish Charities Kosovo Appeal, and International Rescue Corps in Grangemouth, which was involved in rescue attempts following the Indian earthquake. I have recently received correspondence from the Mercy Corps, which is another not-for-profit organisation that exists to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression. It has headquarters in the USA and in Scotland, and it operates in many countries abroad.

There is also a substantial Scottish presence in UK and international aid charities working throughout the world. Scotland has therefore an active and varied voluntary sector involved in international development work. Those civil society organisations and networks play a vital role in empowering poor people overseas not just to tackle their immediate situations but to confront the forces that keep them poor. There is an increasing awareness of Scotland's voluntary sector as a player on the world stage. That is as it should be.

The Executive agrees that that part of the Scottish voluntary sector should be recognised and encouraged. The Department for International Development works closely with the Scottish Executive and Scottish organisations and civil society to achieve the Government's objectives.

Last year the Minister for Social Justice visited the Department for International Development to discuss its work in developing countries and to gain recognition for the role and contribution of the Scottish voluntary sector, faith groups and trade

unions. Of the 100 plus voluntary organisations in Scotland that work on international issues, the Department for International Development has a direct relationship with around 20. Executive ministers want to see how the voluntary sector's networks in Scotland can be of help. To maintain the sector, we need to have contact at different levels.

As I have suggested, there is no sense of complacency in this debate. How could there be, given the world that we face at the moment? As many have said, we indeed live in an ill-divided world. Cathy Jamieson pointed out that we talk about diets in a world of starvation. That cannot be acceptable. Many ministers have to consider the consequences of obesity and eating disorders, and it is a most bizarre sense of priorities that allows that to happen at the same time as there is world starvation. We must reorder our priorities and our sense of urgency.

We maintain our commitment to partnerships in order to tackle the forces of world poverty that a Government can tackle. We will also work at grass-roots level.

It is especially fitting that we are discussing the work of the Linlithgow Oxfam group, which makes its contribution to tackling world poverty. As Jackie Baillie said in last week's debate on the voluntary sector, they are indeed unsung heroes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. It is 6 o'clock on the button.

Meeting closed at 18:00.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, 375 High Street, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 10 October 2001

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £500

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £3.75

Special issue price: £5

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

The Stationery Office Bookshops at:
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
The Stationery Office Oriel Bookshop,
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF12BZ
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information
on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament,
their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0870 606 5566

Fax orders
0870 606 5588

The Scottish Parliament Shop
George IV Bridge
EH99 1SP
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers