

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 6 November 2003

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 6 November 2003

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

Sustainable Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-559, in the name of Robin Harper, on sustainable Scotland, and three amendments to the motion.

09:30

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): The Executive's partnership agreement states:

"We want a Scotland that delivers sustainable development; that puts environmental concerns at the heart of public policy and secures environmental justice for all of Scotland's communities."

That is a truly noble ambition, supported by strong pillars, but what does the Executive offer us? A thread.

Members must not misunderstand me: that thread represents the Executive's commitment, and my Green colleagues and I are delighted that the partnership agreement contains even a little green thread. We are delighted that the other parties incorporated more green rhetoric than ever before into their political manifestos, but—and that is a big but—words are not enough. If one good policy is undermined by another policy, we are no further forward and, occasionally, we might even be worse off.

Again and again, the Executive claims that its fence-sitting on tough decisions is dictated by the restrictions of responsible government. Those claims are increasingly being exposed as shorthand for business as usual. That is not good enough. Part of the Greens' job in the Parliament is to act as a conscience, to hold up green commitments to the clear light of day and to demand serious action. Our job is to outline key areas where the reality on the ground varies so widely from the stated public policy that the little green thread is in knots.

The partnership agreement makes a commitment to reach a target of

"40% of Scottish electricity generation ... from renewable sources by 2020".

That commitment is made to address climate change and to meet our commitments under the Kyoto treaty. However, the partnership agreement contains no target for traffic reduction and is

saddled with commitments to build more roads, expand airports and encourage air travel, all of which cause climate change. That is a policy contradiction.

Although the Executive supports renewable energy, it has still not ruled out nuclear power stations or waste-to-energy incinerators. What sort of signal does that send to potential investors in renewables? Meanwhile, the first wave machines could come on stream in Portugal, because renewables receive many times more investment there than is available in Scotland. That is another policy contradiction.

On food and health, the Executive has made commitments to local markets, organics and healthy eating. However, our Government is still sitting on the fence in relation to genetically modified crops. Without a GM-free Scotland, the Executive's positive commitments could be undone. In the debate that will follow this one, we will hear that GM threatens the future of both organic and conventional farming. That is another policy contradiction.

On reducing waste, there is a vague commitment to create significant opportunities for new products that are manufactured from waste—but it is just a commitment. However, the 1 per cent target—only 1 per cent—for the reduction in the amount of waste that we produce seems to have been abandoned. That is another policy contradiction.

At the root of the Executive's contradictory approach to sustainability is an obsession with economic growth as a sort of miracle driver for societal well-being. However, to judge progress on gross domestic product alone is to live in a fool's paradise. Even Tony Blair acknowledges that. He has said:

"focusing solely on economic growth risks ignoring the impact—both good and bad—on people and on the environment ... Now ... there is a growing realisation that real progress cannot be measured by money alone ... But in the past ... We have failed to see how our economy, our environment and our society are all one."

The crisis in the fishing industry is a sad testament to the illusion of the benefits of economic growth at any cost.

Some five years ago, the Executive committed to strategic environmental assessment, which was hailed—and we do not demur—as the most important tool to inform decision making. However, the Executive is only now taking action, to meet the deadline for avoiding legal action by the European Union. The minister has said that he will introduce primary legislation on strategic environmental assessment, which is welcome, but there is still no guarantee that it will cover existing strategies and agencies such as the new transport

authority. The Executive is like a dinosaur at work: bang it on the head with a good idea and the tail twitches five years later.

So, what should we do about the green thread? Will we get it to pull all these things together? We need a sea change—a fundamental shift in approach and policy away from the inadequate pursuit of growth at any cost towards the goal of sustainability. An independent commission of the Centre for Scottish Public Policy, which includes Sarah Boyack, agrees with that. It says in a robust and clear report that was published this week that neither the Executive nor the Parliament takes the challenge of sustainable development seriously enough and that failing to meet that challenge would be cheating on our children, cheating on ourselves and cheating on our neighbours.

We need a truly green vision—not just a thread, but an entire cloth in which green threads join with one another to form a coherent pattern, each policy is considered in the context of others and there is truly joined-up thinking. To help to achieve that, the status of the Executive's sustainable development unit within government must be improved. We must have a sustainable development strategy and the Parliament should have a sustainable development committee to monitor progress.

We promised our voters that we would be both constructive and challenging in our role as parliamentarians. We are delighted that the coalition parties and others have adopted some of our language but we now ask them to adopt more of our vision. We acknowledge the Executive's apparent commitment to the environment and sustainable development, as outlined in the partnership agreement, and we will track its progress on those issues.

If we have a collective future, we will achieve it only if we grasp the opportunity that is presented by the Executive's start and if sustainability leads economic development, not the other way around.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's intention of placing the environment and sustainable development at the heart of all of its policy making; notes, however, the policy contradictions, including those in *A Partnership for a Better Scotland*, which indicate that this goal is not likely to be achieved, and therefore calls on the Executive to integrate sustainable development within all of its policy making and organise government to achieve this end.

09:37

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I am grateful to Robin Harper for acknowledging, at least, that the partnership agreement is full of noble ambition—indeed it is, and quite rightly so. The document

was published at the outset of the Executive's term in government and it was right for us to set out a clear and high ambition. I am sorry that he has to be so niggly about the green thread and that he finds it somehow awkward or difficult. I would have expected him to be more generous, and I would have thought that even he might be keen to acknowledge a green thread that has 78 positive commitments on environmental matters.

Nevertheless, the green thread is there and, in speaking to my amendment, I want to make it clear that that green thread links together clear commitments on actions and policy, creating a clear framework within which the Executive will deliver on sustainable development rather than just talk about it. We have priorities and our emphasis is on resource use, energy and travel. We will measure our progress using the sustainable development indicators, many of which have clear targets.

More important, we are committed to action. Action is set out in the introduction to the partnership agreement, which contains the commitment to sustainable development that Robin Harper was kind enough to quote. I hope that he will quote it often. There is concern for sustainable development and also for environmental justice. Those are key priorities, not only for me as Minister for Environment and Rural Development but for every Executive minister and for every department.

Robin Harper mentioned the economy. Let us be clear that the Scottish Executive Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department must ensure that growth is sustainable. We must grow renewable energy industries—that is important in terms of what will fuel economic growth. We must assess our economic development policies against their impact on the targets that are set in our sustainable development indicators. It is not a question of having a laissez-faire approach to economic development. We will also return vacant and derelict land to productive use.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the minister explain exactly how trebling air traffic in Scotland is consistent with sustainable development?

Ross Finnie: The Greens should stop saying that the clock should suddenly be turned back and economic development stopped and that they will fly nowhere, travel nowhere and go nowhere and get themselves into the real world. They must understand that improving Scotland's links to Europe via direct routes and reducing pollution at Heathrow will do much more for the environment than waving flags and telling Scotland that its economic growth must come to a sudden end.

There is a wide range of projects and investment

in trams in Scotland. Roads have been mentioned. By 2006, 70 per cent of transport spending will be on public transport, which has never been achieved by any previous Administration. I hope that the Scottish Green Party will acknowledge that achievement.

In respect of health, we will require more efficient use of energy in buildings. On education, we are developing curriculum materials to promote environmental awareness. On social justice, we will reduce the number of people in fuel poverty by 30 per cent by 2006.

We will recycle and compost 25 per cent of our municipal waste by 2006. Members should consider examples throughout Europe. They will then find that even the best and most progressive countries—regrettably—still have to have recourse to landfill and incineration.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Ross Finnie: No—I am short of time.

In short, the programme is the most ambitious programme for the environment and sustainable development that has ever been prepared by a Government in Scotland. Our next task is to deliver on those commitments. Cabinet ministers will be responsible for delivering on the environmental and sustainable development commitments in their areas. That work will be supervised by the Cabinet sub-committee on sustainable Scotland, which met yesterday to discuss the programme and tasks. Over the next months, I shall meet each Cabinet minister to examine and assess with them how their programmes are meeting commitments.

We have the political will to deliver on sustainable development and our ambitious programme will be underpinned by our commitment to deliver strategic environmental assessment. We have set out a two-stage process to deliver strategic environmental assessment—again, I am sorry that Robin Harper carps about the matter. We will introduce regulations to implement the European directive by 21 July 2004, which is the due date. Then, we shall introduce an early and comprehensive bill on strategic environmental assessment. Once the bill is enacted, we will repeal the regulations so that there is a single body of law that deals with strategic environmental assessment, which will take things much further than the absolute requirements that are contained in the directive.

There will be two major benefits. First, the quality of decision making will be improved. Assessing the environmental implications of options will ensure that decisions are based on sound evidence and that we understand the consequences of what we are doing. A culture

change will result and environmental factors will be considered at the start of policy making rather than being simply an afterthought.

Strategic environmental assessment gives us new opportunities for public involvement, scrutiny and increasing the transparency of public decision making. Therefore, it is at the heart of our drive for environmental justice.

In summary, we have a clear framework for sustainable development, clear priorities and indicators and challenging targets. We have made a commitment to action to make Scotland more sustainable for the benefit of its people.

I move amendment S2M-559.3, to leave out from “intention” to end and insert:

“commitment to a Scotland that delivers sustainable development, puts environmental concerns at the heart of public policy and secures environmental justice for all of Scotland’s communities; welcomes the Executive’s commitment to introduce Strategic Environmental Assessment for public sector strategies, programmes and plans, and welcomes the demonstration of the commitment to sustainable development in every section of *A Partnership for a Better Scotland*.”

09:43

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland)

(SNP): A signal that there is an opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to make a huge difference in achieving sustainable development is that our standing orders state that any bill that comes before it must have attached to it an assessment of its impact on sustainable development. That is a far cry from what happened in this country a few years ago. Then, the whole of the United Kingdom was referred to as the dirty man of Europe.

Like people in the rest of the UK, Europe and the world, the people of Scotland face key challenges. Nowadays, many folk live in better housing and there are more cars, videos and personal computers. We take more holidays and enjoy more leisure, but such changes have a massive impact on the environment. The challenge must be to reduce demands on the earth’s resources, improve all environments and tackle poverty, which is a key objective of any sustainable development strategy.

The Scottish National Party agrees that sustainable development must be a thread through absolutely everything that is done and must not be simply a fad for politicians who now and again turn their attention to the issue. We all remember Tony Blair soon after he was elected in 1997 going to Europe surrounded by Cabinet ministers and dictating what should happen to help the environment, then going to New York and speaking to the United Nations. I do not think that many of us remember him doing much to achieve sustainable development since his warm words

and such rhetoric.

In September last year, after his visit to the South African summit, the First Minister made a statement to the Parliament on sustainable development. I cannot remember him talking much about sustainable development since then or making further statements to the chamber. The issue does not seem to be particularly high on the Executive's agenda.

Ross Finnie: Does the member simply have a short memory or is he not interested in reading about what the First Minister does? The First Minister has made important statements, particularly about sustainable development and social justice, and I am surprised that the member has missed them. Perhaps his mind was on other things.

Richard Lochhead: The key for the Executive is to ensure that sustainable development is a priority. There have not been many ministerial statements or comments by the First Minister about sustainable development in the chamber. If the issue is a top priority, we must hear more from ministers so that the Parliament can hold the Executive to account.

We must change the culture of individuals in Scotland, our communities, businesses and, of course, politicians. As other members have said, the key challenge is to marry economic development with sustainable development.

I was interested in the World Wildlife Fund's saying that, because we do not have a proper green jobs strategy in Scotland, we are missing out on 50,000 jobs. I remind members that there are currently around 150,000 unemployed people in Scotland. Unemployment could be cut by one third in Scotland if we got our act together in implementing a green jobs strategy.

We do not want to be churlish. The Parliament and the Executive have made steps forward. Strategic environmental assessment has been mentioned and I hope that it will change the culture of the public sector in Scotland. Much more must be done in respect of renewable energy and the national waste strategy, but at least we are making a start.

However, we must bear in mind the fact that the impetus for many changes has come from the European Union rather than from Executive ministers; we are simply responding to directives that must be implemented. That said, it is important to continue to emphasise reducing the use of materials and reusing and recycling materials in Scotland.

People must change. That means that education must be the key in chasing sustainable development. I have a leaflet by the north of

Scotland sustainable development awareness campaign. Most people in Scotland do not know what is in such leaflets. Even the *New Internationalist* magazine—which not many people read; only a few middle-class people in Scotland read it—has produced an excellent poster that shows a 20-step programme to kick habits and improve people's impact on the environment. We must ensure that the people of Scotland are aware of all the steps that they can take.

The Executive's record is not perfect. Robin Harper referred to an issue that was in the press yesterday. A draft independent report by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy commission said about sustainable development that the Executive is cheating on our children, cheating on our neighbours and cheating on ourselves.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Our colleague Robin Harper was gracious enough to amend his speech in the light of a correction that I gave in respect of the exact quotation from the document. I would be delighted to give the member a copy of that correction afterwards. The document does not refer only to the Executive—Parliament and wider society were also discussed. There is collective responsibility. That was the whole point of the paragraph.

Richard Lochhead: I will wait and see what the report says, but I gave a direct quote.

The key point that the SNP wants to make is that many key drivers in achieving sustainable development are reserved to Westminster. Many transport issues—which we must get right if we want to address sustainable development—are reserved to Westminster, as are energy and nuclear power issues. Fiscal policy and the carrot-and-stick approach to make people change their behaviour are also reserved to Westminster.

Robin Harper said that if one good policy is undermined by bad policies elsewhere, we will lose its benefits. That is true. If we are to make a real difference, we need cross-cutting legislative powers. There is no point in adopting the best policies that we can in Scotland only to be undermined by what is happening in London. That is why this country needs full financial independence so that we can make a real difference. Scotland is a perfect size—we simply need the tools to make a difference.

I move amendment S2M-559.1, to insert at end:

"and recognises that, by gaining the powers enjoyed by other independent member states of the EU, the Parliament's efforts to achieve sustainable development will be greatly enhanced as this will provide legislative powers over matters currently reserved to Her Majesty's Government that influence sustainable development, the ability to use fiscal measures and direct representation on international bodies dedicated to protecting the environment".

09:49

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Conservatives have always supported a sustainable development policy that is aimed at empowering the individual and increasing choice, while reducing the power of the bureaucracies. However, our priority for a sustainable Scotland is not the Greens' centre-down emphasis on arbitrary and often unrealistic targets; rather, it is to offer practical support and encouragement for rural businesses and industries—in particular, the fishing sector, which needs assistance as never before to ensure that fishing communities will have a sustainable future. As Liberal Democrat minister Tavish Scott put it eloquently earlier this week, what is the point of sustaining Scotland's fish stocks if the communities that have depended on them for generations have disappeared?

It is estimated that 20,000 people in Scotland owe their jobs directly to the fishing industry and that around 48,000 jobs are in some way economically dependent on it—that is twice as many people as were ever employed by the North sea oil industry at its peak. In places such as Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Mallaig, Macduff, Shetland and Pittenweem, fishing is the fabric that binds communities together. The fishing industry underpins other key industries such as tourism and has a massive impact on the local culture and social cohesion. Without a fishing industry, many of those communities will simply die.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The problem is that, because the fish are decreasing in numbers, the industry is not sustainable. Surely, the drive should be to find truly sustainable replacement businesses.

Mr Brocklebank: I hope to come to that in a moment.

At a time when countries such as Spain and Ireland are still taking advantage of European Union subsidies to build up their fleets, we are sending ours to the breaker's yard.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Will the member give way?

Mr Brocklebank: No, I will not at the moment. I have a lot to get through.

No one denies that North sea cod stocks are in trouble. There are many reasons for that—probably involving global warming and the migration of cod elsewhere. However, at the same time, we are seeing bigger stocks of haddock in Scottish water than we have seen for 30 years, and herring and other species are abundant. Cod is not a major Scottish species, yet, to stop its being taken as a bycatch, draconian measures have been placed on all Scottish vessels, which could eventually result in the collapse of the whole

white-fish fleet.

Ross Finnie will shortly go to this year's EU negotiations. However, if the result of last year's negotiations is anything to go by, our fisherfolk have never been in greater peril.

Robin Harper: Will the member give way?

Mr Brocklebank: No, I cannot. I have a lot to get through.

Local management, with fishermen at the heart of the negotiations, is now essential. After 30 long years of futile negotiation, Conservatives believe that the only possible way forward is withdrawal from the common fisheries policy. That is now the position of the SNP and, this week, we have learned that it is also the position of certain members of the Liberal Democrats—especially those in Shetland, where the issue is a particular hot potato.

Earlier this year, Tavish Scott accused Tories of attempting to con fishermen by advocating withdrawal from the CFP. Now he says that the CFP is not working and that it should be scrapped. Who is conning whom now, Tavish? How does he propose that it should be scrapped? Does Tavish Scott seriously expect other members to behave like turkeys and vote for an early Christmas? I encourage him in his new-found desire to part company with the CFP. Let us hope that he can persuade his Executive ministerial colleagues, such as Ross Finnie, to follow his lead. I agree that it is a distinct possibility that, within a decade, there will be not only no fishing industry left in Shetland, but, with the running down of North sea oil, precious few constituents either.

Stewart Stevenson: I am delighted to hear that the Tories are opposed to the CFP. Can Ted Brocklebank remind us who took us into the CFP?

Mr Brocklebank: Yes, I am happy to do that. Ted Heath took us into the CFP in 1973. However, he ceded responsibility only out to the 12-mile limit. It was Jim Callaghan's Government, four years later, that ceded responsibility from 12 miles to 200 miles. If we are passing the blame, let us add that.

As far as Scotland is concerned, the CFP has long been a busted flush, and the only way out of the game is to walk away. There is too much at stake for the other players to say that the game is a bogey and cash in their chips. Member countries will fight like piranhas to preserve the maxim of equal access to the common fishery resource. If we are talking about the long-term sustainability of Scottish fish stocks, that is what makes Scotland's position within the CFP unsustainable.

I move amendment S2M-559.2, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"but notes that this should be aimed at the individual, increasing choice and environmentally-friendly incentives while reducing the power of the bureaucracies, and further pledges its support for renewable policies as well as supporting rural businesses and industries, including fishing communities and aquaculture."

09:54

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I am glad to be able to take part in the debate. The debate should be about how we get from where we are to a Scotland that we can truly call sustainable.

There are two things that we need to do. First, we must build on the progress that has been made by acknowledging the challenges that we have overcome, the shifts that there have been and the tasks that remain. Secondly, we must work out what changes are needed. We must raise awareness, develop a commitment to change and then agree on the action to be taken. We have a long way to go at each level. Rather than concentrating on specific policy issues, as a couple of members have done, I will talk about some of the institutional changes that the Parliament needs to make.

I was interested in Robin Harper's attempt to appropriate the whole Parliament's environmental conscience for the Greens. All the parties have made some progress. The Labour party has made huge progress over the past decade, not only since the arrival of the Greens in the Parliament. We have tried to put sustainable development at centre stage, not just by appropriating the language but by thinking about the policy choices and challenges that sustainable development brings. We have grappled with the problems of joining up government on social justice and environmental justice, economic prosperity and environmental justice, and—the really tough task—all three together. We have made the links and we have started to make some progress on developing them. It is also important that we work with other countries and the rest of the UK, as we have a lot to learn. We have come a long way in a short time, but there is still a lot of change that we need to make.

Our huge progress is reflected in the partnership agreement, which builds on the first four years of the Scottish Parliament. We do not need any lectures on conscience, as we have had to make some tough choices. We just heard Ted Brocklebank grappling with the problems in the fishing industry. The Environment and Rural Development Committee has had to make some tough choices. Ironically, it is Labour and Lib Dem members who have been prepared to make tough decisions now to protect the viability of our scallop industry. None of the parties would be 100 per cent perfect in making those tough decisions,

including the Greens, and the Greens did not support us on the scallop industry because there was not yet a crisis in that industry. What happened to the precautionary principle?

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not. I have only four minutes, and Eleanor Scott will get another chance to speak.

It is important not to be simplistic. There is not one answer and there is no single green truth on these issues. The challenge is for us all to work together to deal with these difficult, tough issues.

In the report that Robin Harper mentioned, which I was involved in preparing this week, we examined structures at a ministerial level to see what more could be done to give political leadership to implement ideas that are in the partnership agreement. We also looked at the civil service and considered a more integrated approach that builds on the excellent work that has been done in social justice on closing the gap in order to learn the lessons and to translate that into work across the whole Executive. The key issue is how we mainstream sustainable development rather than see it as the preserve of environmentalists.

There is a big challenge for the Parliament, and I do not want us to miss the target. Every bill is meant to address sustainable development principles; however, I can think of only two bills that have done that properly—the National Parks (Scotland) Bill and the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill. Sustainable development was at the core of both those bills and was debated extensively in committee, even making it to the chamber for debate. However, no member could put their hand up and say that every bill that we have debated has covered sustainable development and that we have tested all the legislative provisions that the Parliament has discussed.

There is a lot more for the Parliament to do to exert leadership. Let us audit our policies and look at the budget process and our own structures so that sustainable development is not just something that we demand from the Executive, but something that we take ownership of and put into practice. I support the Executive's amendment.

09:59

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): We have heard a classic opening to the debate, with the Minister for Environment and Rural Development coming out with some of the classic smears against the Greens and Sarah Boyack making a welcome speech that referred heavily to "Working

Together for a Sustainable Scotland”.

The most important thing about that document is where it starts. It starts in 2030. It starts with a vision of the future and then tries to work back to discover how we can reach that future. There is a growing consensus about the future that we want—a sustainable world. The year 2030 is a long way away and I will be reaching retirement then. It is also the year in which oil stocks will be running out. On current projections, the demand for oil will be vastly greater than the supply.

Tough choices will have to be made and Sarah Boyack was right to talk about them. Let us consider where we are now, in 2003, and what projections we are making for the next 27 years. Ross Finnie said that the Greens wanted to stop economic growth dead. That completely misses the point of what Robin Harper was saying. Economic growth should not be our principal objective. Our principal objective should be a sustainable future that guarantees quality of life for all Scotland's citizens and, as the report reminds us, for people across the world.

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): Mark Ballard talks about quality of life and I agree with all that he has said. However, how can quality of life be guaranteed for many of our citizens if they do not have economic opportunities and employment opportunities?

Mark Ballard: Economic opportunities and employment opportunities are not the same as economic growth. The Executive still measures economic growth in terms of net national product and the flow of money through the economy. That is not the same as providing economic opportunities. It is possible to have growth that does not create employment and stores up problems for the future. It is possible to have growth in the number of fish taken out of the North sea that undermines the stocks. Ted Brocklebank is correct to say that we have to preserve the fishing communities; if we do not protect the communities, who will be there to fish? However, if we do not preserve the fish stocks, the communities will fade away.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): Why did the Green party fail to support a statutory instrument at the Environment and Rural Development Committee that will do just what the member is advocating? It will protect scallop stocks off the west coast of Scotland.

Mark Ballard: Eleanor Scott will deal with that question in detail, but I remind people that just because the word “conservation” appears in the title of a proposal, that does not mean that it will achieve conservation objectives. Scallop fishers have argued that the proposal would undermine

conservation objectives.

I want to talk about the vision. Friends of the Earth Scotland has offered a vision of environmental justice. In Scotland, the policy agenda has been dominated by efforts to deal with grinding poverty and deprivation in our communities. Friends of the Earth Scotland has developed and promoted environmental justice. We have to link dealing with poverty and deprivation with providing a decent environment for all. I am glad that the Executive has recognised that. We must not take more than our fair share of the earth's resources. That applies to the Scottish context. Some communities consume far more than others. Some communities have access to cars and will use the expensive new motorways that the Executive is promoting, whereas other communities do not have that access and their lives will be blighted by the new motorways. We have to tackle deprivation, inequality and environmental unsustainability. That must be our priority—not an obsession with economic growth.

10:04

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Some of the language on these issues is very complex for ordinary members of the public. When asked what was meant by sustainable development, only 27 per cent of people knew what the questioner was talking about. However, more than three quarters of people understood that people in Scotland need to change the way they live so that future generations do not live in a rubbish tip. The environment is terribly important. We do not want a smelly, dirty Scotland. Furthermore, the environment is worth £17 billion a year to the Scottish economy, which is £46 million a day.

Let us consider how what we do with waste affects our environment. In Scotland, we recycle less than 7 per cent of our waste. Even with Government targets, it will take 15 years—

George Lyon: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I have only four minutes; if I take interventions, I will never get through my speech.

The Presiding Officer: Four minutes plus interventions.

Christine Grahame: If George Lyon wants the source of my statistics, I will tell him. They are from the *Sunday Herald* of 13 April 2003. He can look at them for himself.

What do we do with our waste? We put a lot of it in landfill sites, which is one of the most common ways of disposing of it. In Newington and Morningside in Edinburgh, people complain about

the big black wheelie bins that are put in their streets and that destroy their environment, but perhaps they should work out why we have to have big black wheelie bins. We should forget about the bins and consider our weekly shop, which we are doing nothing about. We can now buy four baked potatoes on a big blue tray with a plastic top that just about requires a screwdriver to remove it. We could send it into orbit and it would come back intact. We do not need that.

What about carrots, cabbages and turnips? If we turn up at the till with loose vegetables, the man or woman there will look at us as if we are in the early stages of Alzheimer's. They then try to put the vegetables in bags. We can say, "No, I don't want them put in bags." If we go to the fish counter—and herring, by the way, is very cheap and a very good meal, so I will advertise it—where we used to get fish with a wee bit of paper wrapped around it, there is now a gadget to put the fish in foil. We can say, "No, don't do that to the fish! I'm taking it home and I will take it right out of that foil. It will not even go in the fridge in that wrapper. I'm going to eat it tonight." We have to stop people using such wrappers, but they look at us as if we are very strange. *[Interruption.]* Members should not comment on that. Don't go there!

This is a serious issue. When we put out our rubbish from the Friday or Saturday grocery shop, the bin is full. It is full of stuff that the food was wrapped in only from the moment we bought it until the moment we got to the kitchen. After that, it went straight in the bin. If we try to do something about that, it is impossible. We are thwarted.

We all know why that packaging is there: it is to woo the money out of our purses; it is to make us buy the four baked potatoes when we maybe just went into the shop for two. With bags of carrots, it is buy one, get one free. How often do those carrots perish in the fridge because we really did not want two big bags of them? We buy them because of the marketing strategy. However, it is costing us. It costs us at the till and it costs us as members of society to dispose of the waste. We should all pretend that there is a strike of the bucket men for a week so that we have to live without our rubbish being collected. We might have to fight off the foxes and cats. Our bins would be full and we would soon find out what we should be doing about recycling and an environmental strategy.

We do not have much power in this chamber. However, we could make a start by putting pressure on companies to reduce the amount of packaging that they use. Christmas is coming up. How many parents will end up having a bonfire at the bottom of the garden on Christmas day because they cannot move for packaging? We

have to do something, right at the beginning, about getting rid of unnecessary packaging. The last thing that society wants—with its pizza containers and its ironically named disposable nappies, which apparently have a lifetime as long as that of the dinosaurs before they died out—is to leave future generations in a dirty Scotland with landfill sites that are full of all the rubbish that we did not need in the first place. Start there. Start with packaging.

10:08

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie (Lab)): Last May, seven Green members were elected to the Parliament under the assisted places scheme—the scheme under which the majority of members of Opposition parties have been elected. I welcome today's debate. Six months on, it allows us to see what contribution the Greens have made in taking forward green environmental issues. The speeches this morning from the Green members have demonstrated that they lack a clear idea of how sustainability can be achieved or, indeed, a clear idea of how sustainable development can be taken forward in practice.

It is not the Greens' fault that the newspapers are more interested in their stance on same-sex partnerships than in anything that they have said on environmental issues. However, Robin Harper on his own in the first months of the Parliament probably had more impact on environmental issues than the others have had more recently. When I wonder why that is, I look at the Green manifesto and I see that sustainable development is not even highlighted as a priority. That seems to me to be symptomatic of a wider failure of the Green party.

Mark Ballard: Will the member take an intervention?

Des McNulty: No. I will perhaps take one a bit later.

I offer the Greens the advice that if they really want to make a meaningful contribution to advancing sustainability, they have to stop posturing and engage in real politics and consider the real choices that Government has to make. That is about marrying the practicalities of introducing environmental policies—rather than the principles of those policies—with policies that will deliver economic growth and social justice.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)): The member talked about real choices. What about the real choices around GM crops? Why will his Executive not make a choice about GM crops and come off the fence?

Des McNulty: There are real choices to be

made about GM crops and real issues to consider. I look forward to the debate on GM crops, which is a debate not just for Scotland but for the world. I certainly want to contribute to that debate.

As convener of the Finance Committee, I spend considerable time—I might be a sad person—scrutinising budgets. However, trying to make sense of the budgetary and distributional consequences of the Scottish Greens' policies leaves me scratching my head. On the one hand it is clear that their taxation proposals are profoundly regressive. The land value tax would penalise poorer people living in cities and the proposal to hike up fuel tax would have adverse effects in rural areas. The Scottish specific waste disposal tax is a disaster tax; it would drive businesses away from Scotland. It beats me how damaging Scotland's economic prospects and the living standards of its people advances sustainability. Evidence worldwide shows that the opposite is the case.

On the other hand, most of the policies that the Greens put forward are uncoded, which suggests that they are likely to be unaffordable. Green health and education policies simply ignore resource issues, while housing, energy and transport policies are impractical in the short and medium term. In contrast, the advances that the Executive is making—reducing landfill; tackling fuel poverty; building affordable energy-efficient housing; improving public transport and making it more accessible especially to older people through concessionary fare schemes; and developing a green jobs strategy—testify to a real commitment, through the partnership, to delivering a sustainable future in which our environment is safeguarded properly.

Another flaw at the heart of the Greens' approach is the notion that they are linking their proposals to an independence agenda. What is that about? Environment does not recognise national boundaries. If we want to develop an environmental agenda and improve our environment in Scotland, that is dependent on what other people do around the world, particularly what our immediate neighbours south of the border do. Our objective has to be to influence and work with others to develop a sensible agenda for saving the world. I was a bit perturbed by Ted Brocklebank's contribution on Scottish cod. The idea that there is a tartan flag on each cod in the North sea seems rather strange.

As Sarah Boyack pointed out, the Executive partnership, rather than the Greens, has delivered on environmental issues. I got sustainable development into the water bills to which Sarah Boyack referred and her work on the National Parks (Scotland) Bill advanced that agenda. Substantial change is taking place. Part of the

reason why we have achieved that is not an ideological commitment to environmental issues and improvement but the link between our environmental agenda and our social justice agenda. We see environmental justice and social justice as inextricably linked. They are both linked to improving standards for our people, given economic and fiscal realities, which include people's aspirations to economic betterment and high-quality services. That is where we stand. People will get real, practical environmental improvement from the Executive; from the Greens they will just get hot air.

10:14

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Robin Harper's speech demonstrated how black and white green can be. Life is not like that; we have to deal endlessly in shades of grey. Ross Finnie outlined the Executive's programme and its ability and commitment to deliver that programme. Richard Lochhead seemed to be asking for more talk. Although he showed us helpful posters, he criticised the Executive for not getting the message across—there is an inherent contradiction there. Ted Brocklebank seemed to be speaking in a different debate. Apparently, withdrawing from the CFP will deliver all we need on sustainability. Sarah Boyack made a clear-thinking and relevant speech. Mark Ballard, when challenged, drew a helpful distinction between economic growth and economic opportunity. We might have laughed at Christine Grahame's contribution, but she was right that the shopping basket is a good place to start making changes. Des McNulty made constructive criticism of the Greens' manifesto and spoke about the links between social justice and environmental improvement.

The Liberal Democrat constitution states:

"We believe that each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and, by safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long-term continuity of life in all its forms."

Environmental sustainability has always been at the heart of the Liberal Democrat policy programme. In 2001, we were the only political party with a green action section in every chapter of our manifesto, integrating environmental thinking into every area of policy. Not only do we propose policies with the aim of contributing to environmentally sustainable development, but every commitment that we make is designed with an awareness of its impact on the ultimate goal of sustainability. Environmental sustainability is not an optional add-on to be tacked on at the end of the existing policy platform, but a core commitment.

In April 2002, sustainable development

indicators were published as an essential step in embedding sustainability considerations throughout the Executive. The main priorities identified were renewable energy and conservation of energy; reducing the impact of travel; and examining where resources come from, how they are used and where they go. Political leadership at the highest level, as well as input from civic society, is critical if we are to move towards sustainability. The Cabinet sub-committee on a sustainable Scotland, chaired by the First Minister, is a good start. The recently created sustainable development forum will help to oversee full engagement on sustainable development issues throughout the Executive.

Empowerment is a fundamental concept in encouraging sustainable behaviour by all. A recent British social attitudes survey showed that public opinion on sustainability has changed little in the past 10 years. Concern about environmental degradation remains high, but the sense of personal responsibility is low. Concepts such as the Executive's slogan "Do a little, Change a lot" indicate the importance of individual action. It is essential that individuals feel that their action makes a difference. When people feel that their participation is making a difference, we will be moving successfully towards sustainability.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): This is somewhat unusual, but we have a lot of time in hand. Jamie Stone was down to speak in the debate, but he was not here when the Presiding Officer was going to call him. He is back now, so I am happy to let him speak at this stage.

Christine Grahame: I hope that Jamie Stone will talk about cheese.

10:18

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Curiously enough, I might talk about cheese. The key point that I want to make is that sustainability is about sustainable business. That was the reason for my intervention on Ted Brocklebank. I will speak from a Highland perspective. I said this last week in the chamber and I will say it again: there is recognition in communities such as Kinlochbervie that the fish are not going to come back for quite a long while. I salute the way in which the people of Kinlochbervie have recognised that one of a few long-term sustainable business opportunities is tourism.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Last weekend, I spoke to fishermen from Kinlochbervie who told me that they were unable to fish for deepwater species from that port, because they could not get a licence. Does the member agree that it is unbelievable that Scotland

has only 2 per cent of the quota for deepwater species in her own waters?

Mr Stone: I am sorry, but I do not want to get on to that subject. I want to talk about the future and sustainable business. There is a clear recognition that we have to get business into areas such as Kinlochbervie to help those communities; otherwise they die. The community's proposal to build a marina to attract the pleasure-boat trade makes an enormous amount of sense.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

Mr Stone: No, I do not have much time.

I declare an interest in my brother's cheese business. When I was a wee boy, we milked 18 cows on a small dairy farm. My mother decided to make cheese called crowdie. She got her figures wrong—instead of using 5 gallons, she used 50 gallons—and ended up with a truly astronomical amount. From there, the little business grew—it is not a big business and it will never make my brother rich. It really did start in the bath, and I went unwashed for a considerable time at about the age of 6. The business still exists and is, I submit, a small example of a sustainable business, because it uses a natural product from the Highlands—milk—adds value and sells it on. We sell it on the back of the image of Scotland, particularly the Highlands, as having an unspoilt environment, and the word "Highland" is itself a great selling point.

I have had good dealings with the Scottish Executive on matters such as Kinlochbervie and sustainable small business, so I fully back Ross Finnie's amendment. The Executive is doing its level best to acknowledge that sustainability is about sustainable business and is putting resources into that. I therefore applaud the Executive's actions and ask members to support Ross Finnie's amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now go back to closing speeches.

10:21

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Last week, I spoke in the debate on integrated rural development, and much of what I said then applies to the debate on a sustainable Scotland. The previous Rural Development Committee identified the road infrastructure and transport in the Highlands as major priorities, but the Green party's transport policy seems to be based on bicycles and wind, and I sometimes wonder whether its highly popular leader, Robin Harper, travels by TARDIS like Dr Who. Unfortunately, we mere mortals have not reached the age of "Beam me up, Scotty," and until we do we will have to rely on the internal combustion

engine to get around, especially in areas with few trains. In urban areas, we want first-class public transport, but in the region that I represent, the private car is a must. Low fuel costs and a good road infrastructure are essential to sustain life in rural areas. They are important for local businesses, particularly tourism, which is an important Scottish industry—and the environment matters for tourism.

Patrick Harvie: Jamie McGrigor's use of the word "sustain" reminds me that so many people misunderstand what sustainability is. In fact, his colleague Alex Johnstone admitted only a few moments ago that he does not understand the concept. Will Jamie McGrigor define sustainable development for us, please?

Mr McGrigor: I will do that in a minute, because it appears later in my speech. I assure my friends in the Green party that caring for the environment is central to Conservatism, because Conservatives believe in good biodiversity, which means recognising what is around us and making the most of it without damaging it for future generations. However, to do that, we need people who have confidence to populate and look after the rural areas. They need to know that they can make a living and that their children have a future. Transport is a key to that, as are happy and confident people.

I have a haunting fear that a slow nationalisation of nature is taking place. It is driven by environmental bodies and quangos that may have good intentions, but appear to have limited practical experience of the realities of living in Scotland's countryside. If we want a sustainable Scotland, we need a profitable Scotland, and it is often local people's activities, livelihoods and pastimes that have protected species of flora and fauna that thrive in certain places. All too often, the practical views of local people are not taken into account when Scottish Natural Heritage decides to impose the designations special area of conservation and site of special scientific interest. In many cases, those designations are forced through against the wishes of local people, without enough consultation and without a thought to how so-called conservation measures will affect the sustainability of people's livelihoods. We must reverse depopulation, or we will not have a rural culture, and culture, as well as Scotland's landscape, is important to tourism.

In Scotland, we are lucky to have a beautiful, open landscape and prodigious wildlife. We have bigger herds of red deer than any other country in western Europe. They are a priceless national asset, but are being demonised by so-called conservationists who appear to want to create a different landscape of so-called native woodland. Members might think such a woodland lovely, but

the reality of such an experiment in the hills in the northern hemisphere is often a landscape comprising stunted scrub and tick-infested shintangle, which is unpleasant and impossible to walk through as well as being species poor.

Mark Ballard: Jamie McGrigor said that he wanted good biodiversity. Would he call more land where an overpopulation of deer nibbles away any chance for the natural climate species of the Highlands to regrow "good biodiversity"?

Mr McGrigor: Overgrazing is not good, but Mark Ballard would need to tell me what he thinks is a proper level of good grazing. Good grazing can be achieved by good management, and it is perfectly possible to grow woods of beautiful deciduous trees—such as oak, ash, beech, birch, Scots pine and rowan—in the sheltered glens without having to slaughter huge numbers of the beautiful red deer.

Mr Stone: Will Jamie McGrigor give way?

Mr McGrigor: No, I will not give way now.

Along with sensible, sustainable numbers of sheep, the red deer keep Scotland's hills properly grazed, thus ensuring easy access for people who enjoy hill walking. We simply put a fence round the trees, which will keep the deer out—that way, we serve the trees and the deer—and manage the deer herds, taking a harvest each year to maintain the sustainability of a herd.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Wind up, please.

Mr McGrigor: When the trees are mature, the fences can come down.

On the sustainability of a good tourism industry, the Executive must reassure us that a proliferation of wind farm towers will not be detrimental to tourism. I have lived in Scotland most of my life and have seen the erection of electricity pylons and hydroelectric dams, all of which caused opposition and furore at the time, but which have not affected tourism in the long term and obviously benefit those who receive the electricity. The Conservatives are in favour of renewable energy, but ask that wind farms be sensitively situated so that they are not offensive to local people and do not spoil Scotland's wild and beautiful countryside.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Wind up, please.

Mr McGrigor: How am I doing for time?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have now had six of your three minutes, Mr McGrigor.

Mr McGrigor: A sustainable Scotland relies heavily on small businesses and is underpinned by good infrastructure. It is up to the Executive to provide that infrastructure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give a degree of latitude to Stewart Stevenson, who is closing for the Scottish National Party.

10:27

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): That is a dangerous offer, Presiding Officer, but thank you for it anyway. I sometimes think that Jamie McGrigor knows what he is thinking only when he hears it and I sometimes wish that he would not share it with us quite so generously.

"Sustainable development is not an optional extra. Our social, economic and environmental ambitions are interlinked and we must work to deliver all three if we are going to deliver the quality of life we want for ourselves and for future generations."

I hope that those words are familiar to the minister, because they are, of course, his. I suspect that almost all members will find themselves agreeing with those words and I hope that the Greens will recognise that one of the legs on which sustainable development must stand is economic sustainability.

Personal experience always informs political debate and as I drive each week back home from Aberdeen to Peterhead and am treated to the rather unsightly view of four major tips—which not only service the local area but bring waste to Peterhead from all over Scotland, including from Inverness—the point of sustainability is reinforced: we must eliminate waste.

We have heard a number of interesting speeches. Robin Harper described the fishing industry as wanting economic growth at any cost. He needs to get out and speak to some fishermen, because they are desperate to have a sustainable industry and to ensure that the science that assesses the stocks in the sea is good so that their sons and their sons' sons have a future. It is the regulatory regime that has failed.

Ross Finnie said that the Executive had 78-plus commitments and that 70 per cent of the transport budget would be spent on public transport in the future. That is all very good, but I believe that there is a practical difficulty with that—and I am surprised that the convener of the Finance Committee, Des McNulty, did not bring it to our attention. There are 145 targets in the budget for 2004-05, but how many of them meaningfully address sustainable development? In my estimation—the minister can tell me otherwise—the answer is 10. Furthermore, they come under only three policy areas. Two of the targets come under the communities budget. Seven of the 17 environment and rural development targets could be included—well done, minister—whereas only one of the seven targets for tourism addresses sustainable development. The rhetoric does not

necessarily translate into the budget and into the Executive's main targets. There is therefore much more work to do.

As Nora Radcliffe pointed out, sustainability is not an add-on. Even in the Parliament, there are some little, simple things that we do not do or that we do not do well. I was disappointed to discover, on returning to the Parliament for its second session, that, for some reason that I do not understand, we all had new personal computers on our desks. Why are we scrapping equipment after only four years' use? When I retired from my professional life in computers, we had a PC that we had been using for 20 years—we bought it in 1980 and were still using it when I retired in 1999, because it was still working and it still did the job for which it was bought. We do not need to be spending money in the Parliament on things that will last only four years if they actually have a lifespan of 10 years.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in the final minute of his speech.

Stewart Stevenson: Jamie McGrigor referred to forestry. I agreed with a lot of what he said, but his party's track record on sustainable forestry is not terribly impressive. Throughout Scotland can be seen banks of distressed and unmanaged forests, which were introduced for tax reasons. They are sub-economic: the value of harvesting the forests is less than its cost. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past.

On renewable energy, we welcome support for wind farms, although we are cautious about the unmanaged way in which they are being developed. We have to make progress in that area but, in doing so, we are following the lead of many other European countries, rather than being a leader ourselves. Similarly, we are not doing enough on wave power, where we could be a leader. We could be selling our technology to the rest of the world. There is not a lot of economic benefit for us in wind power, but there is sustainable development benefit.

We have a choice between being leaders and followers. I say to the Executive that we need to be leaders and not—as is suggested under its current plans—followers.

10:33

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): This has been a wide-ranging debate, as we might expect on the subject of sustainable development. The majority of contributions have been positive, upbeat, stimulating and interesting. I would,

however, exclude a couple of speeches from that description. Mr Brocklebank's contribution, interesting as it was and concentrating as it did on fishing, failed to address the biggest sustainable development issue facing the fishing industry, which is the decline in stock and biomass and how that can be addressed to maintain a sustainable fishing industry and sustainable fishing communities.

Mr Brocklebank: Will the minister take an intervention?

Allan Wilson: If the member does not mind, I will move on, as I do not want to get bogged down on fish—yet again.

Christine Grahame gave us a stream of consciousness, describing a capitalist conspiracy by the packaging industry to make us buy more baked potatoes. I understand from what she said that an independent Scotland would be a terry-towelling Scotland. I have good news for her: through sustainable action grants, we have provided funding for the Scottish nappy network, which has been set up to promote renewable nappies. *[Applause.]* That is a significant step forward. However, the Scottish Executive has set its sights a little higher than simply promoting renewable nappies.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am feeling particularly stigmatised, as someone who used disposable nappies. If I had a child tomorrow, I would probably use them again. I do not think that we should be guilt-tripping women when they are doing their shopping.

I wish to ask the minister about a separate point. Could he comment on the Executive's view of the urban environment and the importance of sustainability issues to cities? Too often, the focus in such debates is entirely on rural areas, but the issue is significant for people in communities in my constituency.

Allan Wilson: As the member knows, I agree entirely with those sentiments. We have put at the heart of our environmental agenda and our agenda for sustainable development the question of environmental justice. That means that communities in urban environments that have been put upon through environmental degradation have the opportunity to improve their environment and their quality of life by embracing the principles of environmental justice.

Patrick Harvie rose—

Allan Wilson: If the member does not mind, I would rather make progress. The Greens' basic criticism of our policy was that there were inconsistencies in what we had to say. One criticism was that we put economic growth at the heart of our agenda for sustainable development. I

make no apology for that. As I have said, I believe that economic growth and the creation of sustainable employment, giving economic and employment opportunity to some of the poorest people in our community, is at the heart of building sustainable communities.

Robin Harper: When I recently attacked Scottish Enterprise about its apparent lack of commitment to sustainability, it said that the Executive tasks it solely with economic development. Is that the case, or does the Executive, with its new ideas, intend to revise Scottish Enterprise's remit?

Allan Wilson: As my colleague Ross Finnie has just said to me, we set targets and indicators for Scottish Enterprise as we do for every Government agency.

To turn to a point that Richard Lochhead raised, we are committed to a green jobs strategy. My colleague Jim Wallace will be launching the draft strategy for consultation very soon. However, we will take no lessons from nationalists or Greens on creating employment opportunity. The United Kingdom Government's record on creating employment opportunity and addressing the economic inequality that is caused by unemployment is second to none over the past century.

I say to Robin Harper that economic growth does not have to be at the expense of the environment. We will work with business to develop and implement the green jobs strategy and we will assess economic development policies against their impact on our sustainable development indicators. We have a whole range of measures in place to help business to be more sustainable and to drive the economic benefits that that can bring.

That does not include banning low-cost air fares. Tourism is a key driver of our economy and creates employment opportunities throughout rural Scotland.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): Will the minister take an intervention?

Allan Wilson: I will continue, if the member does not mind.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in his last minute.

Allan Wilson: Tourism is increasingly dependent on low-cost air travel, so that even tribunes of the people, such as Tommy Sheridan, can commute back and forth to Havana at relatively little cost.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): The minister has obviously never done it.

Allan Wilson: I have spent many a happy hour

in Havana, it has to be said. The point is that depriving ordinary working people of the opportunity of air travel is not the way to create a sustainable economy.

I do not have the time to go over all the points that have been raised, but I will, as ever, make myself available to discuss them with members. I am pleased that the Scottish Green Party welcomes the Executive's intention to place the environment and sustainable development at the heart of our policy making. As I have explained, the commitments of the partnership agreement are not contradictory, nor are they in conflict with sustainable development. The Green party needs to take a more holistic view of what sustainable development means and it needs to come on board with the Executive.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Eleanor Scott to wind up the debate.

10:40

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Presiding Officer, I hope that you will be generous with me as well, because some members have had quite a long time to say their piece.

I thank all the members who have taken part in the debate, which I have enjoyed. It is heartening to hear words such as "sustainability" and "environmental justice" being spoken in the chamber by people other than Green members.

Because I was asked to, I will mention scallops and get the subject out of the way. I did not vote for a proposed scallop conservation measure because I did not think that it would work. I voted as I did not because I did not think that there was a potential problem with scallop stocks, but because I did not think that the measures would address the problem. It is interesting to note that stocks of scallops, which were hitherto unregulated, were in a slightly healthier state than stocks in other, heavily regulated sectors of the fishing industry, which suggests that, when we try to regulate, we do not get it right. I felt that the proposed measures would just increase pressure on scallops. The minister and others took a different view. Time will tell who was right. However, I will not vote for something just because it is labelled "conservation"—I have to think about whether it will work. I agree with Stewart Stevenson that, in the past, we have not got that right. That does it for the scallops.

Greens are delighted by the increased awareness of the environmental challenges that face Scotland and by the increased recognition that we have to change things. As Robin Harper stated, there are many positive commitments in the partnership agreement and we support them.

We are pleased that some Green party policies, such as moves on green jobs and the polythene bag tax, are now being picked up by other parties. That is a sign that the Parliament is starting to share a vision and that the Greens are having an impact. Sarah Boyack said that all parties have moved and that a green conscience is not just the prerogative of Greens. I agree with that. However—and I do not want to sound sanctimonious—other people see us as the conscience, which is why there are now seven Green members.

As Robin Harper made clear, if one good policy is undermined by something that is environmentally damaging, we are no further forward and we might even be worse off. That would be the case if, for example, the 70 per cent of the transport budget that is for public transport includes the projected increase in air travel. I reassure the minister that the Greens are not saying that we must stop all flying today. We are simply saying that flying three times as much tomorrow is environmentally irresponsible and not sustainable.

Des McNulty tried to engage us in debate—in fact, he talked at us, but at least he talked about our agenda as opposed to his hobby-horses. I have our manifesto here and I reassure him that, on page 4, which is the first page of text after the contents, sustainable development is mentioned twice:

"Greens also believe that Scotland has the potential to be a leader in sustainable development, demonstrating new ways to live within the planet's means."

I will not read out the whole passage, but sustainable development is mentioned twice on the first page. I am sure that it is mentioned elsewhere, but I was listening to the debate and could not go through the manifesto. I reassure Des McNulty that sustainable development is mentioned in our manifesto.

Des McNulty misunderstands Green politics, which is probably why he finds our commitment to independence a bit difficult. We are committed to radical democracy and to people making decisions at the most local level, as near as possible to where decisions are enacted. We are committed to social justice, one aspect of which is the proposed civil registered partnerships bill. We are also committed to sustainable development and environmental responsibility. We are, after all, a political party; we are not an environmental pressure group. We want to shift tax on to resource consumption. The simple truth is that the rich consume more than their share. Unlike Mr McNulty, I do not believe that a land value tax—which is being extensively debated at the moment—would impact more on the poor. Our citizens income scheme would be a powerful tool

for the redistribution of wealth, which is an issue that other parties have to take on.

Mr Stone: Eleanor Scott will know, as she lives in the Highlands, that there is a serious problem with the idea of raising tax on diesel and petrol. Does she concede that that is a problem in the Highlands and that a VAT derogation would tackle the problem? If the price of fuel goes up any further, we will strangle our communities.

Eleanor Scott: Fuel is only one of the costs of motoring in the Highlands or anywhere else. In the Highlands, insurance is considerably cheaper, for example. Few people say that having taxed, insured and paid for their car, they will not run it because fuel is so expensive. We have to look at the whole picture. I would be happy to debate that issue further.

We agree with Richard Lochhead's amendment that having our own fiscal and other powers would enable a Scottish Government to take more effective action. After all, that is Green party policy. Of course, those powers in themselves would not deliver sustainability—that would depend on what we did with those powers. I am sure that Mr Lochhead agrees that we must do our best for Scotland and the world with the powers that we have now and not sit back until independence day. That said, we are happy to accept the amendment.

I have more of a problem with the Tory amendment. I do not accept that a sustainable economic policy will necessarily be more bureaucratic than an unsustainable one. Equally, I do not believe that laissez-faire will ever deliver sustainability—it certainly has not done so so far. I wonder why the Tories think that sustainability and the environment are purely rural issues. I agree with Johann Lamont's point that the urban environment is crucial.

As to the minister's amendment, well, he would say that, wouldn't he? We welcome the Executive's pledge on strategic environmental assessment and agree with the minister about its importance. Strategic environmental assessment was promised in the previous session and only now is it being brought forward to comply with the European Union directive that is due to come into force in July. That suggests that the Executive is moving grudgingly towards sustainability and that it is doing so only when it is forced to, instead of truly embracing the concept. Having said that, I welcome the measure. I do not want to be niggly—I know that Mr Finnie thinks that we are being niggly. We will be supportive. However, as Robin Harper said, once strategic environmental assessment is in place, it might not cover or review existing strategies, such as transport policy. I would welcome reassurance from the minister on that point.

The report by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy commission, which has been mentioned several times, proposed a sustainable development committee that would work in the same way as the Equal Opportunities Committee—it would scrutinise the work of other committees and Government bodies to ensure that sustainability is mainstreamed into their work. That is a good idea and I hope that it can be taken forward. I hope that the report will be extensively discussed, because there is a lot in it that we could support. That particular proposal would be one way of achieving the integration that our motion calls for.

In conclusion, I hope that members agree that sustainability is about the world that we bequeath to future generations and about how those generations will judge us. I ask members to support the motion.

Agriculture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-560, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on the future of Scottish agriculture, and three amendments to that motion. Timing will have to be a bit more precise in this debate, because we are a minute or two behind the clock.

10:47

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): When I was thinking about the motion for this debate, I found no better form of words than that put forward by the Scottish National Party's sister party, Plaid Cymru, last month in the National Assembly for Wales. That motion was passed unanimously by the Assembly—the Tory party supported it, the Liberal Democrats supported it and the Labour party supported it. Many of the issues—in fact, all of them—regarding genetic modification in Wales are the same issues that we face in Scotland.

In many ways, the motion that I lodged defends the Executive's document "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" and the partnership agreement. Under the heading "The Vision", on page 1, "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" 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".

The Executive is pushing for market-led agriculture—I have heard the minister reiterate that many times—but where is the market for genetically modified foods? We have just had a "GM Nation?" public debate, which did not show much public support for GM. Several surveys on the subject have been carried out over the past five years in Scotland. In a MORI poll in April 1999, 69 per cent of people agreed that the Scottish Parliament should ban the production and sale of food containing GM crops. Another MORI poll in April 2003 showed that only 14 per cent of people support GM food. Perhaps the most remarkable poll over the past five years was the ICM Research poll in October 2000, in which 56 per cent of people thought that public protests involving the destruction of GM crops were acceptable. The majority of the public in this country not only does not want GM, but agrees with unlawful activity to remove GM crops from fields. It is clear that there is no market for GM.

The problem that we face is that, if commercialisation goes ahead, Scottish farmers will be unable to supply GM-free produce to the market because of contamination. Yesterday, the

Parliament received a visit from two Canadian farmers who spoke about the problems not only of the effectiveness of GM crops but of market loss through contamination of GM-free produce. One of them was an organic farmer but the other was a conventional farmer and a representative of the Canadian National Farmers Union. Those farmers simply want to grow food to meet market demand, but they are unable to do so because of contamination. We know that, between 1999 and 2001, contamination in the United States has cost the American economy \$12 billion through economic loss and lawsuits.

According to the partnership agreement, the Executive wants to develop an organic action plan to help to grow the infrastructure to meet market demand. That is a laudable aspiration, for which we lobbied hard during the first session of the Parliament, but how can the Executive be serious about that aspiration when it does not seek to rule out the commercialisation of GM crops? We heard yesterday that organic farmers in Saskatchewan are mounting a class action against Monsanto and Aventis because farmers there cannot grow GM-free oil-seed rape due to contamination. That market is gone—it is gone for ever—but that is the reality of GM commercialisation. I ask members in the chamber whether that is the reality that they want for Scotland.

Let me quote a Labour party minister. I will be interested to hear what our Labour party minister says later, but this is what Michael Meacher said:

"The issue ... is that if it is impossible to separate off organic oilseed rape in the vast spaces of the Canada prairies, it is inconceivable that it can be kept separate in the very much smaller land area of Britain where farms exist cheek by jowl together."

The reality is that we will see a collapse in the Scottish market for organic and GM-free produce if we commercialise GM crops in Scotland. All the science and field trials can never tell us about that economic reality.

The partnership agreement states that the precautionary principle will be applied for GM crops. However, the notion that it is safe to test whether something is safe to release into the environment by releasing it into the environment must be questioned, as we have done all along. The field trials were never looking for wider environmental impacts beyond the biodiversity within the little plots in which the testing was carried out. The trials were never looking for contamination, despite the fact that we knew that contamination occurred, as *The Sunday Times* showed when it investigated the Tayport beekeeper David Rolfe and found GM contamination of his honey. We know that contamination occurred, but the trials did not test for it, so we do not have that as part of the results.

The field trials give us the narrowest of views, which only hint at the environmental impact that could occur as a result of the commercialisation of GM.

I want to mention briefly the call for a GM-free Scotland, which we have always supported and will continue to support. For the past four years, the Executive has had, under part B of European Union directive 2001/18/EC, powers over the field trials. For the commercial growing of GM crops, which comes under part C of the directive, the United Kingdom has to consult the Executive and other devolved Administrations. The National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh minister are exercising their power and responsibility by making the case for a GM-free Wales to the Westminster Government, so that Westminster can, in turn, make the case to the EU for a GM-free Wales and a GM-free UK. What line is the Scottish Executive taking with Elliot Morley? We know the line that Wales is taking; we want the Executive to take the same line for Scotland.

Regardless of whether we achieve a GM-free Scotland and a GM-free zone within Europe, we know that contamination has already occurred. Contamination could occur even if we had a GM-free Scotland. We have already seen how farm supplies have been contaminated before we have even considered commercialisation. That is why we need to shore up the law in Scotland and use our full powers to introduce a GM liability bill. I invite all parties in the Parliament to submit their responses to my consultation.

To conclude, GM technology does not contribute to the aims of the partnership agreement, just as it does not contribute to the objectives of Welsh policy. I urge all members to secure the future of Scottish agriculture by voting for the motion to send a consistent line on GM from all the devolved Administrations.

I move,

That the Parliament calls upon the Scottish Executive to apply the precautionary principle and adopt the most legally restrictive policy, regardless of Her Majesty's Government's position, in relation to GM crops in recognition of the significant danger that they pose to GM-free conventional and organic farming and the potential risks to human health, animal health and the environment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Allan Wilson to speak to and move amendment S2M-560.2. You have a very tight five minutes.

10:55

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): Fair enough—I will do my best.

Today's debate, which is headlined as being on the sustainable future of Scottish agriculture,

should identify important issues that the Parliament needs to address. Indeed, the forward strategy for Scottish agriculture has as a key aim—I am grateful to Mr Ruskell for referring to it—which is the protection and enhancement of our common environment.

However, as we have heard, the Green party has chosen today to single out GM crops for special consideration and to suggest that the Parliament should—I quote from the motion—

“adopt the most legally restrictive policy, regardless of Her Majesty's Government's position, in relation to GM crops”.

I was pleased to hear Mr Ruskell's explanation of where that text came from, because it is not consistent with either what he said or what the Greens have said about the creation of GM-free zones.

Let us be clear on one point: GM crops, whether they are in Scotland, the rest of the UK—including Wales—or Europe, are restricted. They are subject to a strict regulatory regime that is specifically designed to protect human health, animal health and the environment. They cannot be grown in Scotland or elsewhere in Europe—including Wales—without prior approval. That approval will be secured only where we are entirely satisfied, on the basis of our expert scientific advice, that growing the crop is safe.

We are neither for nor against GM as such, but we are committed to safeguarding human health, animal health and the environment. We are committed to a precautionary and evidence-based approach to policy making. We are committed to transparent and proportionate regulation and to legislation where that is necessary. We are committed to consumer choice. Those principles have guided our policy on GM organisms to date and I recommend that they should continue to do so.

Ministers are very much aware of, and sensitive to, the real and understandable concerns that, as Mr Ruskell mentioned, the wider public have about GM. That is why we have made a commitment to move forward on a precautionary basis. We will act cautiously but, equally, we will not turn our back on progress where that can be supported by sound science.

The most important question is whether a GM crop will pose any more of a threat to human health or the environment than a conventional crop will. That question is considered in depth each time an application to release a GM variety is made. During the past few months, I have considered six such applications, all of which I have sent back for further information without approving a release. No individual crop can be authorised for cultivation unless it has satisfied a rigorous assessment of potential impacts on

human health and the environment.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Does the minister accept that such assessments can only ever produce a result that says that a specific threat has not yet been identified? Does he agree that the assessments cannot give an assurance that a specific crop poses no threat to human health or the environment?

Allan Wilson: No science can do what Mr Harvie demands of it. It was interesting that, throughout Mr Ruskell's speech, no reference was made to the scientific advice of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment or its statutory function in that regard.

Because we are a responsible Government that is involved in a responsible decision-making process, our decisions will be based on advice from the statutory body ACRE on the implications of the farm-scale evaluation trials. Our establishment of those extensive trials and the open and deliberative consideration of the results underscore our commitment to the environment.

The results will inform the position of the Executive and the UK Government and will be forwarded to all other EU member states and the European Commission, which, too, will want to consider carefully the results of what has been the most extensive study of its kind. It is clear that the results also raise a number of wider questions about modern intensive agriculture and its impact on farm land wildlife and wider biodiversity.

The Executive will continue to work within the strict EU regulatory framework for GM crops and consider each application on a case-by-case basis. The blanket ban that appears to have been suggested—or a blanket approval, for that matter—would not be compatible with EU law.

Members will be aware that several European regions have attempted to declare GM-free zones. However, the legal advice that I have received is quite clear. It would be contrary to the directive's single-market objective to adopt a blanket policy of the type that the Green party's motion calls for or to seek to impose conditions that cannot be justified on the ground of protection of human health or the environment in order to make Scotland or any part of Scotland GM free.

I move amendment S2M-560.2, to leave out from "calls" to end and insert:

"notes that in accordance with *A Partnership for a Better Scotland* the Scottish Executive will apply the precautionary principle in relation to the planting of GM crops; notes that no decision has been taken on the possible commercialisation of GM crops; recognises that it would be premature to do so before the results of the farm scale trials and the GM dialogue have been fully evaluated, and notes the Executive's continuing commitment to protecting human health, animal health and the environment."

11:00

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): Notwithstanding today's debate, the minister's remarks about the European Union exemplify the serious issues about democracy in the EU that have to be addressed.

I can add to Mark Ruskell's opinion poll evidence about the public's attitude towards GM. He missed out the Consumers Association research in May 2002, which showed that less than one third of those who were surveyed found the idea of food that was produced from a genetically modified plant acceptable. We know that the public are not happy.

Why? There is a huge leap in cause and effect from selective breeding to the sort of genetic modification that is being done in laboratories today and which has resulted in field tests at various sites throughout Scotland. The public do not believe that there are sufficient safeguards to ensure the future safety of our seed stocks and food supply. For example, few will have been surprised by the Scottish Executive's recent revelation that an investigation of the GM seed used in farm-scale trials has uncovered further evidence of the use of unauthorised GM material that was not covered by the release consent. That puts the minister's comments about regulation into perspective. How many times does that have to occur before the minister realises that the great theory about managing to contain GMOs is completely impossible? Of course, that was the thrust of the Green party's opening speech.

Important as it is to push the boundaries of scientific knowledge and endeavour, we must acknowledge that when we are dealing with such sensitive and emotive issues as our ability to feed ourselves safely in the future, it is essential that the public can trust those involved. The Executive should know by now how the public feel about GM food.

Some companies deserve praise for their stance. In 1998, Iceland became the first retailer to remove GM ingredients from its own-label products, and the Co-op has recently banned GM food and ingredients from its business. It is clear that those businesses are responding to the message from their customers.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I agree with what the member has said about consumer resistance and the fact that there is no demand, but surely that is a separate issue from whether the product is safe. Surely the correct response is for Scottish farming plc to take a collective decision that there is no market demand and that it will not grow the crops at all.

Roseanna Cunningham: I do not believe that the two issues are entirely separate. The Liberal

Democrat position on GM food is clear, at least in the countryside if not when it comes to making decisions in the Executive. The two issues cannot be easily separated because there is no public confidence in the science. Simply taking a scientific view and pushing ahead will not help the situation.

When we are dealing with the unknown, or even the uncertain, in an area that has the potential to affect every individual in the world, it is obvious that the precautionary principle must be applied. That is particularly true in the case of GM crops, in which once a certain line has been crossed there will be absolutely no going back. The fear is that that line is already being crossed deliberately to pre-empt consumer resistance.

The GM issue is not just a question of whether the technologies involved are safe. It is about allowing choice and ensuring that consumers retain the ability to purchase non-GM foods if that is their wish. It is also about ensuring that farmers who want to continue producing non-GM crops are able to do so. Application of the precautionary principle must ensure that such producers are not disadvantaged. All the evidence suggests that proceeding with the technology will mean choice being removed.

We know that Tony Blair is in favour of GM foods, but the Liberal Democrats' position is appalling. Their leader opposes GM crops. At their Scottish conference last year, in my constituency, they passed a motion calling for an immediate moratorium, but it was a Liberal Democrat minister in the Scottish Executive who approved the trials in the first place.

The Parliament must assert its right to speak out on the issue and we have to accept the public's views. The risk of pollution is too high, the risk to our high-quality reputation is too great and the future of Scottish agriculture depends on our being able to maintain the integrity of GM-free crop production.

I move amendment S2M-560.3, to leave out from "calls" to end and insert:

"recognises the massive public opposition to GM crops; believes that the precautionary principle should be applied to any further development of GM crops, whether on a trial basis or for commercial planting, and considers that the future of Scottish agriculture lies in maintaining the integrity of GM-free crop production."

11:05

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): In dealing with today's motion, I begin to wonder who the conservatives are. Certainly the Green party is taking a very conservative line. I wonder sometimes whether, if Mark Ruskell had been born a couple of hundred years ago, he might

have been a member of the Flat Earth Society.

When we talk about GM technology, we have to remember that it is not new. Fifty years ago, experiments were being done with the irradiation of cereal seeds. Much of the barley that is grown in Scotland today, including that which is being grown on many organic farms, can trace its ancestry back to those experiments. Cereal seeds were irradiated in a nuclear pile and the deformed or mutated seeds were then grown and tested for desirable characteristics. Those characteristics have been bred through to the plants that we have today. Technology is something that we have experimented with before and we have to understand the issue in a broader sense.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I am afraid that I have only four minutes, so I have to press on.

The field trials that have been done were completely pointless. They carried on a characteristic that is undesirable in the Scottish environment. The proof is that the general regime that was applied during the tests was not beneficial to wildlife, the environment or the production of the crop. I suggest that we have been barking up the wrong tree.

The debate demonised GM technology and then had the effect of leading public opinion. We should remember that if the technology is allowed to develop, there will be huge opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry for the production of materials in a more environmentally friendly way than can be done at the moment.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I cannot, because I am very short of time. Mr Harvie will have a chance to speak when he winds up at the end of the debate.

If we applied the technology and research abilities that are available to us to producing a cereal seed that was resistant to fungal infection, or perhaps a maize plant that could resist a spring frost, that would benefit the farming industry in Scotland. We have the ability to search for those answers.

The biotechnology industry in Scotland is being threatened by the debate that is now taking place and the tone of that debate. Work at the Scottish Crop Research Institute in Invergowrie is being undermined by the failure to grasp the concept of biotechnology and genetic manipulation as it could benefit us in the future.

With one qualification that Alex Fergusson will mention, we are happy to accept Ross Finnie's amendment to the motion. We have more of a problem with the SNP amendment. Although I am

almost prepared to agree with everything in that amendment, I do not believe that we are quite at that stage, so we might have to abstain.

We must be prepared to be broadminded on the issue. I believe that GM organisms are not popular with the public because we have been barking up the wrong tree for the past four years. The time has not come for commercial release of GM crops in Scotland, because none of the crops that have been produced for testing is of any potential benefit. The qualification that I must add is that if we turn our backs on the technology for ever, we will have undermined our biotechnology research base in Scotland and we will have passed the industry to less scrupulous people in other parts of the world.

I move amendment S2M-560.1, to leave out from "apply" to end and insert:

"give an assurance that any decisions relating to future development and exploitation of GM technology shall be made on the basis of best scientific advice."

11:09

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I am sorry to see that the wide title of the motion, "Future of Scottish Agriculture", narrows down in the text to GM crops only, but I will come back to that. Undoubtedly, the question whether GM technology presents a threat or an opportunity is fundamentally important, but it is one to which we do not yet have a thoroughly researched answer.

At this point, I insert my usual caveat on the topic. We may deplore the way in which some global companies operate, but we have to disentangle that issue from the evaluation of the technology itself. In addition, GM covers a hugely wide and diverse technology, and we cannot simply lump it all together and condemn it. Each application must be considered separately and on its own merits or demerits. Furthermore, we should not forget the importance of biosciences to the Scottish universities and institutes. Many are currently world leaders, but a Parliament that projects an anti-science attitude could soon undermine their ability to attract international research funding and their pre-eminence in a fiercely competitive field could quickly be lost.

The farm-scale field trials of the past three years were the logical and necessary step after laboratory testing and plot trials. Conducting those trials, however, is emphatically not to prejudge whether commercial growing will be the eventual outcome—certainly not before the trials have been properly evaluated. The technology is still very much under examination; that examination should be fair and objective, but it must also be thorough, and the early indications from the series of trials that have just finished are that further work must

be done.

Setting the pure science to one side, moving operations into the real world meant that there would be a test of the potential for human error. It is important to evaluate that aspect. That the seed companies demonstrated their inability to provide seed consistently within their own acceptable purity standards is an important outcome, which must be given serious consideration in future decisions on whether commercial use should be allowed.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Nora Radcliffe: I am sorry—I do not have time.

We cannot simply declare a ban on GM. However, EU directive 2001/18/EC says:

"No GMOs, as or in products, intended for deliberate release are to be considered for placing on the market without first having been subjected to satisfactory field testing at the research and development stage in ecosystems which could be affected by their use."

"Satisfactory" is the key word in that sentence.

The GM science review panel concluded that there are several areas of concern in which further research is needed. That research should be undertaken before consideration of any decision on the commercialisation of GM crops. It would also provide an opportunity for more conclusive work on concerns about health risks.

GM may be the problem of the future, but the future will depend on how we deal with the problems of the here and now. In "Custodians of Change", published in 2002, the agriculture and environment working group concluded:

"the priority environmental issues for Scottish agriculture, for the next 5-10 years, are:

1. Diffuse pollution to water;
2. Biodiversity and habitat protection;
3. Landscape change".

Diffuse pollution is a problem of the here and now. We must give serious consideration to the effect of the nitrates that we let loose in the environment, and possibly even more serious consideration to what phosphates are doing. The example of the Ythan nitrate vulnerable zone designation illustrates how difficult that is to do. The first farm-scale trial was at Daviot in my constituency; the Ythan is just over the hill from there. The Ythan estuary has an extraordinarily rich variety of habitat and birdlife. Aberdeen university has had a field station there for many years, and scientists and students have studied the area and collected data going back 30 years. Even so, when the catchment was designated because of eutrophication it was not possible to say with absolute certainty what the causes or the

remedies were. That made me very conscious of the complexities of environmental monitoring. There are no easy or simple answers.

Whatever the eventual outcome, the right approach is one of sound scientific evaluation, with the health of the environment and the consumer firmly established as the fundamental priority.

11:14

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): I am happy to take part in a debate about the future of agriculture. Crofting has been, is, and hopefully will remain an integral part of life and work in the Western Isles and beyond the shores of those isles. Any discussion on what the future holds is of importance, because it allows us to focus on the issues that matter to those who have maintained and continue to sustain the environment in which they work and in which their forebears worked. A discussion about the future of agriculture should focus on the issues that matter and not the sideshow that is the GM debate.

First, I will deal with the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mr Morrison: Not at this moment.

Decoupling is the central feature of CAP reform. Subsidies will no longer be paid on the basis of what is produced. We know that the link between subsidy payments and production has led us down a road that is far from sustainable, and we now have to play our part in dismantling that link. To realise that aim, the European Union must focus on modulation. More money has to be transferred from the flawed direct payments method to a wider range of rural development measures. I firmly believe that we should review the national modulation rate to establish whether it can be increased from what I believe is the agreed 3.5 per cent rate to production-related subsidies in 2003, to 4.5 per cent in 2004. Perhaps the minister will enlighten us about whether that is the case when he sums up.

I appreciate that the Executive is still consulting all the relevant players, and I urge the Executive, crofters and farmers to consider again the rate of modulation and establish whether we can go further than what is currently suggested. If that were to happen, it would help to turn round an unacceptable level of subsidy payments—payments that are firmly linked with production—and help us to move to a system that would truly help the future of agriculture in Scotland. That would allow us to promote a range of meaningful rural development and environmental programmes

that would pass every sustainability test that anyone would care to apply to them.

On GM crops, I firmly believe that the approach that is being adopted by the Executive is correct. As the minister has stated, the Executive is focused on its primary objective of safeguarding human health and protecting the environment. If there is any evidence of danger to human health or the environment from any GM crop, the crop will not be approved for release. As other members have said, we cannot turn our backs on what is happening within our scientific community. If a crop can be modified in a way that helps to put food in the mouths of the hungry of this world, I will be the first to applaud it, as would any right-thinking individual. We all know that crops can be designed or modified to survive in certain environments, or so that fewer pesticides have to be used. Those are welcome developments. The Labour party believes in responsible science and responsible policy making. The precautionary, step-by-step approach is the correct one.

The issue of scallops, in relation to conservation, was raised in the previous debate. The crofters of the Western Isles will most certainly not be looking to the Green party to help them secure a sustainable future. They know that although the Green party can talk a good game about conservation, when it is asked to deliver it is always found wanting. The Environment and Rural Development Committee discovered that a few weeks ago, when a conservation measure—as a statutory instrument—was proposed and the Green party refused to support it. The SI was a credible proposal to reduce the number of dredges that boats use from 14 to eight—a conservation measure in anyone's language. The semantic convulsions of Eleanor Scott and the other Green members do not impress the progressive fishermen who supported the measure.

On that constructive note, I urge everyone to support the Executive amendment.

11:19

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I want to talk about two issues: science and democracy. Alex Johnstone indicated that genetic modification is some sort of development from the selective breeding that has gone on before, and the methods that have been used to achieve that. GM is qualitatively quite different. It uses a new, young science—

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept that GM is akin to the process of nuclear irradiation, which was used in plant breeding in the 1950s?

Eleanor Scott: No, I do not. Nuclear irradiation imitates what happens in nature when mutations arise in genes. Bombarding a plant with genetic

material, including the desirable gene, the promoter gene to switch it on and a virus that is used as the carrier, is a different process, which may not be stable and may result in transfer from the target organism to other organisms. It is a qualitatively different technology.

I am saying neither that GM is a technology that will never have a benefit for mankind nor that it is a technology that should not be researched. I am saying that GM should not be researched using our open environment as a laboratory, especially without our being asked first. That is the big issue; I will come to the democracy issue in a minute. First, I will say a bit more about the science.

Nora Radcliffe said that we should not appear to be anti-science. I certainly do not want to appear to be like that. I have not said that biotechnology research, which has the potential to produce pharmaceutical benefits in some respects, should not be done; I said that it should be done in a closed situation. The crops should not be produced in our open environment until we know the potential long-term effects. We are talking about a young science and the advice that the scientists can give will be based on incomplete evidence.

There is also the issue of who owns science. Science is owned and financed by large companies, which means that it tends to move quickly from theoretical science and discoveries to applied science. That is happening nowadays at a rate that would not have happened before. Somebody has to put on the brakes: just because we can do the science does not mean that we should do it. Certainly, it does not mean that we should do it in the open environment in a way that cannot be undone if anything goes wrong.

George Lyon: Does not Eleanor Scott recognise the reality that, for a good number of years, huge swathes of the United States of America, Canada and Latin America have been under such crops? The horse has well bolted out of the stable.

Eleanor Scott: That is right. It would have been salutary for George Lyon if he had been able to talk to the two Canadian farmers whom we spoke to yesterday. The farmers, who are having tremendous problems with contamination, are finding unexpected effects from simple things such as pollen from maize. The maize was modified to contain an insecticide and the pollen landed on plants that are the food of the big butterfly of which people in California are so proud. I have forgotten its name.

Robin Harper: It is the monarch.

Eleanor Scott: Thank you. The monarch butterfly is being killed off by the insecticide. Side effects cannot always be foreseen and they

cannot be undone once the modified crops are out there.

That point brings me back to the democracy issue. We had a field trial in the Highlands, which was universally opposed by all the democratically elected representatives in the area—from community council members to Highland Council councillors, to members of the Scottish Parliament and the member of the Westminster Parliament, who in this case was Charles Kennedy.

Alasdair Morrison said that GM was a sideshow. That might be so for the Western Isles at this point in time, as GM has yet to come there. However, if the door is left open for GM crops to be grown in Scotland, they will be coming soon to a field near him. Crofters in Alasdair Morrison's constituency will look to him to protect them from that development. GM threatens the livelihood of those crofters because of their dependence on the image of a clean environment and natural production methods.

We need to protect the reputation of Scottish agriculture and take into account people's wishes. People have said that they do not want GM crops growing near them and that they do not want to be part of an unwitting experiment. We have to respect the wishes of the people. It is up to Government to enact those wishes.

11:23

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):

Last night, we had a debate on what to do with nuclear submarines once their lives are over. None of the options that we discussed for decommissioning the radioactive rods and other parts of the submarine is safe; every option in the proposal poses a threat to the environment and our health. The situation will get not better but worse as more submarines are decommissioned. From the Scottish Socialist Party's point of view, the decommissioning of nuclear submarines is a floating time bomb that this generation will have to deal with. The point that I am driving at is that, if those who opposed the development of nuclear submarines years ago had won the argument, we would not be dealing with the issue in our environment today.

Today, we are debating GM crops and the GM technology that will have a fundamental effect on our planet for generations to come. I do not support GM, but the Executive supports it. What effect will GM have in 50 or 100 years time? We do not know the answer to that question. I do not know and the ministers do not know—indeed, nobody knows what the effect will be.

Members have said that we should have scientific research, but the jury is out on that. The situation is not clear. I have a real problem with

scientific research, when companies like Monsanto sponsor the laboratories, universities, scientists and all the equipment that produces the research to say that GM is safe. I am sorry, but the SSP does not believe that. I do not think that the public believe it either. Roseanna Cunningham made those points.

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

Frances Curran: I am not prepared to take an intervention.

Why are we rushing headlong into this technology? What is the haste? Why do we have to go at a rate of knots towards it? The members who think that the agenda is solving world hunger should not kid themselves. One per cent of the research into GM technology is aimed at the crops that are used by poor farmers. The agenda is being driven by four multinational companies that have cornered the market. In 2001, 91 per cent of the seeds for GM crops in use across the planet came from Monsanto seeds. Those seeds do not meet the needs of poor farmers who rely on affordable, readily available supplies for a range of crops. GM seeds are aimed not at eradicating world hunger, but at large-scale commercial farmers who grow cash crops.

Patrick Harvie: Does Frances Curran agree that one of the impacts of the growth of GM crops in America has been to increase the ability of American farmers to dump cheap, subsidised crops on the markets of developing countries? That point underlines the social justice aspects of her argument.

Frances Curran: Absolutely. I will make a quick point about that in my last minute.

I ask the minister when he sums up to explain the rationale behind the genetic use restriction technologies—the so-called terminator gene. Why would anyone want to have a crop in which the seed is sterile and the farmer cannot replant it year after year?

Alex Johnstone: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): No. The member is in her last minute.

Frances Curran: No. I have only a few seconds left to me.

We are talking about world hunger and sustainability. Next week, I am going to a meeting in Europe where representatives of Indian farmers, who represent millions of people who work on the land, are coming to Europe to ask us not to go along with GM technology. People from the landless organisations in Latin America will also ask us not to do that.

Allan Wilson said that the Executive is neither for nor against GM technology—his bum must be

sore from sitting on the fence. Please do something. Have a bit of bottle. It is not as if it would cost the Executive any money. Future generations will thank him for it.

11:27

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Until yesterday, I thought that the debate was going to be about sustainable agriculture and the future of agriculture in Scotland. I was going to welcome that debate, as it is important to many of my constituents. Unfortunately, the title seems to have been something of a Trojan horse to sneak in a GM debate. For the life of me, I cannot see why, if the Greens wanted to talk about GM, they did not lodge a motion on GM and not raise expectations.

The motion is ill-informed. As the minister demonstrated, the Scottish Executive believes in applying the precautionary principle. Back in March 2000, the then Minister for Health and Community Care, Susan Deacon, led a debate in which public concerns about the development of genetically modified foods and crops were acknowledged and the precautionary approach was commended. I am tempted to replicate the speech that I made on that occasion three and a half years ago. I will not do so, other than to repeat my view that we cannot assess the threats or benefits of GM without informed scientific and medical opinion. That opinion has to be informed by rigorous, controlled and independent research and not by prejudice, ill-informed fears or anxieties.

I have to pick up Eleanor Scott on the idea that nuclear irradiation is akin to something that happens in nature. Intense nuclear radiation causes fundamental genetic mutation. If there were to be a nuclear war, that is one of the reasons that I would sit on the roof with a bottle of wine—I would not want to survive it.

Research is necessary, not only to evaluate whether GM commercialisation is desirable, but because—

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Dr Murray: No, I am sorry. I cannot take any interventions, as I do not have time to do so.

The fact is that GM commercialisation exists in other places. As George Lyon said, the horse has well bolted and by now it is not just out of the stable but galloping halfway round the field.

I remind members that foot-and-mouth, which devastated agriculture in my constituency, might have been introduced into this country by illegally imported meat in a sandwich. We have to know how to react and behave if we discover that material has been introduced into this country from overseas sources. That is another reason why we

have to get on with the research in this country.

The actual title of the debate is "Future of Scottish Agriculture", and I really wanted to talk about some of the things that are happening in that respect. Indeed, I would have thought that the Green party would welcome certain measures. For example, the rural stewardship scheme was launched with the publication of "Rural Scotland: A New Approach" back in 2000. In August 2002, conservation awards worth £14.6 million were made to 196 farms that covered a total of 75,000 hectares; about 20 per cent of those farms were in southern Scotland. A year later, awards worth £23.6 million were made to 1,078 conservation projects covering 360,000 hectares of Scottish countryside. Surely that should be welcomed if we are talking about the future of Scottish agriculture.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Dr Murray: I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

The Executive's "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture", which was published in June 2002, stated:

"farmers are better able to care for the environment if they are economically successful and if they continue to farm in our remote areas."

The document said that land management contracts would be explored. I am pleased by the progress in that respect with the establishment of a working group and a modelling exercise in which model land management contracts were drawn up for 21 farms, three crofts and a common grazing. Indeed, the model contract that was drawn up for a farm in Dumfries and Galloway identified 15 agriculturally and economically sustainable projects that would bring in more than £11,000 per annum.

I would have welcomed the opportunity to examine what was being done to bring together Scotland's agriculture and environment and to consider a way forward for both.

11:31

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The Government has to answer some questions about how it might handle the mass public opposition that will break out if there is any suggestion of further field trials or GM crop development. It should heed a Cabinet Office report which, according to *The Guardian*, said:

"if farmers and protesters thought organic or conventional farming would be damaged by GM crops, and there was no proper legal redress, it would be an invitation for anarchy and the destruction of GM crops before they caused damage."

We know from the GM vigil on the Black Isle that people have very strong views about the way in

which this technology is being foisted upon us. Unfortunately, the minister has been silent in the debate—indeed, he has left the chamber. In that case, perhaps his deputy had better tell us why the Government in Scotland has been so supine and has not taken on board the feelings of people in this country.

The responsible science that members on the Labour benches talk about does not take account of the disgraceful links between members of regulatory committees and the industry from which they have been chosen. In fact, Michael Meacher and Lord Whitty have pointed out the links between many members of the committees that make certain decisions and those that advise the UK Government. That Government will not answer questions on the matter, and the Scottish Government is once more supine when it comes to the links between the people who advise and those who make the decisions. A spokesman from Friends of the Earth has said:

"business is setting the agenda right at the heart of government. The whole process needs to be opened up and made transparent."

How is this Government making the situation in Scotland more transparent?

In the report from *The Guardian* that I mentioned earlier, a spokesman from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs suggests that, when the European Union decides next year on whether to open up GM commercialisation,

"every country, including the UK, will decide what conditions suit our particular circumstances for each crop—if any."

Will that allow the Government in Scotland to go to London and say that no GM crop that has been proposed is suitable to be grown in Scotland or will the minister tell us now whether any such crop has been found to be suitable in that respect?

The Government has to address the question of liability and the separation of crops, because that is where GM crops can affect conventional and organic agriculture. Mr Head-in-the-Machair-Sand Morrison refuses to consider the fact that feed from the mainland could easily be GM contaminated. Will he join me on the picket lines on Stornoway harbour when that feed is being taken off the ships? After all, the GM-free status of Western Isles crops will be directly affected.

The debate asks us to consider the question whether Scotland could follow Wales. I think that Scotland should be setting a lead. It is disgraceful that the Government ministers who have dealt with the issue have been so supine. Mr Finnie is not even prepared to listen to the criticisms that he deserves. I ask members to support the SNP amendment because the future of Scottish agriculture lies in maintaining the integrity of a

GM-free crop production system.

11:35

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): It is not often that I begin a speech by agreeing with the Conservatives—and particularly with Alex Johnstone. As someone who is still very wary of GM technology, I think that he at least brought a sense of balance and realism into the debate.

The minister mentioned the importance of the precautionary principle. I believe that the issue is at the heart of the debate. In fact, we already met that principle in the Scottish Parliament when we debated telecommunication masts. One important aspect is public consultation. In my speech, I will consider some of people's concerns about GM foods, one of which is the amount of public involvement in the consultation over field trials. Although I know that we are trying to meet such concerns through the dialogue that has been established, I have heard reports that the last set was not as good as it might have been.

I remember highlighting other concerns about GM crops during our first debates on the issue. For example, North American research on buffer zones shows that they represent a significant issue and that we need to keep an eye on the matter. I agree with some of the Green party members' comments that the transfer of pollen to non-GM crops is also a big issue.

Another concern centres on the long-term effects of GM crops on humans, the environment and the food chain. Elaine Murray is correct to say that science can only go so far in that respect. However, it is important that we carry out longitudinal studies to keep an eye on what is happening year on year and to ensure that GM material is not affecting the food chain adversely.

People are also very wary of big interest groups and multinationals such as Monsanto, Bayer and Syngenta. I take on board some of the Scottish Socialist Party's points about that issue, particularly since I gather that the European Commission will most likely have a vote that might put GM sweetcorn and field corn on European shelves. I believe that Syngenta and Monsanto are pushing the issue and that such produce might sneak in by the back door before the EC is able to introduce its legislation on processed food and animal feed next year. That sort of thing makes people wary.

However, returning to Alex Johnstone's point, I believe that we must accept that GM technology will have huge benefits for medicine, pharmaceuticals and so on, and I agree with Margaret Beckett that the farm-scale trials are the biggest that have ever been conducted in the world. There is a genuine desire to make the trials

as good as they possibly can be and it is important to feed the results into the European dimension.

Finally, we must agree with the minister that the right way to go is to take a balanced view of the matter, follow the precautionary principle, take on board public concerns, make adjustments as needs be and consider the wider UK and European agenda.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have managed to call all the back benchers who wished to speak, so I now move to wind-up speeches, but I must ask all speakers to stick strictly to their time limits. Mr Lyon, you have three minutes.

11:40

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I shall do my best to keep to that limit, Presiding Officer.

I begin by welcoming the minister's statement that any decisions on the commercial planting of GM crops will be taken on the basis of the best scientific evidence available. That principle is fundamental in shaping policy where human health and potential environmental damage are involved. If we buy the conspiracy theory put forward by Frances Curran and Rob Gibson that all scientists have been bought and paid for, the progress of mankind stops here today, because we could never develop new drugs to tackle cancer or other new medicines or health measures without an independent scientific evaluation of whether they were safe to use.

Patrick Harvie: I do not think that anyone has suggested that all scientists are bought and paid for. Will not George Lyon acknowledge our argument that multinational corporations will bring to market only those products that can turn a buck and put back into their pockets the vast investment that they have made, and that that money can come only from poor communities?

George Lyon: The Executive is right to wait until that evidence is available before coming to any final decision.

As a farmer, I personally believe that Scottish agriculture plc should reject the use of GM crops, for three reasons. First, as Roseanna Cunningham and other members have said, there is no market demand for such products. Consumer resistance to GM products is strong, and some of that resistance is due to the intemperate language used by those who are opposed to the technology. Indeed, politicians in this Parliament have used such intemperate language. Nevertheless, the reality is that there is no market demand for the product, so it is a pointless exercise even to consider growing those crops in the first place.

Secondly, we should note the experience of commercial farmers in the United States of

America. They were promised that GM technology would lower production costs and that it would be somehow to their commercial benefit, but that promise has not been realised. There is no sustainable long-term benefit to the farmers from using that technology. The argument that one spray of Roundup is all that is needed has been proved wrong; in many cases, farmers have to go in two or three times with Roundup because the first application has not worked.

That brings me to the third, and probably most important, reason. Mother nature is not benign in the process. There is a reaction to every new product that is developed. Mutation takes place, and resistance builds up to every new drug and chemical that we use in the farming industry. That will also happen with Roundup—it is already happening in the USA, which is why it takes more than one spray to kill off the weeds.

It seems foolish in the extreme to go down a road where we are utterly reliant on a handful of multinationals—the Monsantos of this world—to produce and sell us the seed and chemicals that control the world's food production. That is an illogical position to take and one that should be resisted. However, I repeat that the decision must be taken on the basis of the scientific evidence presented to ministers, and I support the minister's view on that.

11:43

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): Like other members, I was somewhat confused by coming to debate the future of Scottish agriculture but finding the debate confined to the fairly narrow but very emotive subject of GM crops. That said, I think that it has been a good debate, and substantive points have been made from all parts of the chamber.

In introducing his motion, Mark Ruskell gave an eloquent and impassioned speech. I cannot agree with it all, however, for the following reasons. Scotland has, as Alex Johnstone said, a proud tradition of plant breeding and research. Whether that is GM under another a name is probably the subject of another debate altogether, but we have always been at the scientific forefront of that type of technology. When we come to the science, we have to accept that the jury is still out on GM technology. Evidence is still being taken and, until it is all gathered and examined, the jury cannot possibly deliver a verdict. I do not believe that we can turn our backs on the science or on any scientific advancement; nor, indeed, can we decide on the issue, or expect ministers to do so, until those evaluations are complete.

Roseanna Cunningham's amendment is carefully worded, and it is tempting to agree with it,

but I cannot do so because of the last sentence. The amendment asks that we consider

"that the future of Scottish agriculture lies in maintaining the integrity of GM-free crop production",

but surely that is what the debate is all about. The decision that has to be made is whether that is the case or not and, as I have said, the jury is still out.

I can agree with the Executive amendment, with one proviso, and I hope that the minister can clarify that point. In the past, my colleague John Scott and I have spoken of the need to apply the ultra-precautionary principle on the issue of GM crops. The Executive amendment says that decisions cannot be made until the GM dialogue has been fully evaluated. I hope that the minister can confirm that, at that stage in the process, he and his advisers will apply the ultra-precautionary principle in evaluating the results of those processes. As well as evaluating the science, ministers must also evaluate the effect on Scotland's position in the agricultural marketplace. Will the introduction of GM commercial crops ruin for ever the niche markets that our agricultural producers are becoming ever more efficient at supplying? Will the position only accelerate under common agricultural policy reform, which we are to debate this afternoon?

Such questions must receive substantive answers before ministerial decisions are taken. If the answers are provided within the ultra-precautionary principle to which I referred, the Executive position can and will receive our support. If GM crops are approved, I would take the unusual position of agreeing entirely with George Lyon and expecting all farmers to choose not to grow them.

In closing, I must say that I hope that Stewart Stevenson will be summing up for the SNP, because that will be the first appearance in the chamber of what must be a genetically modified tie.

11:46

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I thank Mr Fergusson for those warm and unexpected words.

I would like to address the subject of scientists, politicians and the wider public. Scientists are objective. If they are not, they are not scientists. Their job is to inform the decisions that others make. Let us not pretend that the scientists make the decisions. Sometimes in this debate, it has seemed as if the scientists are making the decisions and we are simply to fall into line with them. Let us go back to basics: the scientists must inform the decisions that we make.

If the public are opposed to GM crops, they may

express their opposition rationally or they may do so irrationally. Frankly, it disnae matter. We still have to take account of the public's view.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will Stewart Stevenson give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I am sorry, but I have only three minutes.

Of course, we have had genetic modification over thousands of years, in animals and in crops. That was done by using the natural processes of evolution but speeding them up, by denying a future to those animals and crops that were not heading the way that we wanted and by selecting and promoting those that were. Now, however, we are using technology that brings new risks. We see from the example of Dolly the sheep that the modification of genetic structures can create weaknesses in the resulting organism that have adverse effects. The same will undoubtedly be true of crops. We breach the cell wall to introduce viruses and genetic modifications, and doing that leaves a weakened structure. That is the source of some of the difficulties that we undoubtedly face.

We and the broader public have difficulties with the subject of risk. Statistically, how likely is it that something adverse will happen, and what will the impact be when it does? Is there a management plan for when that impact is too great? In this debate, there are huge issues around those questions. How would we manage a situation in which Scotland goes down the GM crop road and then concludes that doing so was the wrong answer? There is no such management plan—no one has come up with one. That is why, while the jury may be out on this particular debate, the burden of proof has to lie with the prosecution, and the case of those who prosecute the benefits of GM crops has not been made. We must not proceed.

11:49

Allan Wilson: Although I can agree with much of what Mark Ruskell said, I must say that the Green motion is both misguided and mistimed. We are obviously aware of the public concerns that Sylvia Jackson and many other members have referred to but, as our amendment states,

"no decision has been taken on the possible commercialisation of GM crops".

That is not because we are sitting on the fence, but because our decisions on those matters are evidence based.

We are not supine or anything like it. We acknowledge—Stewart Stevenson raised the issue—that generic lessons are to be learned in relation to the communication of science and risk. Consider the example of herbicide resistance, to

which many members referred. That can develop through conventional cross-breeding and through genetic modification. That is why we established the farm-scale evaluations, which the Greens and others oppose. It would be irresponsible to take decisions before we have received scientific advice from our advisers on their statutory assessment of the results of that evaluation process.

I noticed that Stewart Stevenson distanced himself from the demeaning comments of his colleague Mr Gibson about the scientists concerned. The people who are at the cutting edge of the development of the new technology are independent of Government and of industry. It is naive to suggest that because industry may have given some research funding to scientists those scientists are consequently in the pay of industry.

Our primary objective is to protect human health, animal health and the environment. That is the basis of the strict European Union regulatory regime to which I referred. No crop can or will be approved without its having first satisfied that rigorous risk assessment. If there is any evidence of harm, that approval will not be given. I say to Alex Fergusson, Sylvia Jackson and others that we will continue to adopt the precautionary approach in risk assessment.

Wales is regularly pointed to—as happened today—as an example of where there is a successful restrictive GM policy in action. However, let us be clear on one point—Wales is not and has never been GM free. The joint paper that it has presented along with other regions effectively acknowledges that the power that they seek to declare themselves GM free is contrary to the single market and therefore, as I said, such demands cannot be met.

We recognise that GM crops could affect the interests of conventional and organic farming and that measures will be required to ensure the sustainable co-existence of the regimes. We will receive evidence from the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission and we will examine those co-existence issues. We look forward to the Greens and others having an input in that process.

Patrick Harvie: Will Allan Wilson give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. I am sorry, but he is in his last minute.

Allan Wilson: I stress that no decision has been taken on the possible commercialisation of GM crops. It would be premature to do so before the results of the farm-scale trials are known and the GM dialogue fully evaluated. We will need to reflect on all the relevant information. We will not be bounced into making a decision by either Mr

Ruskell or the biotech companies. We believe in responsible science and responsible policy making. We should proceed with care on the basis of scientific fact rather than on the basis of prejudice and misinformation.

11:54

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):

The debate is about the future of farming in Scotland. Do we want farming to be dictated to by a few companies with a specific financial agenda, or do we want an open agenda that puts at the forefront of the debate the needs of not only the wide variety of interests represented in our farming community but the consuming public?

The partnership agreement specifically mentions a market-led vision for Scottish agriculture. Nobody here has produced any evidence to show that there is a market for genetically modified crops. As a farmer, I am delighted to hear three farmers say that they have made the decision that they will not grow GM crops. That says it all.

The supermarkets do not want to sell GM food, the people do not want to eat GM food, and many more farmers are extremely wary about growing the GM crop. Even NFU Mutual has come out clearly against providing cover for cross-contamination. That is a serious point to make.

Where is the future for the GM crop? Roseanna Cunningham made an important point when she mentioned the lack of trust in the biotech companies and commented on the line that has been deliberately crossed to force us to go down the GM route. Sylvia Jackson repeated that point. The companies—there are only four main companies—are forcing us to take on board the GM crop.

The farm-scale trials have already shown that there is a reduction in biodiversity. We do not need any more discussion. The “GM Nation” dialogue showed that people are overwhelmingly against the crop. We have heard about the experiences of Canadian farmers. We do not have room in our small country to have sufficiently safe buffer zones, even if such a thing genuinely exists. If the wide Canadian prairies have been so contaminated that there is no chance of growing GM-free—never mind organic—oil-seed rape, what chance do we have of doing that?

Although members have talked about buffer zones, not much has been said about one of the most important aspects of GM pollination—bees. It has to be emphasised that bees fly up to 3 miles, so one bee can fly in one direction for three miles to a field and another bee can fly in the opposite direction for three miles to another field. We therefore need buffer zones of 7 miles between crops. Where in Scotland can we have buffer

zones of 7 miles? The whole idea of growing GM crops is nonsense.

The Canadian National Farmers Union representative from whom we heard yesterday acknowledged that GM oil-seed rape covers the whole of Canada. What really concerns him is that wheat is the next crop that is being genetically modified. That has a serious implication for Scotland, because we grow a lot more wheat than we do oil-seed rape. The Canadian NFU is concerned that if it is so easy for contamination to take place, their wheat crops will not have a market anywhere. They are already being told by American, European and Asian markets that there is no market for GM wheat. We must not go down that road. We must declare ourselves GM free and concentrate on our top-quality, world-renowned local food.

The debate is not only about the future of farming in Scotland, but about a technology that could seriously damage our countryside. It is about the people who live in villages and farming communities that are surrounded by oil-seed rape fields.

The Executive amendment does not go far enough. We need a firmer commitment and real leadership from our Liberal Democrat Minister for Environment and Rural Development. What is he waiting for? The debate has taken place and the people have spoken. No other decision needs to be made. The scientific advice is irrelevant when we can see the reality in the fields in Canada. That is the bottom line.

Far more members are in the chamber now than were present throughout the debate. All members should discuss what has been said in the debate. We need to vote with our conscience for the people of Scotland. I want members to vote the way that they really feel about the motion—I want them to support it.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I ask members to join me in welcoming to the public gallery Bill Owens, the governor of Colorado. [Applause.]

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-317)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Next week's Cabinet will receive a report on the success of tonight's MTV Europe music awards, which will take place in Edinburgh. Maybe I will suggest to the Cabinet that, rather than telling the Brits to get off, we will campaign to get the Brits to come to Scotland, too.

Mr Swinney: I am sure that the First Minister will enjoy his evening of entertainment at the MTV awards.

In an article that appeared on Tuesday in *The Shetland News* under the masthead "Great is the Truth and it will Prevail", Tavish Scott, the Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services, states:

"Fishing is not a main priority of the UK Government. It hasn't been under successive Tory or Labour governments."

Is that the Scottish Executive's position and, if not, why is Mr Scott still a minister of the Scottish Executive?

The First Minister: Mr Scott clarified that position yet again this morning. The issue is not about personalities or trying to misquote people; it is about the importance of the Scottish fishing community and industry and the work that is under way to ensure that they have a sustainable future. The priorities that we have for that remain in place and will be pursued relentlessly by Mr Finnie and other colleagues in Scotland and London in the coming weeks. We are fully determined to secure an outcome at the Brussels council meeting in December that will sustain the future of Scotland's fishing industry.

Mr Swinney: The problem with that answer is that it does not square with what Mr Scott said in the newspaper. Over the years, the First Minister has told members that Scotland's fishing industry is a priority for the UK Government, but his view has been fundamentally undermined by a member who remains in his Government.

If Mr Scott's humiliating rebuff to the First Minister's policy is not enough, I inform the First

Minister that the Liberal Deputy First Minister, the Liberal Minister for Transport and the Liberal fisheries minister believe that, contrary to what the First Minister has told Parliament, giving the European Union exclusive control over Scotland's fishing industry

"is both undesirable and unworkable".

Will the First Minister explain why half of his Government believes that his policies on fishing are undesirable and unworkable?

The First Minister: In the middle of last year's fishing negotiations, the Scottish nationalist party tried to misrepresent the position of the Executive and the interests of the Scottish fishing community at the heart of Brussels. That was a shameful episode that Mr Swinney has yet to repudiate. It now looks as if the same pattern is emerging all over again.

The priority for the Executive and for ministers in the coming weeks is to ensure not only that we have the strong negotiating position that we require at the Brussels council meeting in December, but that we pursue the issue relentlessly and win some success. Those, like Mr Swinney, who advocate a complete end to any common fisheries policy are fundamentally wrong. The end of the common fisheries policy would mean the end of the Shetland box and the protection that it provides and the end of the Hague preference and the minimum guarantees that it gives to Scottish fishing communities. It would also mean that Scotland would be involved in a free-for-all in which we would have as much to lose as to gain.

We will continue to work, within the framework of the common fisheries policy, for a fundamental change in that policy—we secured changes last December and further changes are to come—to ensure that Scotland has a sustainable fishing industry for a long time to come.

Mr Swinney: This morning, the First Minister has accused me of misrepresenting and misquoting Tavish Scott and the Liberal Democrat party. Let me give him the details, chapter and verse. In *The Shetland News*, under the masthead "Great is the Truth and it will Prevail", Tavish Scott says:

"Fishing is not a main priority of the UK Government. It hasn't been under successive Tory or Labour governments."

That is the quote, with not a word deleted and not a word inserted.

Secondly, I quote from the Scottish Liberal Democrat conference, which took place in Dunfermline on 1 November:

"Conference however believes that: making the conservation of marine biological resources under the

Common Fisheries Policy an exclusive competence of the EU is both undesirable and unworkable”.

That is the position of the First Minister's junior coalition partners.

Let us be clear. The First Minister tells us that the United Kingdom Government will make the protection of our fishing industry a priority and Tavish Scott says that it will not. The First Minister supports the handing of exclusive control of our fishing industry to the EU and the Liberal Democrats do not agree with him. Will the First Minister now do the right thing and change his policies and fight to save the Scottish fishing industry? So far, he has failed to do that.

The First Minister: I state again that Mr Scott has clarified his position. He stated very clearly again this morning that simply to repatriate the CFP to the UK or to Scotland would not be in the best interests of Scottish fishermen and would put at risk features of the current policy, such as the relative stability in the Shetland box, that we want to preserve. The partnership agreement and the work of this Executive have been absolutely consistent on the matter.

On a day when representatives of Scottish fishing communities are in Edinburgh to put their case to us—I do not always agree with what they say, but I respect their right to come here to argue on behalf of their families and communities—it is wrong simply to score political points again.

We need a strong Scottish position in the debate and we need to argue hard, not just for fishing but for sustainable fishing in the North sea and in the rest of the waters around Scotland. We need to ensure that Scotland does not take all the pain in any decisions that are made in December and we need to use scientific evidence to back up our position that other countries, in particular those that are involved in industrial fishing, should take that pain as well. We need to see through the fundamental changes that were agreed last December as speedily and effectively as possible. That is in the best long-term interests of Scotland's fishing industries and all parties in the chamber should get behind that.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-323)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I expect that I shall meet the Prime Minister at least twice before Christmas. I have not yet decided whether I will ask him to support our campaign to bring the Brit awards to Scotland.

David McLetchie: The First Minister seems to

have an obsession with popular music today. If he is looking for something to wear to the MTV awards, I suggest a Shetland isles jumper.

This week I was amazed to hear a minister agree with the Conservatives that the common fisheries policy should be scrapped. Well, he said that, then he did not say that, and then he said that again, all in the space of 36 hours. From a typical two-faced, all-things-to-all-men Liberal Democrat back bencher, that would be perfectly acceptable behaviour—even normal or, frankly, mandatory behaviour. It should not be acceptable behaviour for a minister in the First Minister's Government but, astonishingly, Mr Scott remains a minister. I am sure that, like me, many people will be confused about the situation. If Mr Scott will not resign of his own volition on this occasion, will the First Minister explain why he does not dismiss him?

The First Minister: As I said earlier in answer to Mr Swinney's questions, Mr Scott has clarified this morning that he wants us to negotiate hard within the framework of the current common fisheries policy—as he should, and as everyone in the chamber should—to ensure that we move towards the regional management system for EU fisheries policy that we have consistently supported.

The difference between the coalition parties and Mr McLetchie—on this issue as on so many other European issues—is that he does not believe that there should be a fisheries policy at all. In advocating that position, he must think very hard about what he supports. Mr McLetchie is advocating a policy that would lead to the ending of the Shetland box, the Hague preferences and the guarantees that Scotland has under the current common fisheries policy. He is advocating the creation of a free-for-all in the waters of the North sea and elsewhere in which Scotland would have as much to lose as to gain. That is the dangerous route that Mr McLetchie would like us to take. We will not take it.

David McLetchie: As the First Minister knows perfectly well, there was no free-for-all before 1973. These matters were well regulated on an independent, bilateral basis. I have no doubt that they could be regulated on a similar basis in the future, without a disastrous common fisheries policy.

It is interesting that the First Minister is in such difficulty on this issue with Mr Scott. The First Minister failed to deal with the then Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Mr Watson, when last year he publicly disagreed with the Executive's policy on the Glasgow hospitals review. At the time, the ubiquitous Mr Scott described that dispute as having “a corrosive effect” on Government. How does the ministerial code differentiate between a minister speaking as an

individual MSP and a minister speaking as a member of the Government? Have we reached the stage at which the ministerial code is simply not worth the paper on which it is written? Is it not time to put an end to the double standards and mixed messages that are bringing the Administration into disrepute?

The First Minister: I do not accept that analysis. I recall that, rightly, last year Mr Watson supported the Executive's position in the debate in the chamber on the Glasgow acute health services review. Contrary to all the predictions that Mr McLetchie made at the time, Mr Watson went on to win his constituency seat again handsomely in the election in May this year. I congratulate him on doing so.

As I have said before in the chamber, we need a mature democracy in Scotland in which individual MSPs, including ministers, represent their constituencies, but in which the Government acts in a united fashion and ensures that it represents Scotland's interests at home and abroad. That is exactly what we intend to do. Despite distractions from Conservative members, between now and December we will pursue the long-term interests of the Scottish fishing communities. We will ensure that the outcome of the fisheries council is fair and equitable and that other countries bear the pain of preserving stocks in the North sea as much as Scotland does. We will ensure that we in Scotland have the appropriate international agreements in place and that we retain those agreements, to avoid the free-for-all that can only damage rather than assist Scotland's long-term interests.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Will the First Minister join me in welcoming the creation of a joint school campus in Dalkeith in my constituency of Midlothian, which brings together St David's High School, Dalkeith High School and Saltersgate School? Will he join me in congratulating the staff, parents and pupils of the schools and Midlothian Council on having the vision to create an integrated campus and for working so hard to break down the barriers that still too often divide us?

The First Minister: Shared campuses are right in certain circumstances, where they are appropriate for local communities, have support and would lead to improvements in the education of the youngsters involved. Shared campuses will not be right in all circumstances, but where they work they should do so in the best interests of the children. In all of their management arrangements, they should put the interests of the children first. I hope that in the course of the next few days and weeks any difficulties that have been experienced in Midlothian over the past few days can be not just ironed out, but turned around to ensure that the community makes a positive contribution to the

future of the youngsters involved.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Does the First Minister share my concerns about recent events regarding the firefighters' pay settlement? Can he confirm that the Audit Commission has stated that

"the pay award remains a matter for the employers to consider individually and collectively"?

The First Minister: First, I condemn utterly the attacks in certain parts of Scotland last night on firefighters who were doing their jobs in dangerous and difficult circumstances. I am sure that the whole chamber will agree with me on that.

Secondly, as I have said before, the negotiated agreement that was achieved between the employers and the Fire Brigades Union on the future of fire service pay and conditions should be implemented by all sides, which should move forward in the way in which they have agreed. I hope that current difficulties will not result in prolonged action over the next few weeks.

Hate Crimes

3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the First Minister what progress has been made by the working group on hate crime. (S2F-334)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We are determined to send out a clear signal that crimes that are rooted in prejudice are unacceptable in 21st century Scotland. The Minister for Communities announced the establishment of a working group on hate crime in June. The group has met four times since then and we expect to receive a report from it soon.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): On Friday, in *The Independent*, it was revealed that the Labour Government in London will introduce an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill for England and Wales to include as hate crimes homophobic crimes and crimes against people who are suffering from disabilities. Can the First Minister reassure us that the report of the working group on hate crime will be brought to the chamber for discussion, for us to formulate legislation, and that he will not introduce yet another Sewel motion by the back door to incorporate the forthcoming Westminster legislation into our legislation?

The First Minister: I am happy to do all that I can to ensure that, when Patricia Ferguson brings the next Sewel motion to Parliament, she does so by the front door rather than by the back door. The Sewel motion procedure is a transparent way in which to ensure that, should Westminster ever make a decision that covers our responsibilities, the Scottish Parliament agrees to that in advance. That procedure has worked well for us, as a Parliament. There are no plans to introduce a

Sewel motion on this issue. There are, however, plans for the working group to complete its business and for its report to be widely debated.

Robin Harper: The First Minister has still not reassured us that the Executive intends to introduce legislation on the matter. Does the Executive intend, subsequently, to introduce legislation?

The First Minister: With respect, that was not the question that Mr Harper asked me, so I could not give that reassurance. I am happy to say again that we have established a working group that has wide representation on it. It is right and proper for that working group to conclude its business before we make any decisions or further recommendations.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Has the First Minister made arrangements to ensure that the legal system and the police are dealing well with hate crimes involving, for example, racial and sectarian hatred, for which there is existing legislation?

The First Minister: Yes. I am just checking the figures that are involved. My understanding is that more than 50 cases involving an aggravation of religious prejudice have been brought since the commencement of the relevant provision that was agreed in the Parliament last year. We said at the time that that was a key element of our long-term strategy for tackling sectarianism in Scotland. I believe that the police and the authorities have taken that seriously.

Such motivation is not easy to prove in a courtroom and I am sure that, in individual circumstances, we will need to ensure that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service pursues the cases in a thorough way. It is appropriate that we now have that law in Scotland and I hope that, in the years to come, it will not only have an impact on those who carry out such crimes, but—much more important—prevent those crimes.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Can the First Minister confirm that the working group will address the issue of homophobic hate crime, and does he agree that there can be no place for homophobia in a modern Scotland? Does he agree that, although work on that area in the criminal justice system is to be welcomed, the key issue is to reduce the incidence of such crimes? Will he, therefore, set out what steps the Executive is taking to tackle homophobic attitudes wherever they occur?

The First Minister: A whole package of work is under way, and I will be happy to ensure that the Minister for Communities writes to Susan Deacon with the detail of that. We have included that very

important issue in the remit of the working group and we expect the group to produce recommendations on it.

MTV Music Awards

4. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive intends to ensure that Scotland gains the maximum benefit from the MTV music awards in Edinburgh. (S2F-327)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The MTV music awards were worth attracting to Scotland just for the worldwide audience of 1 billion and for the contribution that they will make to the local economy. We have maximised the benefits for Scotland by also working with MTV and agencies of local and national Government to develop many supporting projects—including video advertising to promote Scotland and Edinburgh; ensuring that over half of the suppliers for the event are Scottish; and distributing an information pack promoting Scotland to those who attend the awards.

I am confident that tonight's awards will provide Scotland with invaluable global exposure and will boost our reputation as a high-quality destination that delivers excellence. I wish all those involved the very best.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Ask him for a ticket.

Mr Stone: I thank the First Minister for his answer and I could not help but overhear the leader of the Scottish Conservative party mention tickets. Should the First Minister happen to have a spare one about his person, I would be very grateful for it.

The First Minister has mentioned, quite correctly, the economic benefits of these awards. Will he share his thoughts on how those benefits can be spread more widely throughout Scotland, rather than just to Edinburgh city centre, welcome though that is?

The First Minister: The financial benefit to Edinburgh and the Lothians has been estimated to be in the region of £4 million. However, as we can see from the fact that at least one star is staying in Gleneagles, the benefits are already being spread elsewhere in Scotland.

This was an opportunity for us to showcase Scotland, not just Edinburgh. That is why we have done something that has not been done on similar occasions in the past. We have been involved in television advertising and a video promoting Scotland and Edinburgh across the globe. We have also ensured that, in the run-up to the event and afterwards, we will convince people that not only can they come to Edinburgh and have one of

the best parties in the world, but they can come to Edinburgh and see a very professional and properly organised event that others should follow.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The First Minister will doubtless be tucking into a dinner tonight at the MTV awards while the rest of us tuck into our fish and chips. Why is that dinner being produced by a south British company when there are so many excellent catering companies in Scotland?

The First Minister: I was not even aware that there was a dinner tonight, but I am delighted that more than half the suppliers supporting the event are Scottish. That is good news for the local economy and good news for the reputation of those suppliers in the years to come.

Vaccinations (Measles, Mumps and Rubella)

5. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive will now review its policy of not allowing NHS Scotland to provide single vaccinations for measles, mumps and rubella. (S2F-319)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Expert medical advice, both here and internationally, confirms that the MMR vaccination remains the safest and most effective way of protecting children from these very serious and potentially fatal diseases. We have no plans to change current policy and I urge parents to ensure that their children are vaccinated to protect them and any others with whom they may be in contact.

Alex Neil: I draw the First Minister's attention to Executive figures that came out last week. They show a 27 per cent increase in the incidence of mumps, a 22 per cent increase in rubella and an 18 per cent increase in measles. At the same time, there has been a 3 per cent drop in vaccinations. As long as some parents believe that there is a possible connection between MMR and autism, the figures will continue to show that trend. We should recognise that fact. Rather than take the risk of causing an outbreak or epidemic of measles, mumps or rubella, would it not be safer, as well as potentially more cost-effective, to offer parents the possibility of single vaccinations for their children?

The First Minister: We debated this issue during First Minister's question time about 18 months ago. It was a serious issue then and it is an even more serious issue today. We are better informed today. One of the authors of the scientific paper that sparked off this whole debate and created many of these concerns—Dr Simon Murch—has made his position absolutely clear in recent days. He says:

"There is now unequivocal evidence that MMR is not a risk factor for autism—this statement is not spin or medical

conspiracy, but reflects an unprecedented volume of medical study on a worldwide basis ... No other vaccine has ever been studied in such depth, and the evidence for its overall safety is comprehensive."

He understands, as I do, the genuine concern of parents about immunising their children. However, all the medical evidence throughout the world is that providing the joint vaccine is the right thing to do. By not taking the joint vaccine, parents put not only their children in danger, but other people's children, specifically those who cannot have the vaccine for reasons of their own, for example because of other conditions that they have. Those children are then left in a position where they might develop measles, mumps or rubella, which might be fatal. The issue is deadly serious and I urge parents throughout Scotland to take it seriously and to take the vaccine.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Does the First Minister accept that the way in which he answered the previous question illustrates the problem? He said that this was a serious issue 18 months ago and it is an even more serious issue now. The overwhelming majority of parents in Scotland want their children vaccinated, but an increasing number do not have enough confidence in the triple vaccination. The First Minister promotes choice in many other areas of Scottish life. Is it not time to promote vaccination of all children, but to provide choice for parents on whether they select the MMR vaccination or single vaccinations?

The First Minister: That always sounds like an attractive option. However, the evidence and the advice that we have taken from those in the scientific community and, more particularly, those in the Scottish medical community who are responsible for this issue is that to go down that route would be more dangerous, would put more children at risk and would ultimately be counterproductive. It is vital that we maintain the current policy, not for some dogmatic reason but for real evidence-based reasons why that is the right thing to do for children and particularly for those children who cannot have the vaccine but need everyone else to have it. There is a critical level at which the vaccine must be in place and it is vital that we return to that level as quickly as possible.

Comprehensive Education (Reform)

6. Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): To ask the First Minister how the plans he announced on 3 November 2003 regarding reforms to comprehensive education will affect equality of opportunity. (S2F-332)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I want real equality of opportunity to realise ambitions, nurture talents and motivate all to work

hard and succeed. Greater flexibility between and within schools, encouraging and empowering head teachers, staff, parents and pupils will help to achieve that.

Ms Byrne: Does the First Minister agree that offering diversity and a broader curriculum in our schools is possible only if there is a significant reduction in class sizes? Will he give us the assurance that there will be no break-up of our comprehensive education system?

The First Minister: I reiterated on Monday my absolute commitment to the principles of the comprehensive education system and my strong belief that that system needs to be reinvigorated for the 21st century. It cannot be a uniform system in which the same standards, conditions and curriculum are applied to all; it must be a system in which each child is allowed to prosper and reach their full potential. Flexibility in the classroom, in the curriculum and in the choices that children and their parents are offered is fundamental to achieving that goal. In certain classes, the size can make a difference.

However, I also believe that what happens in the classroom makes a big difference. One of the liberating features of Scottish education in recent years has been the massive increase in the number of classroom assistants in primary schools. They have transformed the classroom atmosphere and the opportunities and support available to youngsters, who get much more from a room in which there are two adults than they would from a room with slightly fewer children, but only one adult. We have to be flexible about how we staff our classrooms to reduce class sizes where possible and to make education in the classroom as good as it can be.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that part of the flexibility that children should be offered includes the proposal that older pupils in particular should have the opportunity to get work and college experience in the context of the overall school umbrella? That is one of the biggest moves towards enhancing the educational opportunities that are available. Will the First Minister make that aspect of the partnership agreement a priority for his Administration?

The First Minister: That is an extremely important part of the education section of the partnership agreement, as Mr Brown is aware; it is one to which I am absolutely committed and that the Executive is pursuing with some pace. It is important not only that some children have the opportunity to exercise options at college, but that, even more successfully, children are able to exercise the opportunity to access college lecturers and others in the school environment, with their peers, and to exercise more options for

courses. That good practice is working successfully in many Scottish schools, and I want it in many more.

12:30

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Care Commission

1. John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for the future funding of the care commission. (S2O-694)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): The policy on future funding of the care commission remains that the commission will be funded through a combination of registration fees for all services and subsidy of fees for child minding and day care for children. The Executive will shortly consult on maximum fees for next year.

John Swinburne: Does the minister agree that the future self-funding of the care commission, at the estimated cost of £95 per care home place, will, once again, have more financial implications for service users and will add to the continuing confusion about the true cost of nursing and residential provision, which the Scottish Executive has so far failed to resolve?

Mr McCabe: I do not agree at all with that assertion. The current annual fee for care homes is £95 per place, or £1.82 per week, which represents about 45 per cent of the current cost of regulating the service. That is a small proportion of the overall cost of the services that are regulated both in care homes and elsewhere. As is the case with many other services that such organisations provide, they will have to consider how they absorb the costs.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I hear what the minister says, but I refer him to a publication from the National Association of Inspection and Registration Officers in Scotland, whose members inspect care homes. The association's position is that the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care should not be self-funding and it urges that funding should be

"spread across the whole community, including funding via direct taxation."

Is the minister taking into consideration that comment from experienced people on the ground?

Mr McCabe: A large proportion of the care commission's budget—something like £19.5 million out of the £25 million that it costs—comes from grant in aid from the Scottish Executive, which comes from direct taxation.

Barrier-free Housing (Grants)

2. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what grants are available to assist disabled people to achieve barrier-free housing. (S2O-714)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): A range of grants is available, including support from local authorities and Communities Scotland, across the range of tenures. In 2002-03, more than 96 per cent of new-build houses that were funded through Communities Scotland's housing association grant scheme were built to barrier-free standards.

Eleanor Scott: Does the minister agree that there is a tendency for support for barrier-free housing to gravitate towards the rental sector and that there is a lack of support to enable disabled people to buy barrier-free housing, especially since the special needs capital grant was removed? In the European year of disabled people, disabled people should have the same rights to house ownership as anyone else. What, if anything, will replace the special needs capital grant?

Mrs Mulligan: I am not in a position to say what will replace the special needs grant. We are petitioning the European Union to ensure that we are within the European aid rules; we are actively dealing with the issue. However, it is still possible for people from the owner-occupied sector to access housing improvement grants and I hope that they will take up that opportunity should they need to do so.

Lothian and Borders Police (Capital City Status)

3. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what consideration has been given to the case for capital city status submitted by Lothian and Borders police to the Executive on 5 September 2003. (S2O-677)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The Executive has considered the chief constable's case, has accepted that it sets out some policing pressures that are distinct to or disproportionately affect Edinburgh and has agreed that those issues should be considered within the review of police grant-aided expenditure allocations, which is due to be completed in the spring.

Mr MacAskill: Is the minister aware that during periods such as the present, when fireworks night leads into the MTV awards and a major NATO conference, police resources in the city are fully stretched? As a result, Lothian and Borders police are discussing hiring officers from neighbouring forces to cope. Is it not ridiculous that council tax payers in Edinburgh pay not only for their own

force, but for hiring other forces? Is it not time to recognise that Edinburgh deserves capital city status, the same as the old bill of metropolitan London gets?

Cathy Jamieson: I will resist the temptation to make myself even more unpopular by saying that I will be at the MTV awards.

It is ridiculous that, this week, the SNP has not welcomed the opportunities that will be created by the signing of the prisoner escort contract, which will immediately free up police officers for front-line services. The SNP should welcome such opportunities. I have given a clear assurance today that the particular case for the city of Edinburgh will be considered in the context of the review that will take place.

Sport (Drugs Testing)

4. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking with Her Majesty's Government and sports bodies to ensure there is an effective drugs-testing regime in sport. (S2O-690)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): The matter that the member asks about is for UK Sport and the governing bodies of individual sports. The United Kingdom's anti-doping policy has the full support of the Executive and sportscotland. We reiterate that taking performance-enhancing drugs is cheating and we condemn it.

Donald Gorrie: As the educational aspect of persuading people not to use drugs is within the control of the Scottish Parliament, will the minister consider co-operating with his colleagues and with the relevant bodies to have a major educational programme in schools to explain to people the long-term effects of anabolic steroids, for example? I have been assured by an expert that not only are an increasing number of young males taking anabolic steroids to do better in sport, but they are taking them to be more attractive to the female sex.

Mr McAveety: I have never used anabolic steroids, have never seen the need to use them and have not been disappointed by not using them.

We welcome the initiatives that are being taken by sports bodies to ensure that young athletes in particular are reminded in their training programmes of their legal responsibilities and of the impact that anabolic steroids can have on their performance. A substantial body of evidence indicates that the drug taking that has been found in some sports has not enhanced, but has been detrimental to, performance. I assure the member that we will continue to work in partnership in work that is done in schools on drugs awareness to

ensure that young people who undertake sports do not feel that taking drugs should be a personal or career choice.

Drug-related Deaths

5. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many drug-related deaths there were last year. (S2O-668)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): There were 382 drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2002.

Mary Scanlon: I understand that around 60 per cent of those drug-related deaths were deaths of people who had recently been released from prison. Many such people are referred to waiting lists for community drugs services. What is the minister doing to bring about clinical continuity of care for ex-prisoners?

Hugh Henry: Mary Scanlon will be aware that, at the end of August, I announced a review of drug treatment and rehabilitation services, which was a commitment in the partnership for government agreement.

Mary Scanlon highlights an area that is of general concern. Too many prisoners are still addicted to drugs, too many people are inadequately prepared for release from prison and too many people do not get speedy and appropriate access to drugs services. We want to find out what can be done better.

One issue that is driving us in considering the need for a single agency is ensuring that different parts of services that support prisoners come together to work better and much more efficiently. Mary Scanlon can be assured that we take the matter seriously and that we are determined to improve things.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I acknowledge that there has been a correlation between the number of people who have just left prison and the number who have died as a result of drugs, but I do not believe that the correlation is universal. For example, I am not aware that there is such a link in the north-east, where there were around 50 drug-related deaths last year. Have other factors been identified that are closely associated with the number of drug-related deaths? If not, will the minister try to find out whether there are regional variations in the pattern?

Hugh Henry: We will undertake a comprehensive examination of the reasons for drug deaths in Scotland. Every drug death in 2003 will be closely examined in the review. Even before we get the details of that review, it is evident that many drug users do not use only one

drug—at the time of death, a number of drugs have been taken—and that drug activity can also be associated with heavy alcohol consumption. We also know that some of the people who die of drug-related causes, although not all of them, have taken drugs for many years and their general health has deteriorated as a result. There are concerns that people whose health has been affected over a number of years and who continue to use a mixture of drugs and alcohol can leave themselves more exposed to death than others. Complex issues are involved. We need to find out more about those issues so that we can more appropriately target services and try to end this appalling waste of life.

Community Partnerships (Membership)

6. Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):

To ask the Scottish Executive what its policy is regarding the membership of community planning partnerships and the partnerships reflecting community interests. (S2O-701)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): The community planning legislation places a duty on local authorities, assisted by their community planning partners, to consult and co-operate with community bodies. The specific membership of partnerships is a matter for partners to decide locally. However, the community planning process should be open to all relevant public, private, voluntary and community bodies.

Frances Curran: How is it possible that the Lennoxtown initiative, for example, a supposedly community-led project that receives £3.2 million of public money, can be set up as a limited company? The board members are self-appointed, the board's meetings are not minuted, there are no public meetings and there is no transparency. Can the minister assure me that that is not a model that the Scottish Executive would support? Does she agree that, if we want to encourage community involvement, we should support direct election to such community boards?

Ms Curran: The member will appreciate that it is difficult for me to comment on an extremely specific issue, but I am happy to consider any particular matters that she would like to raise with me in relation to the example that she gave.

I assure her and the chamber that, when we are working on guidelines for the development of community planning partnerships, we are ensuring that there are appropriate, robust mechanisms in place that are open and accountable to the Scottish public to ensure that matters are properly managed. The drive behind community planning is to ensure that we have local involvement and effective partnership working to enable us to create solutions to the problems that Scotland's

communities face. I am confident that we are on the verge of doing something important in developing governance in Scotland in a way that will involve communities and that ensures that we create the solutions that those communities need.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(SNP): I welcome the thrust of the thinking behind community planning. However, will the minister accept that there are problems concerning multichannel decision making and the silos that people get themselves into when undertaking decision-making processes? Does the minister agree that we must find better ways of merging budgets so that we can create a shift of priorities from one area to another?

Ms Curran: I think that community planning is an attempt to do just that. We are trying to encourage people to think beyond their silos and to be co-operative, strategic and visionary in relation to their areas. Community planning is one of the most progressive proposals that we have come up with to try to deliver that. Having said that, I do not underestimate the challenge that many partners, including the Scottish Executive, face in delivering that. I am sure that I can count on Bruce Crawford's support when we encourage people to work in a co-operative way to deliver strategic partnerships in their areas.

Gypsy/Traveller Sites

7. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to assist local authorities in providing suitable sites for Gypsies and travelling people. (S2O-673)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): More than 30 sites for Gypsy Travellers have been provided by local authorities with funding from the Scottish Executive. The Scottish Executive undertakes a range of duties to ensure that the needs of Gypsy Travellers are accommodated throughout Scotland.

Dr Jackson: I am sure that the minister is aware that there are continual problems throughout Scotland in relation to the availability of land and the lack of facilities at sites for Gypsy Travellers. There is no doubt that some local authorities are doing well in that regard, but others are not.

What measures can be taken to promote best practice in this area and to ensure that adequate facilities are available for Gypsy Travellers across Scotland?

Ms Curran: I am happy to reassure Sylvia Jackson that we have been doing that kind of work over the past few years. For example, local authorities are now expected to identify the accommodation needs of Gypsy Travellers in their housing strategies. Communities Scotland now regulates local authority sites for Gypsy Travellers

with specific reference to the standard of the facilities. We want to prioritise the general issue of tackling prejudice against Gypsy Travellers. We will continue to take decisive action on that.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): What powers do the police have to move on people who are using inappropriate sites in communities?

Ms Curran: There have been recent developments in encouraging co-operative working between police and local authorities. That is to ensure that any action taken is sensitive and appropriate and takes into account the needs of Gypsy Travellers. There must be a sustained approach to accommodation. We must move away from a culture in Scotland that has been insensitive—and downright hostile—to the needs of Gypsy Travellers and move towards a much more co-operative approach and a sustained solution. There will be partnership working between the police and local authorities and there will be proper engagement with Gypsy Travellers.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Those members who read *Holyrood* magazine will know that I wrote of an especially harrowing case to do with precisely this sort of problem. My good friend John Farquhar Munro tells me that, despite 100 per cent funding from the Scottish Executive, three applications on Skye have been turned down on planning grounds, because of objectors and so on. What are the minister's thoughts on that obstacle?

Ms Curran: I am sure that the member will appreciate that I cannot comment on any particular case because I do not have the details to hand. However, I am obviously happy to look into the case. Public policy should be consistent and meet the needs of all Scotland's communities. I am not sure what lies at the heart of Jamie Stone's question but I reassure the chamber that we are determined to tackle prejudice against Gypsy Travellers. We have had a number of debates in the chamber about that prejudice and we must tackle it.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the temporary sites that are envisaged in the new regulations may well cause difficulties for local authorities and communities? Will she give a commitment to do all that she can to assist local authorities and communities in ensuring that temporary sites are in suitable places with sufficient support?

Ms Curran: We must take sensible approaches that are based on proper planning, accommodation and facilities. We must ensure that people are well informed about the options available to them. Part of the answer is in the work that we have done with Communities Scotland. We are sharing information and we listen to the

different interests when determining whether a site is established or not.

School Meals (Nutritional Standards)

8. Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken to ensure that nutritional standards are maintained and met in the provision of school meals, particularly in primary schools. (S2O-676)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): As described in the report from the expert panel on school meals, "Hungry for success", four levels of monitoring will be undertaken. That will involve: annual reporting by local authorities through the national priorities in education; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education's programme of school inspections; a published report from HMIE, working with specialist associate assessors in evaluating school meals provision; and independent research assessing the implementation and impact of the recommendations from the panel.

Dr Murray: I am sure that, like me, the minister will be gratified to learn that the Soil Association praised the Executive's nutritional targets, comparing them with the "muck off a truck" that is served in England and Wales—those were the association's words, not mine. Has the Executive given any consideration to the suggestions of the association's director, Patrick Holden, and set additional targets for the use of local and organic foods? In particular, Mr Holden has suggested that more farms could be directly connected to their local schools. That would be of particular relevance in constituencies such as mine in Dumfries.

Euan Robson: And in my constituency as well. I understand the point that the member makes. The Executive is aware of the Soil Association's comments and its suggestion of additional targets. There has been correspondence—not, I think, with the Scottish Executive Education Department but with the First Minister's office.

That is being followed up. There have been no meetings as yet, but the suggestion that has been made is interesting and worthy of pursuit.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 9 is withdrawn.

Acute Services (Reorganisation)

10. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for reorganisation of national health service acute services. (S2O-685)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): Planning for acute NHS services is primarily a matter for NHS boards,

working with all their partners, subject to departmental guidance on consultation. I am pleased to see continuing progress in planning, consulting on and implementing acute and related health care strategies across Scotland. That is essential if Scottish patients are to get the modern health care services that they need and deserve.

Dennis Canavan: In Forth valley, the reorganisation of acute services is very much dependent on the minister's approval of the plans for a new hospital on the site of the Royal Scottish national hospital at Larbert. Is he aware that the letter that he has received from the chief executive of Stirling Council, which proposes an alternative location, is bristling with inaccuracies and that the alternative proposal in that letter would lead to an unacceptable delay in the construction of the new hospital? Can we therefore have ministerial approval for the Larbert site before the end of the year?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am sure that Dennis Canavan would agree that I should examine the matter thoroughly. I received a letter from Stirling Council in the middle of October and I am sure that he would also agree that it was right for me to examine thoroughly the issues that were raised in that letter. I have looked into those issues and will soon come to a conclusion. I assure him that I will respond to Forth Valley NHS Board very soon—well before the end of the year.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Does the minister agree that Stirling Council's on-going work to find land for the location of the acute hospital site that would be more accessible for the people of Forth valley than the site at Larbert should not continue to be sidelined in a negative and, at times, aggressive manner by Dennis Canavan?

Malcolm Chisholm: The reality is that there is a large degree of consensus in Forth valley on the need for a single site. That is welcome, but it is understandable that there are differences of opinion on precisely where the site should be. I must examine both the details of that and the nature of the consultation, which, in this case, was detailed and robust. The key issue is the site. I shall come to a conclusion on that very soon.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): The minister said that he would come to a conclusion "very soon". It would be good if he made an announcement quite quickly. Does he agree that the consultation process that took place was robust and that many communities throughout Forth valley contributed to it?

Malcolm Chisholm: I assure Cathy Peattie that "very soon" means quite quickly. I repeat that I am confident that the consultation was robust. All sides will think it right that all the relevant issues

should have been examined in detail.

Dental Training (Aberdeen)

11. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on plans for a dental outreach training centre in Aberdeen as referred to in "A Partnership for a Better Scotland". (S2O-687)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): The Scottish Executive has identified £100,000 of funding to develop plans for a potential outreach centre in Aberdeen. The first planning support resource has been allocated to NHS Education for Scotland, which will work with NHS Grampian to introduce outline plans for such a development within the next six months.

Mike Rumbles: I thank the minister for his answer, because the initial funding is very good news indeed. Will he tell the Parliament when, approximately, we might expect the Executive to make a public announcement on the release of the capital funding that will be required to establish the dental training centre in Aberdeen, which was a firm commitment in the partnership agreement?

Mr McCabe: There is not much point in my saying "in the near future", because someone will ask for clarification of what that means. I assure Mr Rumbles that there will be no unnecessary delay in reaching a conclusion on how that project will be funded.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister define what "unnecessary delay" in making that capital funding available means? In Grampian, there are some question marks over the £2 million that may be made available over three years. As I understand it, there is no written commitment, as yet. Will there be a commitment to releasing that £2 million? I also invite him to address the need for more dental school places. Will more places be made available in the dental schools and, if so, when will that happen?

Mr McCabe: I can only repeat what I have said. We will do our best to ease any concerns that exist in Grampian as soon as possible, but I am not in a position to do that this afternoon. Obviously, we are making every attempt to increase the number of dental school places. We are aware that the situation is unsatisfactory. As I have said, we are urgently examining the situation.

Mr Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, welcome the announcement of funding. Before additional dentist training is available in Aberdeen, what is the potential for using golden hellos and for extending the dental practice retainer scheme to attract and retain

dentists in the short term to address the gap in provision?

Mr McCabe: A series of measures, including golden hellos, has been initiated in an attempt to improve access to NHS dentistry. Undoubtedly those measures have made a positive contribution, but they have not been totally satisfactory and have by no means dealt with the overall problem. That is why we are reviewing all aspects of NHS dentistry, as I have said. We hope to have something to say in the near future.

A96 Dualling

12. Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to fund the complete dualling of the A96 from Aberdeen to Inverness. (S2O-678)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Executive has no current plans to dual the entire A96.

Mrs Ewing: Why not?

Nicol Stephen: That is a good question. Currently, 23km of the route is dualled and 137km is not. However, more than £25 million of improvement schemes for the A96 is programmed. That will involve five separate projects. We are also investing significantly in the road system in north-east Scotland through our funding and support for the Aberdeen western peripheral route.

We must prioritise investment. We want to shift the scale of investment in transport towards public transport schemes. That does not mean that road schemes will be neglected, but investments that are targeted on road schemes must have a clear and identifiable benefit and must meet the highest possible economic, environmental and safety terms. That is how we will continue to assess road projects. We will make significant commitments to several road projects in the coming years and the A96 will benefit.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): What is the status of Scottish Executive funding for the Aberdeen western peripheral route? Will the minister give me a figure?

Nicol Stephen: Nothing has changed. The Scottish Executive is committed to the road's funding. We will pay just over 80 per cent of the project's costs. Progress is being made. Like the ministers who gave the two previous answers, I hope to be in a position to reveal more soon.

Environmental Levy

13. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will actively support proposals for an environmental levy on plastic bags. (S2O-710)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): We will study carefully the proposals when they are finally published. We support all measures to enhance the environment but, like everybody else, we must study them and make certain that any measures are enforceable.

Chris Ballance: I thank the minister for his answer. Was that a yes or a no?

Ross Finnie: To try to reduce every issue to a simple yes or no answer would lead to an environmentally unsatisfactory position. That may be the way in which the member wishes to conduct Green party business, but it is not the way in which the Executive conducts its business. The sensible and rational approach to this sensible proposal is for us, like everybody else, to study it carefully and to ensure that it has the environmental impact that it is meant to have, that it does not add a burden and that it can be implemented.

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): I am sorry that my mobile phone rang earlier.

I am glad that the Greens and others support my environmental levy proposal and I encourage more members to do so. That shows that the Parliament will take environmental issues seriously. Has the minister discussed the issue with Her Majesty's Government in London, either recently or further in the past?

Ross Finnie: My officials and I discuss environmental concerns with our opposite numbers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regularly and the proposed levy has been discussed.

Equine Activities and Industries

14. Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what specific proposals it has for promoting and expanding equine activities and industries. (S2O-709)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): We have no proposals that are specifically tailored to equine industries. However, in the Scottish Enterprise area, the business gateway provides a single brand for businesses, which allows easier access to a consistent range of services that are geared towards potential business start-ups and growing businesses. Standard core programmes are available from all outlets and provide focused, high-quality support to customers. In the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area, the local enterprise companies act as access points for information and advice on the range of services that are available to new and growing businesses.

Mr Welsh: Is the minister aware of the massive

£760 million economic contribution of equine industries and of the even greater potential for employment in the sector, both in rural areas and, through ancillary industries, in urban areas, which would be good for small businesses, good for rural areas and good for Scotland? Government ministers in England and Wales are actively participating in the industry and have engaged in planning over a 10-year period. Why is the Scottish Executive not offering a similar deal for our equine industries?

Ross Finnie: I acknowledge Mr Welsh's long-held interest in the equine industry. There is no question of Scottish Executive departments not recognising the importance of that industry, whether in relation to tourism or other areas. We have no particular evidence of a need to replicate everything that is done in England and Wales. We have ministers who take responsibility for various aspects of equine policy, but we are a much smaller country and do not have the problems that were identified when the unit involved was set up under the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I do not believe that the case has been made for a replication of that in Scotland.

Fish Stocks (Scientific Research)

15. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what alternative scientific research it plans to commission into the reasons for North sea and north Atlantic fish stock fluctuations. (S2O-680)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Fisheries Research Services has a wide-ranging programme of research on the marine environment. The programme is reviewed annually and is modified as appropriate.

Richard Lochhead: I thank the minister for his response, although it does not quite answer my question. Will he commission specific research into the causes of the decline in cod stocks in the North sea? Has he been in contact with any of the many marine scientists from throughout Europe who say that climate change is largely responsible for fluctuations in the location of cod stocks in the North sea? Surely that is the key to strengthening the case that we will be taking to Brussels in December.

Ross Finnie: Unless I am mistaken, the inference to be drawn from Mr Lochhead's question is that climate change is not studied by FRS. He should be talking to FRS about that. He should understand that, as part of its regular work, FRS studies all aspects of the North sea, including ecosystems, temperature change, climate change and the salinity and nutrient content of the water. There is no way in which the current movement of cod stocks is not studied by FRS. All that work is

additional to the standard fish assessment surveys that are undertaken.

We have access to the information to which Mr Lochhead refers, and we have access to the understanding and knowledge of what happens among cod stocks. It may be that he does not like that science, but that is not a reason for me to commission other scientific research.

Glasgow Crossrail

16. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will support the development of the Glasgow crossrail project. (S2O-691)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): We will fully meet our partnership agreement commitment to support the Glasgow crossrail project.

Robert Brown: I thank the minister for his reply, although it was less illuminating than I thought it might be. Does he agree that the two biggest obstacles to a 21st century rail system in greater Glasgow are the restricted station capacity and the gaps between the north and south of the city and between the Central and Queen Street systems? When does the minister anticipate a final decision being made on the final approval of the crossrail project?

Nicol Stephen: I very much support the crossrail project and realise the benefits that it can bring to Glasgow. We discussed the issue yesterday during the debate on transport, and I answered an intervention on the matter from Bill Butler, who has been one of the strongest proponents of the scheme. I discussed the matter recently with Alistair Watson, chair of Strathclyde Passenger Transport. The scheme brings many benefits, not least of which are improvements in the flow of rail services between the north and south of Glasgow and use being made of the extra low-level capacity at Queen Street and Central stations.

One of the most understated benefits of the scheme is the benefit to the whole Scottish rail network. If people from Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, the south-west and all other parts of Scotland were able to travel through Glasgow—which, sadly, is not possible at the moment—they could access different parts of the country.

I am very supportive of the scheme. We need to carry out an assessment of the proposal that Strathclyde Passenger Transport has made to us. I am hopeful that early in the new year we will be able to decide whether to proceed with the detailed feasibility study that is now required.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): During yesterday's debate on transport, the minister

mentioned the new transport agency. He has not committed himself to a date, a time scale and funding for the crossrail scheme, but can he indicate whether the establishment of the new agency will interfere with its progress?

Nicol Stephen: It will not.

Bullying in Schools

17. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken to address the issue of bullying in schools. (S2O-675)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): The Executive has introduced a range of comprehensive and positive initiatives to combat bullying, such as supporting the work of the anti-bullying network and ChildLine's bullying helpline. Bullying blights young lives and is unacceptable in or around any of Scotland's schools.

Helen Eadie: Will the minister expand on how he intends to tackle the problem, with reference to a pupil in my area who has been forced to leave a secondary school because bullying at that school has not been addressed adequately? Will he also say more about how Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education monitors, evaluates and, finally, assesses the reports of school inspectors on bullying issues?

Peter Peacock: As I have indicated, bullying is unacceptable in any of Scotland's schools. I regret greatly the circumstances in Helen Eadie's constituency to which she pointed. Schools throughout Scotland have and are required to have anti-bullying policies in place. A range of new, good practices are being implemented across Scotland's schools to bear down on the problem and to eliminate it wherever it arises. When inspecting any school or local authority, HMIE will examine policies relating to social inclusion, bullying, violence and bad behaviour generally in schools, among many other things. It will seek to bear down on the problem wherever laxity in policy is identified. Through such measures, we hope to continue to push bullying to the margins of our society, because it is unacceptable.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Is the minister aware that we have been given to understand that revised guidance on exclusions is due to be issued shortly? Is he also aware that that guidance is awaited eagerly by parents, pupils and teachers alike?

Peter Peacock: They will not need to wait much longer.

The Presiding Officer: I am looking to call Mr Matheson, but he is not here. In that case,

question 18 is withdrawn.

Maternity Services (Glasgow)

19. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what assurances will be given to the public and clinicians that their views will be fully considered in the consultation on the future of maternity services conducted by Greater Glasgow NHS Board. (S2O-686)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): As I have stated previously, I will consider very carefully the adequacy of the public consultation and the substantive proposal that is submitted to me. I will pay close attention to the views expressed by the public and by clinicians.

Pauline McNeill: Clinicians have already made representations to me suggesting that the evidence that they gave during the consultation process has not been taken on board by the review group. I urge the minister to ask Greater Glasgow NHS Board to insist that a transcript of the process is made available, so that there is transparency and so that members of the Parliament and he can be assured that all the evidence that was given to Margaret Reid is being assessed properly as part of the consultation.

Malcolm Chisholm: I support the principle of full transparency in this as in other matters. I assure Pauline McNeill that I will listen to what clinicians and the wider public have to say on this issue. I have already received different kinds of representations from different clinicians. As I said last week, one of the distinctive features of this issue is that very senior clinicians are genuinely on different sides of the argument. That makes it even more complex than some of the other service reorganisation proposals that are being considered.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I understand that the minister will meet representatives of NHS Argyll and Clyde tomorrow. In that context, will he discuss with them regional maternity planning and impress on them, first, the absolute need to co-operate with Greater Glasgow NHS Board in finding a solution for all mums who live north of the river and, secondly, the importance of access, as it is not acceptable for people in Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven or Helensburgh to be required to spend five hours on a return journey to Paisley for basic health treatment?

Malcolm Chisholm: When I responded to Argyll and Clyde NHS Board's proposals, I certainly made it clear that it should do further work with Glasgow in looking at patient flows across health board boundaries. That is a key issue in maternity services planning that should be considered on a regional basis. Clearly, that further work will be

important before final conclusions are arrived at.

Point of Order

15:10

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Rule 7.3 of standing orders requires members to maintain a “courteous and respectful manner” in the chamber. Is it in keeping with that rule for Des McNulty, who is a member of the party that designed the voting system that elects members of the Parliament, to refer to that voting system as an “assisted places scheme”? He strongly implied that 56 members of the Parliament have no business being in the chamber.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I do not think that Mr McNulty sought to be disrespectful or discourteous; I think that he sought to be funny. [*Laughter.*] Within our framework, Mr Harvie, I think that that is quite within the normal give and take of debate.

Common Agricultural Policy

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-556, in the name of Ross Finnie, on common agricultural policy reform, and two amendments to the motion. We will take a slight pause as members clear the chamber.

15:12

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I very much welcome the opportunity in this debate to underline the significance to Scottish agriculture of the CAP reform agreement that was reached on 26 June. The agreement provides, for the first time in more than a generation, genuine and real autonomy in the decisions that we can make on the main subsidy arrangements that shape Scottish agriculture. The changes have the potential to be a turning point for Scottish agriculture and for rural areas more generally. Given the degree of autonomy that we secured, I must confess that I am puzzled by the last sentence in the Scottish National Party amendment.

The agreement has three main elements: decoupling and associated flexibilities; national modulation; and market support changes. Decoupling is the central policy in the agreement. Subsidy payments will no longer be linked to the level of production. Rather than responding to subsidies plus market prices, producers will need to respond to market prices alone in deciding what to produce and how much to produce and of what quality. Crucially, the decoupled payments will be dependent on producers meeting cross-compliance conditions, including the need for land to adhere to good agricultural and environmental condition. I believe that the cross-compliance provisions pave the way for improved environmental outcomes.

The policy presents some key opportunities as well as some potential challenges. The most important opportunity is the freedom to farm. Farmers will produce for the market, not for subsidy. Consumers will say what they want through what they buy and what they do not buy. The need for flexibility in response is essential if farmers are to continue producing and at the same time remain profitable.

Simplification is another major opportunity. Decoupling will dramatically reduce the bureaucratic burdens that farmers face. Under the new single payment scheme one payment will replace the six separate schemes we have now, with their multitude of rules and regulations to which producers have to adhere, many designed

to limit production, expenditure or both.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): As the amount of bureaucracy recedes, will the number of bureaucrats also recede?

Ross Finnie: The member will understand that I run a very tight ship. I hope that Mr Fergusson is not implying that my department is overstaffed. There might have to be adjustments and we will have to review that. That is part and parcel of the management of any organisation and we should not allow that to detract from the central message of the opportunity that the measures bring for the reduction in the complexity that current producers face. Not only does that bureaucracy cause problems, it imposes false incentives that move production systems away from market requirements, reducing choice and creating rigidity. Ultimately such policies are unsustainable in a modern society.

Decoupling also offers scope for environmental improvement. The cross-compliance provisions attached to the decoupled payments will require adherence to existing legal standards of environmental protection, food safety, and animal health and welfare. Farmers will also have to maintain their land in good agricultural and environmental condition, and separate work is proceeding in Scotland to define that in ways that are appropriate to our circumstances.

If there are opportunities, there are also challenges to be addressed. There is a danger that decoupled payments could be characterised as farmers being paid for doing nothing. In addressing that, the key issue is that decoupling is not payment for doing nothing but payment for delivering goods that society wants. Those include all the things that are represented in cross-compliance and maintaining land in good agricultural condition. However, it goes wider than that. It is first and foremost about producing quality food for the marketplace, maintaining rural landscapes, keeping jobs in rural areas and helping to maintain rural infrastructure.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): The minister invites us to endorse the objective of "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture". That document made little mention of organic agriculture. However, earlier this year the Executive brought out its own organic action plan. As we move towards CAP reform, will the minister reassure us that the Executive will use those reforms to support the new organic action plan?

Ross Finnie: The organic action plan came directly from "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture". It was mentioned in the document. We did not produce a completely unreadable and unintelligible 1,000-page report. The document

was widely endorsed by the agriculture community. It is easily understood and contains a number of areas for further work. The organic action plan was part of that. We did the same with the work on environmental issues; we took it much further in a more detailed report and that is a sensible way to proceed. We stand by the organic action plan and by implementing it in full in harness with the CAP reforms.

Another threat is the potential reduction in agricultural production, which might have knock-on consequences for the food chain. That was raised particularly by the beef sector, which might be badly affected, even in the short term.

A third and more important concern is to do with the environmental implications of decoupling. There is the potential for changes in the livestock mix and reductions in livestock numbers that could adversely affect valued habitats. Again, those issues will have to be addressed.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Ross Finnie: I would like to make a little more progress but will take an intervention if it is quick.

Mr Welsh: Hill farmers have always had limited scope for diversification. What future does the minister see for Scotland's hill farmers?

Ross Finnie: I will come to that, but I do not think that hill farmers are going to be hugely adversely affected by the reforms.

The main decoupling provision involves basing payments on the individual farmer's entitlement from an historic reference period—the average of the years 2000 to 2002. Alternatively, however, the provisions and regulations provide for the decoupled payment to be calculated on an area basis. That is perfectly feasible but would result in massive redistribution and I do not believe that that was the central plank of the reform, although that option is there for our consideration.

There are also options for combining the area-based and historic-entitlements approaches. Those options are potentially complex and would add considerably to the bureaucracy. However, there are issues that are of interest. Advancing decoupling in the dairy sector is one option that that sector appears to believe may initially be helpful to it. Therefore decoupling could be implemented in that sector in 2005, as in other sectors.

The agreement makes extensive provisions for partial recoupling in the beef, sheep and arable sectors. In essence, that means the retention of some of the expenditure paid out under the existing schemes. That could undoubtedly address some of the problems that I have highlighted and some of the problems that will arise in the

consultation. However, we must recognise that there are serious drawbacks to taking advantage of recoupling. Each of the recoupling options involves operating the existing schemes in exactly the same way as they operate now, with all the attendant bureaucracy. That could lead to the use of the wrong incentives, and no move forward to allowing producers to respond to the market.

There are other flexibilities in the agreement though. There is the provision to hold back 10 per cent of the decoupled money in each sector for payments to protect or enhance the environment, or to improve the quality and marketing of agricultural products. That is the so-called national envelope. In other words, it is the ability to hold back payments to use in a way that addresses some of the key problems that might be more fully identified in the course of the consultation. The advantage of a national envelope is that there is considerable latitude to design the type of scheme most suited to Scotland. There are some drawbacks because we would have to design that scheme and there would inevitably be an element of bureaucracy. Of course, we would have to take 10 per cent of the money to use for the national envelope, but it would offer us a necessary and important degree of flexibility.

The rural—

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Will the minister take an intervention?

Ross Finnie: I want to move on to the rural development regulation.

The rural development regulation provides for a wide range of activities on which CAP money can be spent. They are intended to help farm businesses—that goes back to Andrew Welsh's point. Some of the measures have wider purposes. Those rural development measures are currently funded through a mixture of direct expenditure of European Union funds, modulation and commitment of the Executive's own resources. Our funding arrangements suffer from the outcome of the 2000 settlement, when we received only 3.5 per cent. By any calculation we might properly have expected 8.8 per cent. However, Scotland, in common with the rest of the United Kingdom, applies a national modulation rate of 3.5 per cent, which will rise to 4.5 per cent in October 2005. The agreement introduces, for the first time, compulsory modulation throughout the EU, starting from 2005.

The value of national modulation in Scotland is currently increased pound for pound by match funding from the Treasury. That is a huge increase in the amount available to us—that can subsist up to the 2005 modulation rates. Even when compulsory modulation is introduced in 2005, it will be necessary for us in Scotland to have at

least a minimum level of national modulation to cover the programmes we already have in the rural development regulation. The key issue for us, however, is whether we wish to use higher levels of national modulation to transfer more money, and attract match funding; to increase spending on rural development measures; and to deliver the type of public goods that society wants.

The canvas is very wide. The rural development regulation specifies 24 sets of measures—including the new ones introduced by the CAP reform agreement—that meet standards of animal welfare and food quality. It provides us with a range of economic, environmental and social measures from which to choose. There are significant opportunities. We should explore a genuinely multifunctional farming approach by combining a range of different measures.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): My understanding is that the national modulation scheme that the minister is talking about might lead to money being taken away from our rural areas and put into the European system. Does it therefore make sense to keep national modulation to a minimum?

Ross Finnie: I am sorry if I have caused confusion. There is compulsory modulation, which will be circulated throughout Europe. We cannot avoid national modulation. All that I was suggesting to the chamber was that it is not possible for the rate of compulsory modulation to be left as it stands, even to meet the rural development programme. There will need to be national modulation. My challenge and the challenge that faces the Parliament is the question whether we should increase it and enhance our marketability.

All those measures are part of a wide consultation that involves all stakeholders. We have set up a stakeholder group and a range of meetings are going on throughout the country. I want to assure the country that the reason for the consultation is quite simple. It is to get the views of the widest possible range of sectors in Scottish society, not just the agriculture sector but the environmental sector, other businesses, retailers and all the rest.

It is quite clear that the Executive wants to use the CAP reform to put in place measures that are appropriate to Scotland. Our solution will be based on the evidence that we are taking. I commend the motion in my name.

I move,

"That the Parliament welcomes the CAP Reform Agreement of June 2003 as a good deal for Scotland; endorses the objectives of the strategy document *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, widely agreed by stakeholders, as providing the strategic focus for decision-making on the various flexibilities available to Scotland within the agreement; endorses the wide and open

consultation which the Scottish Executive has now launched to canvass views across the whole range of stakeholders before final decisions are taken, and further welcomes the Executive's initiative in setting up a stakeholder group comprising representatives of a wide range of stakeholders, farming, industry, consumer and environmental, to advise on the consultation process."

15:26

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): At the outset, I should say that I feel as if I have had to learn an entirely new language with the change of Cabinet brief. We will see how well I manage in terms of the linguistics.

In a debate in the chamber last week, we recognised that there are serious problems in rural Scotland that go beyond those experienced in the agriculture sector. It is important for us to remember that one sector of rural Scotland cannot be artificially isolated from any other. That is overtly recognised in "A Forward Strategy for Agriculture", although the better document that has been produced in the past couple of years is "Custodians of Change". The working group that produced "Custodians of Change" pointed out some of the current difficulties in paragraph 93, which says:

"because agricultural policy is predominantly developed within the context of CAP and environmental policy through separate EU directives, the arguments for change, particularly at an institutional level, remain polarised."

The CAP reforms allow us to begin to address that polarisation. I believe that we should welcome the opportunity to do so. However, we also have to recognise that net farm incomes overall are low and that in some sectors they are disastrously low.

While keeping the opportunities of reform in mind, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are also dealing with the livelihoods of individuals, their families and those who work for them. I hope that all of us recognise that we need to allow older farmers to remove themselves gracefully from farming and encourage younger farmers to succeed them.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I recognise what Roseanna Cunningham says. The financial returns to farmers over the past number of years have been exceedingly low. One of the fundamental reasons for that was the overvalued exchange rate, which lowered subsidy payments to farmers and lowered the market price. Thankfully, that situation has now changed. The market is beginning to pick up and more favourable exchange rates mean that we are seeing higher subsidy payments to farmers.

Roseanna Cunningham: Unusually, George Lyon is a farmer who looks on the bright side. My experience is that farmers in general are very pessimistic about the way in which things are

proceeding. Over the past few years, I know that the value of the pound has been an issue. I see that members are shaking their heads, but farmers' expectations are often connected to the way that things are going and to concerns about their industry.

I meet farmers. Indeed, I met some pig producers not that long ago who had grave concerns about what was happening in their industry. That feeling is widespread. If George Lyon has no problems, that is an issue for him. I do not think that his situation can be applied across the board.

That said, the Scottish National Party broadly welcomes the reforms. Reform was necessary because, given the imminent expansion of the EU, a policy that continued to link subsidy to production was untenable. Equally, it had become clear that food production had become distorted by the method of subsidy. Production had ceased to be linked to the market or to any real form of demand. We should also not lose sight of the international perspective. The direct production-subsidy link created barriers to producers in the developing world. Over the past year or so, that was one of the drivers for change.

The big new change that is to be brought about by the reform is that subsidy is no longer to be linked to production. Instead, the two are to be—in the jargon—decoupled. The intention is that that will allow farmers the flexibility to respond to the demands of the market. If rigorous cross-compliance requirements are put in place, decoupling will also allow a number of improved standards to be delivered, not least through the single farm payment, which will produce a much simpler support system. I note that NFU Scotland in particular is in favour of full decoupling. However, I am also aware that, now that the option of partial recoupling will be made available in a number of sectors, there has been a debate in Scotland about whether it should be taken up. I make no comment on the specifics of that ongoing debate, although I will say that fears were expressed about the effect of full decoupling, particularly on the beef industry. I understand that the jury is still out in some quarters and no doubt submissions are still being received.

That said, one or two questions occur to me. For example, has the minister attempted to quantify the knock-on effect of full decoupling, particularly in the beef sector? By that I mean the effect not just on farmers but on the processing sector, the supply trade, the machinery trade, the auction marts and so on. Will any measures be introduced to ameliorate those effects and, if so, what does the minister have in mind?

Perhaps just as seriously, I had presumed that the minister was aware of comments made by

both Margaret Beckett and Ben Gill of the National Farmers Union in England that retaining the link—by which I mean partial recoupling—would not necessarily be the best way forward. The English NFU is also “vehemently against” any use of a national envelope. Indeed, I have some detail about the extent to which Margaret Beckett has implied that there should be a uniform approach across the UK on the question of decoupling or partial recoupling. Will the minister assure us that, notwithstanding the fact that the UK is the member state, Scotland will be able to take a different course, or will we be forced willy-nilly down the road of UK uniformity regardless of what is best for Scotland?

Ross Finnie: We fought very hard in Luxembourg to ensure that all the flexibilities in the agreement could be delivered at a regional level. As a result, I give the member an absolute assurance that, whether or not Scotland takes up some of the flexibility to address some of the problems that she has raised, decisions on how Scotland will apply CAP reform will be taken in Scotland by the Scottish Executive.

Roseanna Cunningham: I am grateful for that assurance. However, the problem is that farmers and people in the industry are still uncertain about whether that will be the case. They are concerned about ensuring that there will be the possibility of partial recoupling—if that is considered good for Scotland—or a different national envelope. People in the industry are still addressing that issue and perhaps the minister still has some way to go to convince them of the assurance that he has given to the chamber.

George Lyon: Roseanna Cunningham is joking.

Roseanna Cunningham: Once again, George Lyon seems to think that this is very funny. He clearly needs to communicate a little more with some of the farmers who are communicating with me.

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: No. I have already allowed the member to intervene. I will now move on.

The question of how the single farm payment should be calculated is also giving rise to different responses. Both options—either to continue with single farm payments based on the average amount received over the past three years or to move to area-based payments—have their attractions. Obviously, making the payments simply on the basis of what has gone before has the virtue of consistency and stability. It is also supported by the NFUS.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You have one minute.

Roseanna Cunningham: However, I do not think that we can totally ignore the potential in moving to an area-based payment. The redistributional effect of such a measure is not necessarily a negative and it would be helpful if at some stage the minister could quantify for us the effect of such a redistribution. I appreciate that he will not be able to do so today, but such information would be particularly important given the current state of farm incomes in Scotland.

I turn briefly to modulation, which has been voluntary but will now be compulsory. There is an argument about the rate that is advisable for Scotland, but it seems clear that the rate will be higher than that set by the EU. Environmental organisations are keen that the rate should be as high as possible to allow for the maximum transfer of money into agri-environment schemes. I certainly agree that additional rates should apply. Although farmers are not necessarily opposed to that, there are serious questions about the number of farmers who can get into the schemes and the minister's ability to ensure the widest possible opportunity for take-up. Concerns have also been expressed that the money held back through modulation will end up benefiting farmers elsewhere. Indeed, I think that John Scott made that very point in his intervention. Such criticisms were well canvassed in "Custodians of Change", particularly in connection with the rural stewardship scheme. Perhaps the minister will comment on those concerns in his closing remarks.

In any case, most of us will agree that an expansion of agri-environment projects should be pursued if they can be made to work well. As a result, I wonder whether the minister would consider reviewing all the available EU rural development measures in Scotland as proposed by WWF Scotland—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will have to wind up now.

Roseanna Cunningham: Presiding Officer, if it is not possible for us to take interventions and complete our speeches, it will be extremely difficult to progress debates in the chamber properly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You took interventions. You are now running over your time.

Roseanna Cunningham: Well, I took interventions because I was told that I had eight minutes. Interventions take a lot longer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are now taking up a lot of time and will stop someone from the back benches getting in.

Roseanna Cunningham: I shall take the matter up separately.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you finish

now please?

Roseanna Cunningham: I have made a proposal regarding the WWF. The NFU is not happy with the way things are, and the WWF thinks that things could be better. If it is what—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alex Fergusson. Mr Fergusson, you have six minutes.

Amendment S2M-556.1 moved,

To leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert "notes the CAP Reform Agreement of June 2003; recognises that it has the potential to deliver a better deal for Scottish agriculture and for rural Scotland as a whole than the current arrangements; believes that the range of agri-environmental measures should be expanded to promote a sustainable rural economy that will be of benefit to all those involved in Scottish agriculture as well as all those who live and work in rural Scotland, but urges the Scottish Executive to ensure that decisions about the various flexibilities are made in Scotland, on the basis of what is best for Scotland, and are not subject to external pressures dictating UK-wide uniformity."—[*Roseanna Cunningham.*]

15:35

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): Clearly I had better speak within that time limit, Presiding Officer.

The subject of common agricultural policy reform, welcome as it is, is highly complex and lends itself perfectly to the old adage that the devil will be in the detail. I have attended three meetings in my constituency that were designed to explain fully the proposed changes, but I am still a long way from a complete understanding of the complexities involved. However, it is vital that we understand the subject, because in constituencies such as mine, which are still heavily dependent on agriculture as one of the main drivers of the economy, the financial input from European schemes is of paramount importance. More than 20 per cent of the gross domestic product of Dumfries and Galloway is still derived from agriculture, so we underestimate the importance of EU input at our peril.

Although the Conservatives very much welcome the proposal to remove the link between support and production, we should not forget that studies have proved beyond doubt that payments based on headage—that is, geared towards production—have been effective in driving forward the local rural economy. As we look to change the basis of support, let us not concentrate on agriculture alone but keep a wary eye on any effect that those changes will have on the wider economy.

The centrepiece of the reforms, as everybody has pointed out, is the breaking of the link, or decoupling. That is a word that would have been almost unthinkable only a short time ago, but it is now the buzzword, and it has been an eye-opener to me to see how most farmers, sick to death of

the increasing bureaucracy that so bedevils every current scheme, have embraced it. There is even a good argument that production-based payments have involved hugely increased costs at a time of diminishing market returns, and that consequently farm incomes have actually been damaged because of the support payments that were designed to bolster them. In theory, at least, a single decoupled payment will considerably reduce, if not remove altogether, most of the problems of the CAP that have attracted so much criticism over the years.

We whole-heartedly endorse the proposal to fully decouple all sectors of agriculture, including the dairy sector, from the earliest possible moment—that is, from 2005. We believe that talk of partial recoupling or the use of national envelopes to provide sectoral support for, say, the beef sector should be resisted. Such support would simply extend the entire bureaucracy of the current regime while delivering only a percentage of the current support. That would simply delay the inevitable, as full decoupling will eventually become the norm.

Furthermore, we are adamant that a single support payment, which will be the result of decoupling, must be based on the historic entitlements of each individual holding, rather than on any area-based payment. I am sure that the minister has had ample experience of the problem that redistribution of funding brings about with the switch from the hill livestock compensatory allowance payments to the less favoured area support scheme. Those problems would be as of nought if the new change were to be to an area-based payment. In any case, the reform is about changing the pattern of farm support, not the redistribution of it.

We have two areas of concern about the single support payment. The first relates to the dairy sector, which we believe should decouple from 2005, as I said. Our concern lies in the fact that support payments to that sector are not to be linked to historic production, as in other sectors, which can lead only to imbalances within the dairy sector over the next few years. I wonder whether, in summing up, the minister might explain to me why dairy payments cannot be made retrospectively in the same way as with other sectors.

Our second concern lies specifically with the suckler cow sector in the hills and uplands, which Andrew Welsh referred to. It is common practice for suckled calf producers to sell their calves on the white form. In other words, they can avoid the bureaucratic process of applying for the first tranche of calf subsidy, as they know that the buyer will add that amount to his bid. In effect, therefore, they are getting their subsidy through

the marketplace. The disadvantage of that, with the benefit of hindsight, is that they will have no entitlement to what is rightfully theirs, and that flags up the desperate need for flexibility—another word that I am sure will be common in the debate—throughout the process of allocating entitlements.

The minister will be aware of a number of letters that I have written to him over the past few months highlighting constituency cases that will be anomalous when it comes to the allocation of those entitlements. Most of those letters concern very deserving cases of young people starting out on their farming careers or of others who are taking a while to restock after the devastating impact of foot-and-mouth disease. There are also several examples of people who do not deserve to be let down or ignored during the massive exercise of reform. I make another plea to ensure that the maximum amount of flexibility is shown throughout the process in order to minimise the number of people who lose out during the reforms.

Our support is a little more cautious when it comes to modulation. The EU level of compulsory modulation is set to rise to 5 per cent by 2007, with a guarantee that 80 per cent of the funding raised will be returned to the member state. I am not particularly happy about the loss of that 20 per cent, but if that has to be then so be it. Our support for the voluntary modulation that the minister has intimated he will need to levy is based more on the Treasury's pledge to match fund that resource than on any in-built love of modulation itself.

We believe that the farmer who is in effect contributing that funding should have the first refusal to reuse it within his own business. In other words, every farmer should have the option to take part in the schemes that are funded out of modulation, not only the few who are lucky enough to be able to second guess how many points the minister will require for inclusion in a particular scheme in any given year. If that can be achieved and continued match funding guaranteed, the minister will have our support.

Obviously, cross-compliance is the price that farmers will have to pay for continued support. Our plea is that reduced bureaucracy, which has often been hinted at as the benefit of CAP reform, should become a reality. A temptation for officialdom will be to see cross-compliance as a way of expanding its numbers. That must be resisted at all cost and the real potential for bureaucratic reduction, in both forms and personnel, must be grasped with both hands.

The word "potential" is perhaps the one that best describes the proposals. I have no doubt that Scottish farmers will seize the potential that full decoupling offers.

I move amendment S2M-556.3, to leave out from first “endorses” to end and insert:

“encourages representatives of the farming and crofting industries to use the consultation process to lobby for full de-coupling of support payments based on historical entitlements.”

15:41

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I declare an interest—I eat food.

I very much welcome the opportunity that the debate provides to talk about food. It is probably the most important policy area for any of us in the Parliament. We can and will spend hours this afternoon debating the technical points about decoupling and modulation, which is important, but I want to spend some time talking specifically about food.

I ask the minister to go back to first principles when he is thinking about what is best for Scotland in terms of CAP reform and consulting people on the issue. We cannot talk about agriculture in a policy vacuum because it is linked inextricably to several other policy areas. When I was thinking about CAP reform it struck me that we must go right back to first principles. We must seek to create a Scotland where Scots eat healthily, where they have access to high-quality local Scottish produce that is safe to eat and that is produced in a way that does not damage the environment, and where we have a thriving food industry that provides jobs in rural and urban communities.

If we are to achieve that, we must make a series of policy connections. I believe that that is beginning to happen. It is now recognised that healthy eating is central to our aim of making Scots healthy. We now have a Scottish diet action plan, a healthy living campaign and, in Gillian Kynoch, our own healthy eating tsarina, but we still have a long way to go; Scots still spend less on fish, fruit and vegetables and more on fizzy drinks. Although our health statistics are improving, they still make grim reading.

We have also made good progress on consumer information and choice in food. There is better information, better labelling and better traceability, although—again—there is still a long way to go. I pay tribute to the Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd, which has led the way in the UK retail sector in demanding consumer-friendly labelling. It is now easier to source quality Scottish produce in our supermarkets, but there is still a long way to go.

The development of farmers markets has created a healthy sector in Scotland; 56 markets now have a turnover of £50 million a year in total.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Only about 2 per cent of the stock in most

supermarkets is produced in Scotland, so there is not really the range of choice that Rhona Brankin talks about. The problem for the stakeholder is that they can buy only what they are presented with.

Rhona Brankin: We have made progress, but we all recognise that we still have a long way to go and a big job ahead of us. Scottish Enterprise is rolling out a food and drink strategy and the creation of the Food Standards Agency Scotland is a welcome and important step towards ensuring consumer confidence in Scottish food.

We must make good connections throughout Government. For example, an area in which we need to be smarter is food procurement in the public sector. I seek an assurance from the minister that the Executive will consider issuing guidance to public sector bodies, including local authorities, that sets out how they can express a preference for locally produced Scottish food when issuing tender invitations within the best-value framework. I also hope that the minister will give a commitment to identify a single point of contact in the Executive to co-ordinate activity on that important issue. I believe that the will to make progress on the issue exists on all sides and that such a policy could deliver benefits to health, our rural economy and the planet.

The consultation on CAP reform is hugely important for all of us, whether we live in the countryside or the city, whether we are consumers or producers and whether we work in a factory that produces food or in one that produces furniture. Government is responsible for ensuring that building blocks are put in place that will create the healthy, thriving and sustainable Scotland that I outlined earlier. I know that Ross Finnie is committed to a food-chain approach, which I welcome. The importance of such an approach was recognised in “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture”. I believe that Ross Finnie is committed to creating a healthy, thriving Scotland, but I ask him to ensure that ministers throughout the Executive sign up to that commitment.

15:47

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I did not anticipate being called to speak so soon, but I welcome the opportunity to speak on a vital issue. As other members have declared their interests, I point out that I was born and bred in a rural community and that, as some members will have discovered over the years, my father was a ploughman. I have retained a lively interest in what happens in our rural communities. Age might be creeping up on me, but it seemed that life was a lot simpler in rural communities when I was young. In those days, the books had to be done—usually by the farmer’s wife—and checked out by the

relevant authorities. However, in the years in which I have had the pleasure of representing a rural constituency, the point that people have raised most with me, either individually or through various agricultural organisations, has been about the bureaucracy that came in via the CAP.

I will not talk about the acronyms that are involved because we could spend the whole afternoon discussing them—it would take five minutes just to list them. Members will know exactly what I am talking about. Some of the forms involved were mountainous and, for people who were up early in the morning and who worked late into the evening, to place that additional burden on them and on their families and staff was unacceptable. Inevitably, mistakes were made, which caused a great deal of bad feeling.

I welcome the concept that is suggested in the review of the CAP that there should be a single farm payment but, as always, I have reservations. The minister will agree that the devil is in the detail of every document that comes before us. I endorse Roseanna Cunningham's amendment because I want to ensure that money that is saved through the new mechanisms comes back to Scotland. I believe that 80 per cent of the savings that are made through modulation might come back to the state and I want to know how much of those savings will come back into the Scottish sector. We are not convinced that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will necessarily be sympathetic to Scotland's rural communities, even though agriculture is a significant factor in many of our areas.

I do not want the state to take over too many decisions; I want a strong, clear role for farming communities to ensure that the producers' needs are emphasised equally in any decisions that are eventually reached. I hope that, having rid ourselves of one set of bureaucratic rules, we do not immediately walk into another, which just comes in a different format. That should be carefully considered.

In his opening remarks, the minister concentrated on market requirements. Like Rhona Brankin, I am interested in the produce that comes from Scotland and in how that produce reaches our consumers. We heard the recent arguments—I think that they were mostly restricted to the north of England—about how little of the supermarket price of a carton of milk reaches the producer. Consumers do not realise that much of the profit from the goods that are produced through the hard work of agricultural communities goes elsewhere than back into the farming sector. That has to be looked at. I endorse in particular what Alex Fergusson said about the dairy sector, which seems to have been singled out for a special position.

In relation to money coming back into rural communities, I ask the minister whether there is any likelihood that money will be provided for affordable rural housing which is, however we look at it, an aspect of rural development that we need. We have recently had debates on the subject and it should be given consideration.

The transport of live animals and how new regulations will impact on the economy in Scotland has not yet been mentioned, but the National Farmers Union in the upper Banffshire area of my constituency has raised the issue with me. We all care about animal welfare—not a single person would disagree with that—and those of us who have a rural background know how genuinely people care. There might be one or two offenders—as is the case in any group of people—but in rural communities in general we treat our animals kindly and with care. However, it has been pointed out to me that to stop for 12 hours in the middle of a journey that might take only 14 hours would be crueller to the animals than it is to complete the journey in one go. Also, under-loading of animal transport vehicles could lead to severe skewing, as the lorries go round roundabouts or travel along difficult roads. That issue is not directly related to the CAP, but the Parliament needs to look carefully at the implementation of the new directive.

15:53

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The McSharry reforms of 1992 placed Scottish agriculture—indeed, European agriculture—in a straitjacket. The effect was to distort market prices, market supply and short-term land rents. The rigidity of the system prevented farmers from responding to environmental concerns and also put a bureaucratic straitjacket on the industry, which made it difficult for the farming industry to exercise any flexibility or to diversify.

The new reforms, including decoupled payments, offer us the freedom to farm for the marketplace, to respond to public concerns about environmental damage and to throw off the straitjacket of the bureaucracy that has so weighed the industry down during the past few years. The reforms are to be broadly welcomed by everyone who is involved in the industry and I hope that they will be welcomed by members from every part of the chamber.

I have not spoken to a single farmer who does not believe that Scotland should decouple and separate payments from production, although genuine concerns have been raised about how we should implement the reforms, how we should take account of some of the anomalies that might arise and how we calculate the single farm payment.

Of course, with export refunds all but abolished, producers in Europe will feel the full force of world markets for the first time since the CAP was created in 1957. The only cushion that will be left behind to support them is the single payment. That will indeed be a brave new world for many of us who have never experienced such a situation.

I will go into details that I want to discuss, but first I want to say that it is a little disappointing that milk producers have been left behind in the reform. Quotas have been left in place and milk producers face a 22 per cent cut in support prices, which has been only partially compensated through direct payments. That will add to their current financial difficulties. It is clear that they are in the arm lock of the supermarkets and face difficult financial returns from the marketplace.

On implementation issues, I want to knock down the view that farmers will give up producing food and will simply take the single payment for no return. The experience of the United States, which decoupled back in 1997 under the freedom to farm scheme, is completely the opposite. Production controls were also removed—which we are not doing, certainly on the arable side—and there was an explosion in production. Farmers did not sit back and take payments, but produced more. Therefore, I do not think that what has been suggested is likely to happen. Farmers are born to farm the land—they will not leave it unfarmed and take the single payment.

Another issue that has caused concerns and which has been debated by sectors of the meat industry is whether there will be a big fall in beef production in Scotland as a result of decoupling payments. There is no substance to that argument. Indeed, the current system has been a major barrier to increasing suckler cow production in Scotland. The 40 per cent heifer rule, whereby there can be claims in respect of non-producing females, has done more to drive down production in Scotland than any other single measure since 1992. It is nonsense that production will suddenly drop; indeed, the current system is reducing production in Scotland. If we remove all barriers, the costs of quotas and so on, there will be an increase in production. However, production might move from the west to the east and arable producers in the more marginal upland areas might think that suckler cow production is an integral part of the rotation once again and will start producing.

On calculation of the single payment, the minister should shy well away from thinking about going down the area-based-payment route. The experience of the less favoured areas scheme has left us with deep scars. I encourage the minister to consider historical entitlement as the only fair way of doing things.

Flexibility in a single payment system is needed. There is a question whether the process is an administrative process, which some countries have used to administer quotas, or whether it is a market process, which has been used for beef and sheep quotas. I favour the latter.

The creation of a national reserve to deal with new entrants, changed ownership, people who have changed farms in the interim period and hardship cases is needed. The model from 1992 exists—a scheme was set up then to deal with such people as part of the 1992 McSharry reforms.

I want to express a particular concern about west coast producers who have sold suckler calves and received the subsidy payment through the marketplace. If the calculation is done, that subsidy payment will end up with the feeder in Aberdeenshire and there will be no mechanism to pass that extra payment back to producers in the future. That issue must be addressed when things are being worked out.

I am running out of time, so I will finish. There is a fundamental problem with rural development regulations in that, historically, our base rate calculation under agenda 2000 was the lowest in Europe due to the failure of the Conservative Government to implement any of the accompanying measures under McSharry. I ask the minister whether we managed to get that rebased as part of the calculation, because I am unclear about the matter.

In conclusion, the CAP deal that has been negotiated by Ross Finnie working with his DEFRA colleagues has delivered a good deal for Scottish farmers, consumers, the environment and Scotland and it makes nonsense of the argument that the SNP constantly puts forward that only by separating Scotland from the UK can Scotland secure a good deal in Europe.

15:59

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I rise to support the motion in the name of Ross Finnie for two reasons. First, there are a number of farms in my area. Secondly, I take a keen interest in what happens at European Union level in all European matters, including farming.

In rising to support the motion, I want to emphasise a point that we do not take enough account of, which is the significant influence of the World Trade Organisation and the general agreement on trade in services across all EU matters. It would be useful if we parliamentarians took a keen interest in what our European representatives say when they go to negotiate the GATS on our behalf at WTO level. Along with enlargement of the EU, which has had a decidedly

important influence on events, issues relating to the WTO have been driving some of the work that has been done on the common agricultural policy. In that regard, I encourage everyone who has not already done so to read this month's *Scottish Left Review*, in which I have an article. It is not a publication that I regularly write for, of course, but I know that Marlyn Glen, at least, has read my article.

I congratulate the WWF and the NFUS on their submissions to Parliament. They feel that it is important to make representations so that they can influence outcomes. A number of points have been made today by members in that regard.

I have always regarded the involvement of the EU in our lives as positive. I am aware that not everyone shares that view, but I think that the setting of standards and the setting up of a good regulatory framework is beneficial. When ministers have gone to Brussels, they have come back with packages that show that cognisance has been taken of a lot of the concerns of the Scottish public, particularly in relation to the CAP. I remember speaking to a socialist farmer—there are not too many of them, but at least one is known to quite a few of us in the chamber—who told me that he would welcome the day when ministers would go to Brussels and negotiate in a way that would ensure that much greater benefit would be delivered to the rural economy by the European subsidies instead of having a situation in which some farmers have been known to have second homes in France, Greece or Spain. That has been a criticism that the public has made, although I accept that it might have been made some time ago.

I warmly welcome the fact that emphasis is being placed on getting regulations that can be used to tackle issues such as environmental benefit, methods of production and the creation of jobs.

I urge the minister to consider a point that was made in the WWF submission. I do not wholly understand the point that is being made, but perhaps the minister could explain it. Apparently, there are 20 unused measures that the Scottish Executive ought to be examining. The WWF says that most other EU countries do that. When an organisation makes such representations, we should take its points on board.

There are not many SNP members in the chamber to have a go at, so I must direct my question to Rob Gibson, who is the only person on the SNP's front bench at the moment. I know Alex Orr through my work with the European Movement and we are quite good friends, especially in relation to European issues. However, Alex Orr made a statement that leads me to ask what the policy of the SNP is in relation to subsidies. He

said that he would phase out subsidies altogether and, in relation to fishing, he has called for a "no" vote in any referendum on the EU constitution if conservation of fisheries is handed to Brussels. The people of Scotland need clarification on the SNP's policy. If that is what the party is saying, it is a matter of concern.

I have one other question. Will the Tories now head for the exit door, away from involvement, participation and engagement in the European Union, and away from compliance with the new future that we look towards in Europe?

16:05

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):

Historically, the common agricultural policy has not been a good deal for Scotland. Apart from a favoured few, it has done little for farmers or consumers, or for rural development or the environment. Currently, the 250 largest farm businesses in Scotland receive £50 million from the CAP, while 8,600 small farms take their share of just £13 million. "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" rightly states that agriculture should play a major role in sustainable rural development. After all, agricultural land covers more than 70 per cent of Scotland's land area and the industry currently receives more than £600 million in subsidies from Europe.

I am a farmer and I know that agricultural policy is complex and frequently inaccessible. Measures such as the single farm payment should go some way towards reducing bureaucracy—although I worry that partial recoupling may cancel out that reduction. We need to be wary of the potential for abuse in the idea that single farm payments can be tradeable. I have some concerns over whether the forward strategy provides sufficient strategic focus: it does not discuss the need for more agri-environment support or for a better funded, developed and supported rural development plan; nor does the strategy adequately address organics.

Modulation is probably the single most useful element of the June agreement. Increasing the level of modulation can greatly increase support for agri-environment and rural development schemes. I should like to endorse the calls that have been made by Scottish Environment LINK and other bodies for a high level of modulation—especially when Westminster offers matched funding. Will the minister consider, as an absolute minimum, seeking 10 per cent additional voluntary national modulation?

On the news last night, I heard a farmer talking about growing his crops. He wondered why he should bother when, at the moment, he is making a loss of £15 an acre. I am looking at George Lyon

as I say this, wondering whether he heard this. The farmer asked why, if he was going to continue making a loss by growing his crop, he should bother growing it at all when he gets his payment regardless. I am delighted by what George Lyon said and I hope that he is right in assuming that most farmers really do want to grow their crops.

George Lyon rose—

Shiona Baird: No, I must keep going. There is a distinction between, on the one hand, the people to whom George Lyon referred as real farmers and, on the other, the people in some of the wealthier agricultural areas who run agribusinesses.

Decoupling potentially paves the way for a fundamental change in agriculture: farmers will have to earn their money for the role that they play in sustainable rural development, rather than being paid either for the production of unwanted produce or—worse—for doing nothing.

Cross-compliance is vital and it is important that we aim for a high standard. Ensuring good agricultural and environmental conditions, in addition to its intrinsic merit, can provide a competitive advantage for agriculture and other rural industries, including tourism. That vital reference condition must be properly addressed in the consultation process.

I want to raise an issue of environmental justice. This has been mentioned before, but I want to emphasise it again. The CAP has been bad news for many poorer countries. A press release from Oxfam in June condemned the reform proposals that failed to stop the EU from dumping farm produce on poor countries.

If, through maximising modulation, we take the opportunity that the June agreement provides to channel resources more in the direction of rural development and environmental measures and of promoting quality over quantity, we might be able to go some way towards shaping a future CAP that is something other than an economic and environmental disaster for all but a very few.

A constituent of one of my colleagues wrote to the Parliament to say:

“CAP reform potentially could see the biggest change in the Scottish landscape since the Enclosures.”

I urge the minister to make the June agreement into a good deal for Scotland.

16:10

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Only last week, I spoke in the Parliament on the Rural Development Committee's report on integrated rural development, which identified farming and crofting as being vitally important to

the future of rural communities in Scotland. The fact that the CAP reforms were first proposed by EU farm commissioner Franz Fischler makes me nervous, because the same man recently presided over the disastrous common fisheries policy. Let us hope that he is more successful in finding a solution to the common agricultural policy that is in the interests of both consumers and producers. Although we must put consumer interest first, we must think of the long-term interests of Scottish consumers, rather than try to secure the cheapest food in the short term.

In my view, any country that is prepared to depend to a great extent on imported food does so at its peril. It makes itself vulnerable to price hikes and the results of monetary inflation. Although we might be in a commanding position regarding imports at present, that might only be temporary. Therefore, it is vital that we maintain a healthy agricultural sector and sustainable farming; of course, the most sustainable business of any sort is one that makes a profit.

In any negotiations on the CAP, it is important that our politicians fight for measures that give our farmers a playing field on which they have the chance to prosper. The fact that Scottish farmers have complied with quality controls over the past two decades means that our produce, especially our livestock, is of exceptionally high quality and is probably safer than any in Europe. Those quality and welfare regimes do not apply to a great many countries, such as Argentina, from which we and the rest of Europe import vast quantities of meat. It is vital that imports are carefully controlled and that there is an honest labelling system, so that consumers have a choice in what they want to buy and producers gain some advantage from advertisement of the quality of the Scottish product.

Figures show that employment on Scottish farms has fallen from 76,000 in 1982 to 68,000 in 2002. That is hardly surprising, given the drop in farm incomes. The fact that the industry is still so important to Scotland means that it is important that the CAP reforms are used sensibly, both to improve the environment and to leave a strong food-producing sector in Scotland. Scotland is famous for quality commodities and deserves to retain that reputation.

Rob Gibson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McGrigor: In a moment.

Decoupling subsidy from production will be helpful in some ways. For example, it should lead to a more diverse livestock sector and stop the gluts that are caused by the same sort of lambs and calves coming on to the market at exactly the same time of year.

We support the move to a fully decoupled system. If that is to be a truly agricultural policy, it must be about changing the pattern of farm support, rather than about redistributing available funds to different areas, which the flat-rate area system would do. Therefore, we prefer the historic method.

According to the representatives of the National Beef Association and the National Sheep Association, to whom I spoke yesterday, the industry's biggest fear is that the cattle will disappear from Scotland's hills and that, as a result, cattle finishers will lose the source of Scotland's famous beef industry.

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

Mr McGrigor: Not at the moment.

In addition, environmentalists are agreed that cattle on the hills are good for the environment and should be maintained to graze Scotland's hills. Therefore, it might be clever, as my friend Alex Fergusson has suggested, to provide a financial incentive—in the form of a calf subsidy—to the producers of beef, bullocks and heifers to encourage them to keep on producing. That could be done through the national envelope or, better still, if the practice is thought to be of environmental benefit, through modulation. One per cent modulation would raise more money than 10 per cent national envelope. That money could go to the beef-sector producers and the hill men who are making such a valuable contribution to the beef industry and the environment.

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

Mr McGrigor: I am sorry—I will not.

We are told that modulation is to be compulsory throughout Europe. That is enormously unfair to Scotland and the rest of the UK, most of whose farmers will be modulated, whereas the majority in Europe will not be, because of the small size of their farms. It appears that Scotland and the rest of the UK will continue to subsidise the rest of Europe through modulation. Our minister should highlight that enormous injustice whenever possible.

If we are stuck with the clawback tax of modulation, which may also have social implications by creating unemployment, it is vital that as many farmers as possible join the agri-environment schemes. Otherwise, we will have too many contributors and too few beneficiaries of modulation money.

I will take Rob Gibson's intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): The member is in his last minute.

Rob Gibson: People in the north, such as those in Caithness, have felt the need to use the national

envelope or modulation. I was surprised that Alex Fergusson suggested that modulation should return to the farms from which it came. Surely the member agrees that if we want beef livestock on the hills and in the north, help in that direction must go to those who are most in need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McGrigor has half a minute to reply.

Mr McGrigor: I have always argued that subsidies should go to the most disadvantaged areas, if that is what Rob Gibson means. The point that my friend Alex Fergusson made was that modulation should be match funded so that if it returned to farmers, farmers would receive twice as much money.

In conclusion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very quickly.

Mr McGrigor: I support total decoupling. We should get rid as soon as possible of all the red tape that has long crucified farmers. Farmers tell me that whatever system Scotland chooses must be similar to that of England and Wales, to avoid another bureaucratic nightmare.

16:17

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Members have made pertinent points that have covered a wide range of matters from decoupling and GATS to animal welfare. It is important to recall that the common agricultural policy was established in a post-war Europe that was plagued by rationing and food shortages. It served a useful purpose at that time.

Helen Eadie talked about enlargement. If we began today with a Europe of 25 member states that had vastly divergent agricultural practices, we might not come up with the present system, but that is the system that we have been dealt, so we must consider reform.

In an organisation such as the EU, progress can be slow and is often the result of painstaking negotiation that sometimes involves give and take by all. George Lyon talked about the changes for the industry in the past 10 years and the progress that has been made. Throughout his time in office, the minister has contributed a great deal to that progress.

The minister spoke about the challenges. I will highlight two matters that are on the agenda for the Council of the European Union's agriculture and fisheries meeting in November, and on which we need further progress. I ask the minister to do all that he can in partnership with colleagues to make progress on those matters.

First, I will talk about tobacco subsidies. Rhona Brankin spoke about healthy lifestyles and the

importance of policy connectivity. I agree 100 per cent with that. We know that tobacco is an addictive drug that kills. In the course of this afternoon's debate, three or four people in Scotland will die of smoking-related illnesses. Despite that, the tobacco regime accounts for 2 per cent of the common agricultural policy's budget—about €1 billion per annum. I understand that moves are afoot to support reform and that those moves include decoupling, but because the issue is sensitive for southern Mediterranean farmers, the clock moves slowly.

As I said, the issue is on the agenda for the next council meeting and the European Commission intends to table proposals with a view to applying reforms from January 2005. I know that the Government is pushing the case for reform, but the Scottish Executive has been central in promoting healthier lifestyle campaigns. If we want policy connectivity, we must consider carefully what we do on tobacco subsidies. I would like those subsidies to be banned and I would like the money from them to go into health promotion.

Think what could be done with €1 billion every year. Earlier this year I spoke in the chamber about the multimedia, Europe-wide "Feel free to say no" campaign, which focuses on preventing young people from smoking. The current EU tobacco subsidy would fund a campaign that is more than 160 times as large as that. Last month, the EU announced that €1 million was being earmarked to fund 19 research projects on cancer. €1 billion would fund 19,000 research projects on cancer. Add to that the fact that the tobacco that is grown in the EU is not consumed in the EU. It is third rate and is exported to third-world countries, where children often smoke it. That is immoral, and we need to speak out against that.

I turn to the sugar regime. Under the present system, EU sugar prices are about three times world prices. Maize prices are similarly affected. Despite that, the Commission, while encouraging debate, is making no firm recommendation about reform of the regime. Agra Europe has called the sugar regime in Europe

"the most protectionist market-rigging and expensive of the common market organisations for agricultural products".

The current situation is unacceptable. The big winner is the sugar-processing industry. In each of the eight sugar-producing countries in the EU, just one company controls the entire sugar quota. That monopoly means that the big losers are the farmers and agricultural labourers in the developing world, who are trying to sell their produce into a world market, where the price is a third of that in Europe. Colleagues, there is a moral imperative to act.

There is also a further reason why the present

price of sugar should not be sustained. Sugar is used in manufacturing production. It is an integral component of chemical and pharmaceutical products. Production refunds are available in some sectors, particularly in the chemicals industry, but the price of sugar represents a double whammy for citizens and taxpayers, who subsidise EU prices and then have to compensate for those prices through production refunds.

It is not a happy situation for manufacturers either. They tell me that refunds are patchy and unreliable. In some years, no refunds are made at all. We need to reform the sugar regime. I trust that the minister will take that on board and ensure that, the next time the matter comes up at the agriculture council—which is later this month—he and his colleagues at United Kingdom level will press for the Commission to come up with firm proposals for reform.

The motion aptly describes the progress that has been made in Scotland. I am happy to support it, and in particular its call for stakeholders to be included in decision making.

16:22

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Europe is a great thing, and it has done Scotland a lot of good. Over the past few years, however, many people in Scotland have had huge difficulties with its policies, which can usually be described with three-letter acronyms—the first letter is usually a C and the last a P—namely, the CAP and the CFP.

George Lyon: The view of the farming industry is that the common agricultural policy has protected it from some of the more cost-cutting measures that have been introduced by successive UK Treasuries. There is tremendous support on the part of agricultural producers for remaining in the CAP.

Richard Lochhead: I thank George Lyon for that intervention, but I do not recall saying that we should pull out of the CAP. However, people have wanted to change policies, including the common agricultural policy, for a long time. Some farmers have been saying that the biggest change in land use in Scotland this century is possibly about to take place. Many farmers think that the common agricultural policy in its current form has been failing for a long time. If £0.5 billion of subsidy is being put into a particular sector, as has been the case in recent years in Scotland, and if, as they have been telling us in our surgeries, farmers are getting derisory incomes and are having to add non-farming activities to their businesses in order to survive, then we can all accept that something is clearly wrong with the situation.

That is not the only thing that has been wrong

with the CAP. There have also been the food mountains—although they have been dealt with to an extent. As Irene Oldfather mentioned, there is a ridiculous situation with tobacco subsidies. The EU is trying to get more involved in health issues, so it is hypocritical for it to be involved in those subsidies. The issues around CAP reform concern not just Scottish, UK or European farmers; they concern farmers throughout the developing world. Part of the CAP reform agenda relates to promoting development elsewhere in the world, which we should not forget. Although there was a failure to make progress at Cancun, we know that liberalisation is still on the agenda, so even more pressures and challenges will be facing our farmers in the near future. Some way down the line we may lose the right to subsidise any products that are exported. These reforms are the beginning of change that will continue for some years.

George Lyon: One of the main changes that has been agreed is the withdrawal of export restitutions for many products that are produced here in Europe. That measure is intended to help world markets and trade.

Richard Lochhead: I accept what the member says. I am saying that there is more change ahead, because liberalisation will be on the agenda again in the foreseeable future.

I turn to food security. All farmers believe that change to the CAP is inevitable and have thought so for some time. Most farmers to whom I have spoken can prepare for that change. However, food security is important to the debate, as it was the founding principle of the CAP. As a nation, we must ask what we mean by food security. Is it still an objective and is it still required? If so, how do we define it? I hope that that issue will feature in the debate that lies ahead in the next few months and that ministers will take it into account.

Everyone agrees that farmers must farm for the market and for need. As Rhona Brankin said, when determining what will be in the marketplace we must define what we mean by need. We all welcome the simplification that is on the horizon, because it will mean that farmers may not have to spend as much money on consultants—although the integrated administration and control system forms will still have to be completed and passports and movement records will still be needed. Some farmers have mentioned cross-compliance to MSPs. There is some confusion about whether new burdens will be imposed because of climate cross-compliance. I hope that the minister will refer to that, because many farmers want to know about it.

I give a very warm welcome to the new emphasis on delivering new public goods for the people of Scotland and allowing our farmers to

play a central role in doing that and in protecting the environment. It is important that we raise awareness among the people of Scotland of the new opportunities that will be afforded them as a result of these changes. On the ITV news last night, a reporter discussing the CAP reforms said that they might mean money for nothing for farmers. That is a myth that we want to destroy. We want to explain what the CAP reforms mean for the people of Scotland and how they, as well as farmers, will benefit from those reforms.

A severe reduction in production may have a significant impact on downstream industries. As George Lyon pointed out, no one knows what impact the reforms will have on production. Production may not reduce at all, but there are concerns in the beef sector. If members have been reading the press over the past few days, they will know that predictions for the reduction in suckler beef cattle herds range from 5 to 30 per cent. The reforms may have an impact on downstream industries and the infrastructure of many of our rural communities, as reduced production would mean that less feed was required for animals and that abattoirs could be closed. The haulage industry and the marts would also be hit. We must take all those issues into account.

Many farmers are diversifying and that process must be supported. An impressive number of farmers are becoming involved in the production of biofuels and other forms of renewable energy. That development must be supported and encouraged. We are rising to that challenge.

There are challenges, because the outcome of the reforms is unpredictable and we will not be able to measure it. We know that our farmers are resilient and will adapt, but they will need the support of the Parliament to do so. There are many opportunities to protect our niche and premium markets and, above all, to ensure that we protect our traditional way of life in Scotland. It is incumbent on MSPs to try to attend the many consultation meetings that will take place throughout Scotland over the next few days and to hear the concerns of farmers. We can then have another debate in the chamber and move forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is one speaking slot left. I propose to give three minutes to Eleanor Scott and three to Rosemary Byrne.

16:28

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I will not speak fast—I will just speak normally for three minutes.

I very much welcome the consultation and hope that it will draw a wide response from all and sundry—not just from farmers and environmental

organisations, as one might expect, but from everyone. I hope that people will engage with the process, because it is not just about agriculture—it is about the whole of Scotland's rural landscape.

There is general agreement that there should be decoupling, which I support. Decoupling would give farmers the freedom both to farm and to fulfil the role that they are fond of telling us they undertake anyway—that of guardians of the countryside. Without becoming heavy-handed, if we set proper conditions for single farm payments that require the land to be kept in good heart we can ensure that farmers do act as guardians of the countryside and that good practice in looking after the land is maintained. For most farmers, that may not be a problem, but it would be good to have it written into the conditions.

There is less than universal agreement on national modulation. I echo the plea of my colleague, Shiona Baird, that there should be as high a degree of modulation as possible, with the proviso that UK match funding is guaranteed. I ask the minister to say whether the match funding is guaranteed in perpetuity at whatever level we choose to set it at. We would want such a reassurance before committing ourselves to that.

In some quarters, there has been a lack of enthusiasm for national envelopes, but I want to mention the possibilities that those could hold for the crofting counties. Most crofters will be below the €5,000 threshold for modulation and so will not be affected by it, but they could gain if a national envelope were used in, for example, the beef sector to encourage them to continue to keep cattle. There has been a feeling that crofters might give up on cattle if they were not required to keep them. However, for environmental reasons, as has been mentioned, I think that we want to encourage cattle to be kept on areas such as the machair. By using the national envelope creatively, we could make that happen.

Creativity is perhaps the watchword, as the national envelope provides many possibilities for funding rural development. For example, it could be used for breed improvement and for marketing. Slaughterhouse facilities are an essential part of marketing. I wish that we could find some creative way of enhancing our rural slaughterhouse provision, which is very poor. That affects animal welfare, rural jobs and the ability to source local produce locally. We urgently need to address the issue, which is a big gripe in the rural areas.

I said that I would be brief, so let me conclude by saying that the reform gives us many opportunities to enhance our countryside, but I want an assurance that schemes such as the rural stewardship scheme are not oversubscribed. The funding must be available so that any moneys that are modulated go from direct support to agri-

environment schemes. Those must be adequately funded and fairly distributed. The reform presents us with possibilities.

16:32

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): We recognise the need for decoupling subsidies from food production. However, we want to ensure that small farmers and crofters are protected and that they do not go out of business because of the change in the system, the bureaucracy that the system involves or the changes that will occur in less favoured areas.

Some 85 per cent of Scottish farm land is classed as a less favoured area. Therefore, it is important to emphasise the needs of the poorest farmers and crofters. For example, if the new single payment is to be based on historic direct payment receipts, will those farmers with the largest farms but a small proportion of LFA land gain more than the small farmer, the bulk of whose land comes into the LFA category?

We must also ask whether a fully decoupled system of farm support should be applied to Scotland. Decoupling for dairy payments will start in 2004. Dairy payments are made up of two elements: a dairy premium and an additional payment. Those elements must be brought within the single farm payment from 2007, but there is the option to bring forward decoupling in the dairy sector to 2005, so that it starts at the same time as decoupling in all the other sectors. There is a need for clarity on when that will happen, in order to allow farmers time to plan.

Clarity is also required on how set-aside should be operated in Scotland. The issue of whether the flexibility option should be used requires scrutiny.

Like Eleanor Scott, I want to make a few brief points about the environment in relation to the issues surrounding the CAP reforms. The Scottish Socialist Party is concerned that the list of criteria for good agricultural and environmental condition is inadequate as a framework within which to define the status of farm land. For instance, it does not cover the full range of landscape impacts or the habitat or pollution impacts on fresh water of farming—the impacts are only partly picked up.

The whole point of decoupling is to introduce environmental considerations into the awarding of farm subsidies. Good farmers have always been stewards of the countryside. That should be recognised, but we should also give farmers the tools to continue farming. The CAP reforms are necessary and welcome, but they must be predicated on an understanding of the desire for the protection of the environment to go hand in hand with a vibrant farming community.

16:34

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): This afternoon's debate has been characterised by the genuine support from all parts of the chamber for the coming changes in agriculture. There has also been an acknowledgement of the importance of agriculture to Scotland's economy and recognition that agriculture and the rural economy cannot be seen in isolation from other policy areas. Even those who have no interest in fields, seeds and green things recognise that, in order to sustain our cities, we need a vibrant rural economy and a sustainable agricultural sector.

In his opening remarks, the minister spoke about the potential for the CAP reforms to be a turning point for the Scottish rural economy. Most members have picked up on that and agreed with it. As well as welcoming the reforms, members have talked about the need for less bureaucracy. I saw the minister indicating his willingness to seek as much reduction in bureaucracy as possible.

Roseanna Cunningham and Rhona Brankin spoke about the need to address cross-cutting policy areas, such as environment versus production, and the conflicts between them.

The Conservatives have called for immediate and total decoupling. Nevertheless, they also called for maximum flexibility and acknowledged that there will be difficulties. The Conservatives might have difficulty in sustaining those arguments, because I cannot see how we can have total decoupling but say that there are special cases. Where do we draw the line around those special cases?

Helen Eadie and Irene Oldfather set the CAP reform in the context of the global and EU economies.

Alex Fergusson: Perhaps I can clarify our position. My call for flexibility was to ensure that, in the allocation of entitlements from the base years of 2001, 2002 and 2003, there is flexibility to allow those who are currently in anomalous situations and would not receive an entitlement to do so. That is not quite consistent with the position that Christine May has described.

Christine May: I am grateful for that clarification.

The key issues are the importance of agriculture to the economy, keeping existing modulation payments in rural areas as far as possible and protecting full-time family farms. I therefore have some difficulty with what Rosemary Byrne said, because there are many more large family farms in Scotland than there perhaps are in France and other parts of the EU. The proposals might affect those farms adversely. We should also consider sector competence and support, the impact on

regional gross domestic product, regional tourism projects and shifts in development pressures and settlement patterns.

In my closing minutes, I will talk about Mr Farmer. Mr Farmer received £30,000 per year in the years 2000 to 2002. In future, he will receive a single payment with no requirement to keep any cattle, grow any crops or look after any sheep. I heard what Richard Lochhead said about production being sustained. During the consultation process, it is important that we pay close attention; we do not want to end up with people going once round the farm with a mower, as has been suggested. There is also a potential for the single farm payment to move with the individual. That poses the danger of farmers moving from valuable land to less valuable land, leaving the more expensive land with no support at all.

Mr Farmer, with his SFP, could start farming deer or pigs, neither of which has ever received a subsidy in the past. That would impact severely on enterprises such as Fletchers of Auchtermuchty in Iain Smith's constituency, which has never received a subsidy and has been farming deer for 30 years. I hope that that point will be taken into account during the consultation process.

We welcome what the minister and his colleagues in DEFRA have achieved. We encourage him to continue to bat for Scotland, to build a vibrant rural economy and to bring about reforms that benefit all policy areas in Scotland.

16:40

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, where they will see that I am a partner in a family farm that is a recipient of EU support.

I spent quite a bit of time this morning trying to position myself up on the fence beside Ross Finnie, who is there on a different issue. The Conservative amendment is designed to let us come down off that fence with a resounding thump. The Executive's motion meets with the full approval of the Conservatives and we will be voting for it, but it is important to take this opportunity to make clear where we think the consultation has to go. We grasp that opportunity with both hands.

Decoupled payments to the farming industry are to some extent transitional or residual payments. When the minister winds up, will he talk about some of future issues relating to financial support through the EU and say when he foresees payments being significantly reduced and perhaps brought to an end all together? That is an issue about which very few of the people to whom I have

spoken have any knowledge and people would like to know more about it.

George Lyon and others talked about the threat to the beef sector. We need to avoid getting too bogged down in that issue, because the system that is being put in place could deliver support through the marketplace in a way that we have never seen before. One of the ironies is that, in many of the speeches that we have heard today, there has been a lack of understanding of the significance of market forces within the new regime.

Shiona Baird talked at some length about a farmer whom she saw on television, who said, "If I'm going to get this subsidy and there's no longer a need to produce, why should I produce, given that I've been producing at a loss up to now?" That is exactly how we will stimulate the market—the fact that it will no longer be necessary to produce at a loss will bolster the marketplace and ensure that those who have to purchase produce from our farms must pay a market rate for it. That will therefore create a demand that was not there before. When production was directly associated with subsidy, and vice versa, it was possible for the purchasers, the processors or the wholesalers in Scotland to buy their raw materials at a price below the cost of production, which is what got us into the position that we are in today.

Shiona Baird: The guy on the television was very much getting at cheap imports. If we can address the issue of cheap imports and get a good market price for our products, there will be an incentive to farm. That is the bottom line—we need to deal with the cheap imports.

Alex Johnstone: Indeed. I strongly support that remark. However, the system will give us the opportunity to go back to market reality in food production in Scotland. That is essential for the development of our farming communities, because very little young blood is coming into the farming industry. As we all know, the traditional route into the farming industry for young blood is through the farming families, yet many of our young people go off to university and become doctors, lawyers, accountants and whatever. They become accustomed to having some control over their destiny, so the prospect of returning to run a family farm, where the only hope for success in the future is to continue filling in forms and drawing EU support, simply does not attract the best minds and the best individuals available to us. That goes for our sons and our daughters because, as I remind Christine May, Mr Farmer may well be Mrs Farmer. If Christine May had made that remark to my wife, she might have got a mouthful.

Christine May: I was not being gender specific.

Alex Johnstone: Indeed.

The final issue that I need to address is modulation. The farming industry is vehemently opposed to modulation. I can understand why, because the schemes that modulation has been used to fund have resulted in a large amount of people paying a small amount of money and a very small number of people actually getting money back again. We need to build confidence in the farming industry that there is a route for that money to return to those from whom it came. If we do not, we will never have the support that we need.

I have a final question that I would like the minister to address. When moving money through modulation, is it possible to underpin the LFA support scheme with the additional money that is raised through modulation? If that is possible, it might solve one or two of the problems that we have discussed today about cattle moving off the hills.

16:45

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In general terms, the SNP welcomes the CAP reform. We note the effect that it will have throughout Europe to ease the market for African produce and the like. Although we want to ensure that we can supply our people in Scotland with the best Scotland-produced food, we must remember that we are talking about a wider policy, which will have a wider impact.

In particular, I welcome the process towards decoupling. The potential for a single farm payment means a reduction in bureaucracy. That will ensure that farmers can get on with what farmers must do. It is one of the biggest changes that has ever been brought about in farming in my lifetime and it is most welcome.

However, the devil is in the detail. The minister must give us some cast-iron guarantees in relation to how we support people in our less favoured areas. I know that it is early in the consultation for him to do so, but he should give us some indications today. For example, how will he ensure that suckler cows can still be produced in Orkney, Caithness or the crofting areas? I hope that he will talk about such examples today.

The policy has to address the problems of depopulation in rural areas. Highland Council is addressing the population time bomb with which we are threatened in the Highlands because of the considerable difficulties that the problem causes. Keeping people in the hills and glens does not fit with the easy definitions and solutions of the NFU at its top echelons, which are to go straight for decoupling, no modulation and all the rest of it. We have to get real about the fact that Scotland is a country with a difficult climate and a difficult

geography.

I have to declare an interest as a member of the Scottish Crofting Foundation. I am obviously interested in supporting what that body says. I have also taken advice from farmers and crofters throughout our area in order to make these remarks. The SCF says:

"A reduction in agricultural activity and an overall fall in livestock numbers in the Highlands and Islands has been predicted".

Last year, Ross Finnie said in the chamber that that could mean a downturn in activity. If one job is lost on the croft or farm, that can lead to three further job losses downstream. That is precisely the kind of issue on which we need guarantees, so that we can prevent it from happening. Locally, we have seen problems with the state veterinary service, which has reduced employment. We have also seen a cutting away at the economy in the most remote areas. We must ensure that the CAP reform benefits all the communities of Scotland and not just the best-off farming sector.

I have suggested that we need to ensure that modulation is targeted in such a way as to help those who are most in need. Colleagues in the north and in the marginal areas have said that they hope that some detail can be put on the figures that have been given so far. Indeed, at the beginning of her opening speech for the SNP, Roseanna Cunningham asked the minister for some detail on the figures. The minister has to spell out the sort of rural development schemes that have the potential to be used with modulation. We need to know about the practicality of applying some of the schemes that are available through the CAP reform.

I said earlier that the devil is in the detail. We are concerned about issues such as the historic payments that were made under the sheep annual premium in 2001. The payment was low because, although the price of lamb in the UK was low that year, lamb prices were high in other parts of the European Union. We would like to press to have that low figure discounted in the process of averaging out the historic payments.

There is also concern that thousands of acres that have not been registered for IACS will suddenly become available when large sporting estates put a few sheep on to fields in order to qualify for good agricultural and environmental conditions and to apply for single farm payments. We would like to know whether such a scam can be ruled out.

We also want the minister to listen to the population out there. People are asking for a food policy that allows the Scottish public to buy food that is produced in our hills and glens. Although I am glad that the minister has brought in

stakeholder groups to discuss the matter, he must ensure that consumers and others have a good deal more of a say than some of the usual suspects among the producer groups.

Although we generally support the agreement, the forward strategy for agriculture has to marry the potential for farmers and crofters to produce food with the ability of the people of Scotland to buy it.

16:51

Ross Finnie: First, I welcome Roseanna Cunningham to her first debate on the CAP and on agricultural policy in general. I am sure that all members shared my sense of disappointment that it was not Roseanna but Alex Fergusson who raised the difficulties with blue payment forms and that it was George Lyon and others who mentioned the dry heifer rule, which is something that she will come to love in due course. That said, we might get rid of it through this CAP reform. Indeed, I felt a real sense of poignancy that she did not express a view on whether we should have rotational or non-rotational set-aside. These matters have troubled me for the past four years, so she should not worry about them.

To be serious, I think that Roseanna Cunningham tried to take a different route with regard to supporting or not supporting the policy. However, her arguments were not terribly convincing. The Executive has presented Scotland with extraordinarily worthwhile opportunities and flexibilities, and I can only repeat that we will decide the policy.

Rob Gibson and Richard Lochhead suggested that we might lose production. They did not necessarily agree with George Lyon's proposition in that regard. Indeed, although George's view might well be right, the point is not that members should be saying to me, "Gosh, this is a great problem; you must give us some guarantees." Instead, they ought to be saying whether they want to use the flexibilities within the agreement to ensure that we reach a positive view about, for example, the national envelopes with which we can design schemes to ameliorate the very problems that they have raised. That is part of the consultation process and the reason why I fought for those flexibilities in Luxembourg. I genuinely believe that we will need those flexibilities to address some environmental issues. As a result, I do not want to hear moaning and groaning about what might or might not happen. Instead, I want members to put forward positive views about how they would use the instruments that are available.

Roseanna Cunningham: The minister should be a little fairer. The difficulty lies in how we are able to quantify any potential impacts to ensure that any decisions on the various options are the

right ones. Indeed, I posed that very question to the minister.

Ross Finnie: Roseanna Cunningham will be aware that some of those figures are already in the public domain and come from economists in the Scottish Agricultural College and from my own department. Quality Meat Scotland has produced figures for the beef sector. None of those figures is very different in their final forms and, as a result, figures for the key area that she highlighted are well known.

Alex Fergusson referred to the agreement's complexity. Indeed, that was nowhere better exemplified than in his colleague Jamie McGrigor's speech. Jamie demonstrated an appalling ignorance of the difference between pillar 1 funding and pillar 2 funding. I would have thought that, by now, even he would have understood that if one modulates money into pillar 2, it does not become available to support production. However, Alex understands that the agreement is complex. Perhaps he will discuss the matter with Jamie in due course.

I must confess to Helen Eadie that I have not read the *Scottish Left Review*. I apologise for that, even though some voices behind me indicated that it was not that widely read anyway. I understand that the comments to which she referred were made in the context of the World Trade Organisation and GATS. Irene Oldfather mentioned the tobacco and sugar regimes, and I shall talk to her later about the Lomé convention, which we both recall, and its attempt to protect the Caribbean nations.

In going through those issues, Margaret Ewing raised the question of what we do about modulation, what the levels of modulation are and what should be done with the 80 per cent of funds retained. The part of the guaranteed minimum that we will get would be used only if there have to be payments to reform other regimes. It is not a matter of syphoning off money to subsidise other parts of the country; it is a matter of paying for the fundamental reforms.

That brings me to the point made by Alex Johnstone about the financial perspective. The current financial perspective ends in 2006 and is being reviewed between 2007 and 2013. The Berlin summit has already been set and we do not anticipate that the effect of new members will affect that in the medium term. The agricultural subsidy is not designed to be degressed in that period, and that is an important point.

The challenge before us is to examine the detail of the agreement as it comes, to use the consultation period in a constructive way and to consider the opportunities that decoupling offers us. The whole question of simplification has been

mentioned by others. Rhona Brankin's point that we should also see the exercise as an attempt to reform further our whole attitude to the food chain, from bottom to top and from top back down to bottom, is also important. We must understand the relationships in the food chain, and that has a lot to do with the difficulties in the dairy sector. There is a lack of understanding about who gets what in that chain, and when we compare ourselves with other mainland European nations we can see that many get a much better return from the same chain by having understood it better. The opportunities of decoupling, which can make us progressively more market orientated, also offer us great opportunities in that regard.

I repeat that it is not a question of simply saying, "Oh, there may be difficulties." I believe that we have the armoury of measures that can allow us to develop ways of ameliorating and dealing with any possibilities of transfer in production. More particularly, that approach can allow us to deal with some of the environmental degradation that could arise if we get the wrong mix of livestock on our high hills. That matter of real concern was raised by Shiona Baird and other members during the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There is a great deal of chatter in the chamber. I ask members to concentrate on the minister's speech.

Ross Finnie: Let me say something about the rural development regulation. The WWF has indeed put forward proposals that suggest that we do not use all the measures, but it is a question of having the money. There is no point in applying 44 measures and spreading the jam so thinly that it makes not one whit of difference. We want to be able to use modulation in an imaginative way that gives us a greater resource, which will then allow us to utilise more of the measures within the rural development regulation but in a way that actually makes a difference to the environmental condition of our rural countryside. I do not subscribe to the proposition that we should simply take a penny from each farmer and give them the penny back. It would be foolish to believe that that would make one whit of difference to rural Scotland or its environmental condition.

We must take a much more sensible view. If we want farmers to engage in the process, we cannot expect them to do so on an annual basis. We have to look over a five, six, seven or eight-year time scale and say, "Yes, you are contributing to that process and, over that time scale, you will all get your money back. Individually and collectively, you are benefiting from the improvement that that makes to rural Scotland."

Those are the main issues, but the important point to make is that the consultation does not end until January. It is therefore important that all

members who have taken part in the debate and who have reflected genuine concerns on behalf of many sectors in their communities on the issues that they wish to have addressed take the ample opportunities available within the consultation process to express their concerns. We are conducting an extensive programme of meetings throughout the country. Indeed, a meeting was held in the south-west last night and more than 200 people attended, which gives us a good idea of the number of people who are genuinely interested in taking up the opportunity of contributing to the process. Once—and only once—we have gathered in those views will the Scottish Executive come to a view about how best to take the basic decoupled proposition and fashion it in a way that best meets the circumstances of Scottish agriculture.

I repeat that the reform offers us enormous opportunities to change the face of Scottish agriculture. In so doing, it also offers us opportunities to meet the aims of the strategic framework that is set out within the strategy for agriculture to deliver for our rural communities a much more sustainable form of agriculture, and for agriculture in Scotland to continue to be the primary cog in a highly successful food chain—a primary cog that supplies high-quality produce in a way that enhances our environment.

All those objectives can be met if we attend to the detail and if people respond to the Executive's call for them to participate actively in the consultation process on the reform.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I have a point of information and clarification from Alex Fergusson on the debate on the common agricultural policy that has just finished. Mr Fergusson has asked me to say that he should have drawn the attention of the chamber to his entry in the register of members' interests as a limited partner in a farming partnership in south Ayrshire.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-549, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 22 November 2003 on the draft Proceeds of Crime 2002 Amendment (Scotland) Order 2003;

(b) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 22 November 2003 on the Scottish Legal Aid Board (Employment of Solicitors to Provide Criminal Legal Assistance) Amendment Regulations 2003 (SSI 2003/511);

(c) that Stage 1 of the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill be completed by 13 February 2004; and

(d) that Stage 2 of the Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Bill be completed by 3 December 2003.—[*Tavish Scott.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are potentially 11 questions as a result of today's business. I point out, in relation to this morning's debate on sustainable Scotland, that if the amendment in the name of Ross Finnie is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ted Brocklebank falls. In relation to this morning's debate on the future of Scottish agriculture, if the amendment in the name of Ross Finnie is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Roseanna Cunningham and Alex Johnstone fall.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-559.3, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-559, in the name of Robin Harper, on sustainable Scotland, 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)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)

McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 36, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-559.1, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S2M-559, in the name of Robin Harper, on sustainable Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 36, Against 72, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S2M-559.2, in the name of Ted Brocklebank, falls.

The next question is, that motion S2M-559, in the name of Robin Harper, on sustainable Scotland, 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)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 73, Against 13, Abstentions 24.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to a Scotland that delivers sustainable development, puts environmental concerns at the heart of public policy and secures environmental justice for all of Scotland's communities; welcomes the Executive's commitment to introduce Strategic Environmental Assessment for public sector strategies, programmes and plans, and welcomes the demonstration of the commitment to sustainable development in every section of *A Partnership for a Better Scotland*.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-560.2, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-560, in the name of Mr Mark Ruskell, on the future of 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)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 36, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, amendment S2M-560.3, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, and amendment S2M-560.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, fall.

The next question is, that motion S2M-560, in the name of Mr Mark Ruskell, on the future of 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)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)

Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 76, Against 34, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes that in accordance with *A Partnership for a Better Scotland* the Scottish Executive will apply the precautionary principle in relation to the planting of GM crops; notes that no decision has been taken on the possible commercialisation of GM crops; recognises that it would be premature to do so before the results of the farm scale trials and the GM dialogue have been fully evaluated, and notes the Executive's continuing commitment to protecting human health, animal health and the environment.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-556.1, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S2M-556, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the common agricultural policy, be agreed to. Are

we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 37, Against 72, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-556.3, in the name of Alex Fergusson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-556, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the common agricultural policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)

Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 11, Against 68, Abstentions 32.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next and final question is, that motion S2M-556, in the name of Ross Finnie, on common agricultural policy reform, 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)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)

Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 6, Abstentions 24.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the CAP Reform Agreement of June 2003 as a good deal for Scotland; endorses the objectives of the strategy document *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, widely agreed by stakeholders, as providing the strategic focus for decision-making on the various flexibilities available to Scotland within the agreement; endorses the wide and open consultation which the Scottish Executive has now launched to canvass views across the whole range of stakeholders before final decisions are taken, and further welcomes the Executive's initiative in setting up a stakeholder group comprising representatives of a wide range of stakeholders, farming, industry, consumer and environmental, to advise on the consultation process.

Wind Farms

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-424, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on wind farms. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Members might like to know that there has been an unprecedented level of interest in the subject of this debate in the forum section of the Scottish Parliament live website. The debate is also heavily subscribed.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern the proliferation of planning applications for onshore wind farms throughout Scotland; is further concerned, whilst supporting renewable energy, about the environmental and landscape impact of wind farms and understands that these frequently face vigorous local opposition; believes that the current planning regime provides inadequate guidance to local authorities, communities and developers in relation to the siting of wind farms; considers that the Scottish Executive should bring forward as a matter of urgency new planning guidance on the siting of wind farms taking proper account of these factors, and further considers that the Executive should declare a moratorium on the determination of locally-opposed wind farm planning applications until such guidance has taken effect.

17:13

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to present this motion for debate and I thank all the members who have signed it. I welcome to the public gallery people who have an interest in the subject who have travelled all the way from Angus, Perthshire, Argyll and other parts of Scotland to watch this evening's debate.

I lodged my motion in response to meetings with my constituents in Mid Scotland and Fife and meetings with power companies that are concerned about the lack of clear planning guidelines. However, it is clear that concerns exist throughout Scotland and, as you said, Presiding Officer, it is a measure of the public concern about the matter that the discussion forum on wind farms on the Scottish Parliament live website has attracted more entries from the public than any other discussion forum in the Parliament's history.

Wind farms can be extremely large, with turbines up to 100m tall, and they will dramatically affect the appearance of the landscape. The cumulative effect of all the developments that are being proposed in Scotland, if they are allowed to proceed, would be the most significant change in our landscape in several generations. Public interest in the matter is immense and it is essential that the Parliament is seen to address the issues that are raised as a result of the deluge of

planning applications in recent months.

At the outset, I stress that I am not against renewable energy, nor am I against wind farms per se. I fully support the need for all of us to play our part in reducing CO₂ emissions. However, the existing planning guidance that is contained in national planning policy guideline 6 was last revised in November 2000 and it is time for a new national framework with clear planning guidelines that will outline the capacity of different parts of Scotland to accommodate wind farms. It is also time for a clear line of dialogue between the Scottish Executive, planning authorities and local people. In the meantime, a moratorium on existing unapproved applications that face local opposition would give us an opportunity to have a thorough review of how to achieve the Executive's goal of having 20 per cent of energy supplied by renewables by 2010.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I agree that local opinion must be taken into account in the planning process, but the wording of the motion seems to be slightly woolly. Is the member talking about a certain level, number or proportion of residents in an area being opposed to a wind farm, or does he mean that there should be a plebiscite in that area? What exactly is he suggesting?

Murdo Fraser: I am suggesting that there should be a moratorium where there is opposition. If there is opposition to a wind farm in a particular area, that should be enough to halt it, as people will need to pause and think. I will elaborate on the matter shortly, if Mr Ewing will forgive me.

A moratorium would enable Scotland to develop a cohesive strategy to reach the Executive's goal in the most efficient, environmentally sensitive and economic manner possible. The Parliament's Enterprise and Culture Committee—of which I am a member—will commence an inquiry into the issue in January. Without a moratorium, the danger is that we will shut the stable door once the horse has bolted.

Concerns that have been expressed on the website and raised elsewhere range from the potential impact on tourism—surveys indicate that tourists come to Scotland not to look at wind farms, but for the unspoilt beauty of our landscape—and the knock-on effects of that impact on our economy through to the environmental impact of the construction of wind farms, the destruction of natural habitats, threats to wildlife and pollution. The contributors to the website are not nimbys who are concerned about their property prices—they are ordinary people whose lives are being disrupted by planning applications for turbines; some of those turbines could be up to 100m high and sited very close to homes and businesses. One posting on the

website reads:

"I live in an area where Scottish Power has applied for planning permission to build 17, 93mtr turbines. The closest of these is to be a mere 600mtrs from my property ... How close is too close?"

I have heard it said in various quarters that there is nothing wrong with existing planning guidance and that it is robust enough to deal with current and expected applications. However, even the Executive's own advisers in Scottish Natural Heritage have expressed concerns about the high degree of competition for sites and a first-past-the-post race to book grid capacity and secure planning permission. SNH believes that it would be helpful if there were a national framework to provide steerage as to the expected capacity of different parts of Scotland to accommodate renewable energy and—crucially—the share that one planning authority should accommodate. Each planning authority could then plan strategically. I fully support that view.

The pressure that is being put on local authorities by the current deluge of applications is immense. Local planning departments do not have the expertise or staff to cope with all the details in such a quantity of applications. Council officials have expressed concerns about the costs of local inquiries and the burden on councils' budgets of a proliferation of inquiries arising from the large number of planning applications.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Does the member agree that it is unsatisfactory for SNH, having raised objections, not to agree to appear at public inquiries? That is unsatisfactory both for the objector and the applicant. People's natural human rights are being denied.

Murdo Fraser: That is a fair point, but I would prefer to deal with wider issues, if I may. Mr Crawford makes his point well and I am sure that he will do so again.

Any guidelines that are introduced must take account of the economic and environmental impact of developments, both at local and national level. As the only control is the planning system, it is extremely concerning that guidelines are currently so inadequate. At a meeting that I and a number of other members attended, which was hosted by Scottish Enterprise, I raised that matter with a representative of the power companies. They expressed their frustrations at the number of applications that they have to make, at huge cost in terms of time and resources, to get some of their proposals accepted. The power companies expect a success rate of one in eight.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: If Mr Purvis will forgive me, I will

not. I have taken several interventions and I have a few more points to make—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: And you are in your last minute.

Murdo Fraser: Clear guidelines and a planning framework would make the process more economic for the power companies, as they would apply for planning only for sites and areas that were approved for development. That is why we need to take some sort of zonal approach.

In the first session of the Parliament, the Rural Development Committee recommended that the Scottish Executive should develop

"procedures for local consultation between developers, planning authorities and interested parties, and guidance on best practice in such developments."

More important, it further recommended that the Scottish Executive

"work together with planning authorities to develop mechanisms to allow potential development zones to be identified in local structure and development plans, in an effort to reduce conflict."

The zoning idea is important, as it would allow us to address the impact of the schemes on tourism and the rural economies that are currently under threat.

A new planning regime for onshore wind power would be welcomed by all parties—not only by objectors and residents, but by power companies, developers and SNH. If the current rush to develop onshore wind power continues, we will change the Scottish landscape forever. We have one chance to get this right and future generations might not forgive us if we rush into large-scale wind farm developments without pausing to consider all the consequences while we still have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am minded to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate by 20 minutes, which is as much as I can do.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that under Rule 8.14.3 Members' Business on 6 November 2003 be extended for 20 minutes.—[*Rob Gibson.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:22

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I apologise for the fact that I might have to leave before the end of the debate.

I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing this debate. There is little with which I disagree in his speech or his motion. I did not sign the motion because I was a bit concerned about there being

an open-ended moratorium. If we were talking in terms of a more time-limited suspension of applications, I would have had no difficulty in signing the motion.

We all recognise the need for the development of renewable sources of energy and I welcome the work that has been done to ensure that Scotland becomes a market leader for wave, tidal and offshore wind energy generation and hydrogen fuel cells. That will mean jobs and investment. However, I also recognise that wind farms are currently the only commercially viable renewable technology and have an important contribution to make to the mix of Scotland's energy generation.

In last week's debate on rural integration, it was said that the lack of any real forward planning and the absence of clear, concise and coherent guidelines for the approval of wind farm sites is causing anxiety in many Scottish communities and uncertainty for developers. That fact must be evident to ministers and I cannot understand their complacency on this issue. Public support for renewable energy is being seriously undermined by the processes in which we are currently engaged.

We are getting a concentration of applications. I refer members to the green leaflets that many of us were given by campaigners today. All the cases that are listed in the leaflet are in my constituency. There are specific problems with the Sma' glen, which is marketed as a tourist route through Perthshire. I am aware that not all the applications will be approved, but until decisions are made on them, immense damage is being done to community confidence. I wish that the Executive would take that on board.

I believe that the Scottish Executive must urgently publish guidance on the criteria that are being applied to wind farm developments. That will help developers and communities to take positive steps to promote and assist community-led renewable energy projects, including wind farm developments, and to engage with the Ministry of Defence, in particular regarding its objections to wind farm developments on or near MOD property.

I see that the minister is holding a planning note in the air, but that is insufficient.

If the Executive took that step, developers would be encouraged to recognise their responsibilities to local communities so that such communities could benefit from developments on their doorstep and would be reassured that they would not end up with a wind farm being built despite strong—in some cases overwhelming—local objections.

17:24

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): I want to touch on two elements of Murdo Fraser's irresponsible motion. The first is the lunacy that is the demand for a moratorium; the second is planning matters, on which I will touch briefly.

If the motion—which enjoys support from some Scottish National Party members, but not all—were to be adopted it would effectively kill off further wind farm developments in Scotland for years. In my constituency, there are some very exciting plans for wind farms. If those plans come to fruition, the Western Isles will become the source of 1 per cent of the United Kingdom's energy needs. However, if the motion were to be adopted, it would halt any further developments. It would also lead to the early demise of the Arnish fabrication yard in Lewis, which is currently working entirely on wind power projects. The minister visited the yard earlier this month.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Mr Morrison: I have only three minutes, which time does not lend itself to interventions.

Being from the Highlands and Islands, Jamie McGrigor should hang his head in shame for signing and supporting the motion. As I said, the motion would, if adopted, lead to the early demise of many jobs in my constituency, which Mr McGrigor also represents.

We are fortunate in Scotland in that we already have a flexible planning regime. That is why more projects have gone ahead here than in the rest of the United Kingdom. We need urgently to speed up the process rather than to bring it to a dead halt with a moratorium, as has been called for by Murdo Fraser. To some extent, the motion reveals the double standards of politicians who say that they are in favour of renewable energy in principle but who are prepared to blow with the wind in the other direction as soon as a vociferous local campaign is mounted against a specific project.

I want to turn to my friends in the Green party. I know that they have not had an especially productive day. We witnessed their semantic convulsions over scallop conservation—or rather, over their failure to support scallop conservation—and I have no intention of making life any better for them now, at the end of the day. On energy generation, the Greens and their associates regularly remind us that they are opposed to the continuation of nuclear power plants and opposed to any further extension of energy that is generated by fossil fuels. However, there are far too many examples of the Greens and their associates opposing wind farms and hydroelectric schemes in the Highlands and Islands and other parts of the country. I ask them to do us all a

favour and to tell us what they actively support as opposed to what they actively oppose.

Everyone should appreciate that a moratorium on wind farm developments would be a moratorium on jobs and a moratorium on much-needed infrastructure investment. Future generations of Scots would never forgive us if we implemented the folly that has been outlined by Mr Fraser and some of his nationalist friends.

17:28

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I want to make it clear that there is no case for a moratorium on wind farms in Scotland. I realise that communities have concerns about the farms; I have spoken with many people on the subject. However, a moratorium would only exacerbate problems and lead to a loss of confidence in renewable energy; we cannot afford to let that happen. Climate change is the crisis that is driving the move towards renewable energy and we should not forget that. Let us not mince our words: climate change is the most serious environmental problem that is faced by us all and it has happened as a direct result of our need and desire for energy. We now face the likelihood of increasingly unpredictable weather with more extreme events such as storms, floods and droughts. There will be a cost to our environment, society and economy in Scotland and in the rest of the world.

Local authorities must ensure that communities are fully and objectively informed about wind farm developments. They must be consulted from the earliest point about any proposed project. In addition, the Executive should provide a mechanism whereby communities can share in the financial benefits of wind farms. A wind farm can bring in income that would contribute, for example, to local affordable housing in rural areas.

Other practical things can be done to address some of the genuine concerns—for example, to do with the possible cumulative effect of multiple wind farm applications in a particular area. The eight councils in Glasgow and the Clyde valley have produced a report on wind energy that is designed to feed into their structure plan. That allows them to be strategic in their approach while still meeting their commitments to renewable energy. The Executive could ensure that such good practice is replicated throughout Scotland.

Scottish Natural Heritage must be given the resources to apply its environmental guidelines comprehensively, as should planners in local authorities. As well as extra funding from the Executive, planning fees from developers should be used for that.

There should be a designated planning officer in each area who fully understands the issues that surround wind farms and who gets good training to ensure that. Planners must be given the confidence to throw out the pre-emptive low-quality applications that some developers are submitting simply to jump the queue. I say to Alasdair Morrison that those are the applications that we will not support.

In conclusion, we must not turn our backs on the unpalatable truth of climate change or the challenges of renewable energy. We must accept that our desire for energy means that we must make some difficult choices. However, that does not mean that we should cry halt at the first hurdle.

17:30

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, will have to leave before the end of the debate, for which I apologise.

I am grateful to my friend Murdo Fraser for lodging a motion which I hope will clear the air of the thundery atmosphere that has existed since the proliferation of applications for wind farms commenced. It has not been easy for MSPs, who have been regaled with arguments on both sides and who have watched communities being divided and split on what has become a highly contentious issue. Neighbour has been fighting neighbour; that is a bad thing.

I do not want to go into the arguments on the efficiency of wind energy, but it is interesting to note the comments of the former leader of the Labour Party, Neil Kinnock—known as the Welsh windbag—who wrote, in 1994:

“My long established view is that wind generated power is an expensive form of energy, it can only provide a very small fraction of the output required to meet total energy needs and it unavoidably makes an unacceptable intrusion into the landscape.”

I would prefer to see more offshore wind farms and more research into tidal energy, which would not be so visually intrusive. I suggest again that forestry biomass—of which there is plenty available in Scotland—could be treated in the same way as other renewable sources because it is carbon neutral.

That said, we are set to have some wind farms. It is interesting that the applications that are most complained about relate to places such as Edinbane on Skye and Inverliever in Argyll, where the turbines are to be situated in close proximity to people's houses. I have also noticed that many applications are for 27 turbines, because that figure produces enough kilowatts of electricity to allow applicants to bypass council planning decisions and go straight to the Scottish Executive. The fact that the defences of the local

planning authority have been taken away in those instances means that it is vital that the Executive listens and responds to the concerns of people in those areas.

The problems here are lack of consultation on siting of the turbines and the absence of a clear understanding of what compensation will be paid to those who suffer as a result and of how much money will go into community funds so that people in the vicinity of wind farms can at least see some benefit in their locality. The employment benefit in places such as Campbeltown and Stornoway is obvious.

I can remember the complaints about hydro power and the erection of pylons. In the case of hydro power, the dams were carefully planned and there was a clear policy: compulsory purchase was used where proposals were deemed to be in the public interest and compensation was paid to fishery owners and others for perceived damage or changes to their property or fisheries. Although communities could well benefit from compensation money, they would benefit only if their tourist businesses continued to benefit as well. Therefore, it is vital that people with artistic talents are employed in the building of wind farms, so that the turbines blend in with the scenery.

Until the Executive produces a cohesive and sustainable energy plan that can be properly understood, people will continue to suffer from worry and to complain. I ask the minister to tell us the Executive's policy.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am aware that a member who has already spoken in the debate lives in the vicinity of a site that is the subject of a live planning application for a wind farm. Will you give guidance on whether members who are registered objectors or who have an interest in such matters need to declare an interest?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is always advisable to declare an interest in any matter that members think might affect them. My ruling is that members should declare an interest if they are in any doubt whatsoever.

Mr McGrigor: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wish to declare an interest—I live in the vicinity of the sites of several wind farm applications.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That belated declaration of an interest is noted.

17:34

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I wish to declare an interest. I am the chair of a community council, through which a planning application for the extension of a wind farm at Novar in easter Ross is being discussed.

The timing of the debate is important. Unfortunately, the timing of the Scottish Executive's lack of leadership, the lack of evidence of its lobbying power and the lack of clear-cut Executive guidance that does not leave communities to face large companies on their own show that a lack of strategy must be addressed. That is said in sorrow, not in anger.

An attempt should be made to avoid a gold rush and to encourage planned development that could provide people in the Highlands and Islands with tremendous income that would allow them to invest the profits from wind energy and other forms of energy in local economic development, funding for which has been lacking from most other sources. That is the perspective from which I come. I can give members plenty of examples of people who look for the chance to do that.

If we were in Denmark, where four farmers started the whole operation, we would see that wind farms were in the hands of local people, which makes a big difference to how the subject is viewed. Many of the people who give us leaflets and send us e-mails to object to wind farm developments do so because they are frustrated by the fact that they believe that large companies from outside are coming in to make large profits from our landscape, which some people say will be altered irrevocably.

It has been suggested to me that a certain tonnage of cement would be required for each wind farm tower, but nobody ever talks about the tonnage of cement that was needed for each nuclear power station that has been built.

My problem with the debate is that a moratorium would slow the potential for renewable energies to take up the slack and become the main source of power. That would allow the nuclear lobby, of which the Conservative party is an important supporter, to make the case for nuclear power in future.

We must ensure that Scotland uses its renewable clean assets to the greatest benefit. Offshore wind, tidal and wave energy will come, but not for five to 10 years. We are in favour of such forms of energy, which should be the central plank of a renewable energy policy.

In Denmark, the decision was taken to have just 20 per cent of energy produced from wind power. That target has nearly been reached and development has stopped at that. We do not have a strategy that would allow us to show people how much we aim to obtain from onshore wind farms. The Executive must clearly state such a strategy so that people know that what is involved is not just a gold rush for big companies and that local people will benefit.

17:37

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Wind energy is the most developed of the renewable technologies. It is sad that it has not developed commercially in Scotland, but it is the form of generation that we will rely on to achieve the challenging renewable energy targets that we have set ourselves while the newer wave and tidal energy technologies are developed to replace or augment land-based wind farms. Wind energy is also crucial to ensure that we safely cover the gap that could arise in a couple of years' time when decisions about whether to commission new nuclear power stations will be taken.

It has been considered alarming that the number of proposed wind farms is far in excess of the number that will be needed. Roughly 150 applications are in the pipeline, but all of them will have to follow the democratic planning process and not all will proceed. In some ways, a large number of applications is good, because it allows for greater selectivity.

A motion to impose a moratorium on wind farm developments until we have new planning guidance is an overreaction. We need a robust planning process to ensure the continuing sensible development of wind technology in Scotland, but we have such a process in place, through national planning policy guideline 6, which was revised in 2000, and planning advice note 45, which was revised in 2002.

I have a copy of a report that went to the Marr area committee in my constituency. It says that relevant planning policies comprise six policies under the approved Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire structure plan, four policies under the Gordon district local plan and 14 policies under the finalised Aberdeenshire local plan.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the member for giving way, in light of the shortage of time. If the present planning guidance is sufficient, why do not only objectors but power companies say that the planning regime is unsatisfactory?

Nora Radcliffe: Sometimes, if people do not get the answers that they want, that leads them to think that things are unsatisfactory.

Scottish Natural Heritage offers locational guidance, which enables areas of high sensitivity to be avoided, and planning authorities can take cumulative impact into account when determining the outcome of applications. Planning decisions are best made locally, by locally accountable elected representatives, on a case-by-case basis and taking local circumstances into account. We should let local government discharge its functions in the same way as we would expect our authority to be respected.

The Scottish Executive could be helpful by ensuring that local authorities are sufficiently resourced to deal with the high volume of applications that they receive. They could compensate for the fact that authorities do not get a planning fee for projects over a certain size, although they still have to do the work that goes into statutory consultation and incur as much work or more than they would if they were dealing with a straightforward planning application. It is not planning guidance for local authorities that is lacking; rather, there is not enough advice and guidance for local communities on how to turn any wind farm that goes ahead into an advantage for the local community.

A moratorium is unnecessary and unhelpful. It holds up progress without distinguishing between good and bad applications in any way, and it gets us nowhere.

17:41

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I can tell Alasdair Morrison that it would be difficult to get a cigarette paper between our views on this subject and those expressed in Murdo Fraser's motion, which I signed. The main thrust of the motion is that we should have national guidance and that communities should lead on issues to do with wind farms; the agenda should not be imposed. That does not work, as we keep telling the Executive.

There is a huge problem in the Scottish Borders, which could now be considered as being targeted—there are already 33 proposals for wind farms there. The Borders is being targeted because it has open hill ranges, with close connection points on the national electricity grid. It is not that people in the Borders are saying, "Not in my back yard." They already have wind farms at Bowbeat hill and near Peebles. There is also the famous one at Dun law and Soutra hill, which is dramatic and is a tourist attraction. There are lay-bys where people can pull off the road to see the wind farm, so wind farms can work.

However, a problem is being faced at an area called Minch moor, where 14 turbines are being installed. They are 100m high and five of them are to be within touching distance of the Southern Upland way, which is not just a national treasure, but an international natural treasure. The people living near there are most alarmed. Although it looks as if the Borders has a series of small string developments, they in fact comprise one huge development, but it is my understanding—and the minister may clarify this—that Scottish Borders Council will not have to approach the Scottish Executive for planning consents if the developments are below a certain wattage.

I, too, have lodged a motion on the subject, and there is a petition about Minch moor. I suggest not only that guidance should be produced—that is called for in a motion in the name of my colleague Roseanna Cunningham—but that planning policy should be reviewed. We should take a look at countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, which are way ahead of the game. It is not that one is opposed to renewable energy; it is the manner in which planning is going through, without regard to national guidelines, to which I object.

I urge the minister to take on board what I have said and to do something now to satisfy those Scottish communities that are, rightly, most concerned about their heritage because of issues relating to wind farms.

17:43

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing the debate. I would hope that we all recognise our obligations under the Kyoto treaty to phase out fossil fuel use and to develop sustainable energy. In that regard, Scotland has vast resources of wind power, with 23 per cent of such resources in Europe, not including what we contribute in this chamber—perhaps 20 per cent of Scotland's energy needs could be generated in that form. As Murdo Fraser knows, the Executive has set a target of 18 per cent for the amount of all electricity to be generated in Scotland from such sources. Those are ambitious targets.

I share some of Murdo Fraser's concerns about how wind power is developed and I think that it is inappropriate to dismiss people's objections. People from throughout the country have objections.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the member give way?

Colin Fox: I am sorry, but I do not have time—I have only three minutes.

It is often the perception that people's objections are not given due regard.

We find among the list of wind turbines operating in Britain a repetition of names such as B9 Energy, Powergen Renewables, National Wind Power and Renewable Energy Systems. In many communities, there is often a feeling that the big businesses behind wind turbine production and implementation will get their way irrespective of what local communities think. I support the point that Rob Gibson made earlier—people would like wind turbine generation to be used for local communities. We should think globally about our obligations under the Kyoto agreement, but we should act locally to meet our electricity

requirements. Experience in Denmark, Germany, Spain and other places is important. In Denmark, 30 per cent of energy is produced by wind turbines, but they are not all located on greenfield sites in rural areas. We should consider redeveloping brownfield sites, as happens in Denmark.

I have received a briefing on this issue from Friends of the Earth. There is interest in wind turbines and wind energy production. Given that that interest exists, the idea of establishing a visitor attraction where wind energy is explored has merit and would have popular support.

I will finish by sounding a note of caution to the Executive. There must be more development of solar energy, biomass energy, tidal energy and other renewables. There is far too much concentration on wind energy and other options must be considered.

17:46

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Members from all parties have indicated that, throughout Scotland, there has been a huge surge in interest in identifying potential sites for onshore wind farms. That has happened in response to the Government's encouragement of renewable energy and the obligations that have been placed on the electricity industry.

I strongly support the development of renewable energy. It is vital to develop the industry to combat the effects of climate change and its impact on people and the environment. However, we must ensure that the locations of wind farms are suitable.

National planning policy guideline 6 provides useful guidance on locational considerations but, critically, it does not provide specific locational guidance. Consequently, there is a danger of uncertainty for developers, planning authorities and local communities. As has already been mentioned, SNH has produced strategic locational guidance for onshore wind farms in respect of the natural heritage. I welcome that as a first step towards providing guidance to planning authorities when they seek to identify potential areas for wind farm developments. A strategic approach will guide wind farm developments to areas where the effects on our natural heritage are minimised.

The proposals for the national planning framework indicate that it will seek to address energy issues. I welcome that, but it must also identify environmentally sensitive sites where development is inappropriate. Research that has been done in the past few years demonstrates clearly that Scotland can produce more than enough renewable energy without our building wind farms in areas that are designated as

important for the natural heritage. I seek the minister's views on that important piece of research.

I am passionate about developing renewable energy, but that must be done in the right place. I have not signed Murdo Fraser's motion, as I believe that it is far too negative and I do not support the call for a moratorium on the determination of locally opposed wind farm planning applications. However, let us have a sensible debate on this issue without those who register concern about the impact of wind farms on environmentally sensitive areas being stereotyped as being anti-jobs.

17:49

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): There are probably more wind farms operational in my constituency than in any other in Scotland. There are eight approved sites with five operational wind farms and 11 applications are in the planning process as we speak.

Vestas-Celtic Wind Technology Ltd, the first wind farm manufacturer, has set up in Campbeltown and employs 200 people, who work three shifts to cope with the demand that has arisen since the Executive took the proactive approach of setting ambitious targets for Scotland to develop renewable energy. Carradale and Glendaruel in my constituency are looking forward to 25 years of financial benefits, which will flow from the wind farms that operate on the hills above those communities. The incomes that are guaranteed for the future will improve those local communities.

Scotland has 1,200 jobs that are reliant on the development of the wind farm industry. That number will grow. However, this young industry would be threatened if the proposed moratorium went ahead. It would be choked at birth. The moratorium would destroy jobs and strangle the industry before it has had a chance to get up and running properly.

The people of Campbeltown, whose community's fortunes have been turned round by the establishment of Vestas-Celtic Wind Technology, would be appalled by the prospect of a moratorium and the shutting down or pulling out of Vestas-Celtic from the area. Therefore, I find it strange that Jamie McGrigor supports the motion.

I recognise that communities have real concerns about the siting of wind farms and the proliferation of applications that are being made by developers, but the right approach to the issue is to decide such matters at the local level. We need to use the council structure plan and the local planning process to designate areas for potential wind farm development and allow local councillors to make

the final decision. Councillors are the people who know. The issue should not be decided at the centre; it should be decided locally.

There is one anomaly, which is that applications under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for developments of over 50MW—which is roughly equivalent to 50 wind towers—are exempt from local planning procedures. I believe that that anomaly needs addressed.

Finally, ministers must get behind community development of wind farms. Communities do not want the same to happen as happened for hydro schemes, which involved lots of jobs in building the developments but no jobs once they were completed—Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern Energy got all the benefits. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has a proposal for a community development company to assist communities in setting up their own wind farms that would provide a long-term sustainable future, because the financial benefits would flow to the communities. The minister must get behind communities to ensure that wind power works. Let us solve the problems of our rural and remote communities for the foreseeable future.

17:52

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): My colleague Mark Ruskell has clearly outlined the seriousness of climate change and our obligations to future generations. Those must form the backdrop to all our debates on renewable energy.

I want to pick up on some of the points that have been made by objectors. Wind power is a clean form of power that produces no carbon dioxide and leaves no waste, unlike the nuclear power industry. There are concerns about the energy embodied in the turbines and the concrete bases, but the clean energy that is generated by a wind farm will, within a few months, totally compensate for the energy that was used to build, transport and install the turbines. Over a 20-year lifespan, a wind farm pays that back more than 80 times over. By contrast, the net energy that is generated during the life of a nuclear power station is only 16 times its energy input. For a coal power plant, the figure falls to 11 times, when the energy used to extract and transport the fuel is taken into account. Wind turbines create no pollution in their operation. That cannot be said of either fossil fuels or nuclear power.

Let me also deal with the issue of noise. A funny little cartoon was handed out to us when we came into the chamber earlier on, but it is very misleading. It is unfortunate that such examples are put out for people to read. The actual figures for noise are that, at 350 metres, a wind farm has a decibel level of between 35dB and 45dB. The

level for a quiet bedroom is 35dB. For a car at 40mph, the level is 55dB. Wind turbines are very quiet machines. I have stood under them and been able to carry on conversations quite normally. There is no way that wind turbines have a noise impact.

The other point to emphasise is that the dismantling of wind farms is built into the planning applications. After 20 years—most of them have a lifetime of only 20 years—the wind turbines must be removed. The turbines can be removed quite easily leaving virtually no visible trace of their existence. The roads to them are made of hard core rather than tarmac and become grassed over very quickly. The whole thing will disappear quickly.

It is vital that we realise that we need to have those turbines now so that we can address climate change. The other technologies are too slow and too far behind. We need to move now. I hope that I have allayed some fears today and that we will go ahead with the technology.

17:55

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is important that we reinforce the rights of people and make their agreement to future developments in their localities the determining factor when it comes to the approval of onshore wind farms. Local majority opinion is, after all, the best arbiter of what is right in any area, whose people are best placed and motivated to act in the best interests of their community and neighbours.

Most people in rural Scotland have a positive attitude towards renewable energy. However, that view is balanced with the need to avoid a precipitate and excessive skew towards onshore wind farms that could damage amenity and scenery, impact on quality of life, and undermine tourism and the possibility of attracting more people to stay in or migrate to rural Scotland.

Balance is also the order of the day in ensuring that we help those Scotland-based companies that George Lyon mentioned and which are involved in the manufacture of wind turbines. They have invested their capital and expertise in Scotland, have created many valuable jobs at home and have many engineers working internationally from their Scottish home base. We can produce an optimal blend of strategy that helps those companies to do more in the offshore sector, and that works with onshore installations that have majority local community support and can bring real benefits for communities with minimal effect on the environment.

Mr Stone: Will the member give way?

Jim Mather: I only have three minutes, so I will crack on.

We want to avoid being left with damaged landscapes that will result in a long-term economic inhibitor in rural Scotland when the technology moves in favour of offshore wind power, solar power, wave power and small-scale biomass plants, in particular when the wind farm has produced little or no local benefits in terms of a share of profits or lower local power costs. Of course, that is especially true when deals are struck where the biggest proportion of the profits is leached out of an area and there is little or nothing to improve local living standards or economic competitiveness.

I feel differently about projects that have a high degree of local buy-in and a mechanism to glean a tangible material return in terms of dividends and low power costs for local individuals and the community, especially when such a project is initiated by that community. An example is the current project on Gigha.

Renewables can be a key factor in the recovery of rural Scotland, particularly the Highlands and Islands, when such energy is coupled with broadband, a safe environment and the quality of life there. However, it would verge on being unforgivable if renewables were mismanaged to the extent that they undermine the most fundamental attraction—the quality and tranquillity of rural life. We therefore want a consultation process and we want important documents to be produced, such as Highland Council's "Can your community benefit from renewable energy development". We want all that to be done in a meaningful and significant way.

17:58

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I go along with the things that Murdo Fraser said, but I will concentrate on the part of his motion that is about the proliferation of wind farms. I am not against renewable energy—it would be strange if I were, given that I was the manager of a string of hydro power stations before I became involved in politics. Hydro power is perhaps the most efficient of the renewable energy sources that we have today.

However, I remind members that when we start talking about installed capacity, we have to consider what we get out of it. I suggest that the best of wind farms would pick up approximately 30 per cent of load factor. Most hydro stations operate in the 20 to 30 per cent band. At present, despite its good intentions, the Scottish Executive's targets for renewables are too optimistic, given their impact.

Shiona Baird referred to the fact that there is no pollution with a wind farm: the windmills turn and we get power. However, there is pollution because

behind the windmills is the spinning reserve of fossil-fuel stations, which have to be available to come on quickly when the wind stops, or the water runs dry.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Phil Gallie: I do not have time, I am sorry.

When I talk about the water running dry, I point to the situation in Galloway this year, where there has been a 30 per cent reduction in the level of water available to the hydro stations. That is a real concern, and has a real effect on output. The hydro stations in Galloway are major employers, and produce in one year 250GWh—0.25TWh—of electricity. The output of nuclear power stations in Scotland is 20TWh.

We have to recognise that the environment for many people does not mean simply the landscape and walking the hills of Scotland, as I like to do—it means the heat in their homes in winter being provided at a reasonable cost. A lot has been said about Denmark, but no one has said that its consumers have the most expensive electricity in Europe. Those are the practical problems that we must face.

I go along with some elements of wind farm provision. I go along with the barrage schemes and tidal wave power, which offers great potential. We talked about it 10 to 15 years ago, but where is the Severn barrage? It was given up because the environmentalists said that providing it would have too drastic an effect on the ecology and the environment.

18:01

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I declare a peripheral interest, as an application has been made for a wind farm in the neighbouring constituency to mine, just above some of my constituents.

It is easy to see that the motion is a Conservative motion. By their very nature, the Conservatives are resistant to change and meeting our climate change obligations while reducing carbon emissions will require significant change, not least in the countryside that we all love. As a result, I cannot condemn Murdo Fraser and the Tories for lodging the motion and supporting it, although I feel that a moratorium is wrong.

I am less forgiving, however, when it comes to those members of the SNP who have supported the motion. They cannot be said to be sitting on the fence on this issue, because a fence only goes in two directions. It would be more accurate to say that they are sitting on a weather vane, pointing wherever the prevailing wind should happen to blow. On the one hand, they call for ever greater

renewable energy targets. Their election pledge was for a target of 50 per cent of energy from renewables by 2020. On the other hand, they are often at the forefront of local objections when an application comes up, especially when they feel there is some political advantage to be gained. The time has come for SNP members to stop posturing and present a consistent front throughout the country. Are they for renewables? If so, are they going to stop opposing every application? If not, will their environment spokesperson state this afternoon that they no longer subscribe to that target as party policy?

The fact is that a moratorium would not make for more effective planning procedures. The motion is scaremongering. The idea that the country will suddenly be covered in wind turbines is wrong, because eight or nine out of every 10 applications are refused. Community concerns can be satisfactorily addressed by the planning guidelines that we already have. They are robust enough, if they are applied properly and consistently.

There may be a problem with the resources and the capacity of planning departments and their advisory bodies in dealing with the real concerns of communities. The resources need to be in place so that all the relevant parties can get together quickly and application decisions can be speeded up. That includes involving local communities in the process and gaining, as George Lyon said, some benefit for those communities to set against the negative impacts. Developers need to be sensitive to local concerns and I see no reason why compromises cannot be made.

Finally, we are already lagging far behind other nations in the generation of wind power. Not only will a moratorium serve to put us even further behind, it will harm local business—such as NOI Scotland Ltd in my constituency, which is bidding out of Methil for a number of projects—and threaten jobs that are badly needed.

18:05

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I declare an interest. I live in Kinross-shire and I am surrounded by hills. First, I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing a debate that is clearly needed. I also congratulate the Executive on the renewables obligation certificates. The ROCs have done their job and are beginning to create the interest that should have existed all along.

I condemn Christine May for her hypocrisy. Labour party members throughout the country are campaigning against wind farms just as SNP members are doing. Scotland has a problem and no one can say that the problem does not exist. The problem exists because we do not have a proactive enough planning process. We need one

that directs local authorities and does not give them woolly guidelines. The developer-led proposals that are coming through at present are creating problems to such a degree that we have eight applications for every one that is successful. That is no way to run things. We should have a much more directed process, one that helps communities and developers to have much more certainty about what is going to be successful. That is how we could start to deal with the problem.

The conflict that has happened is completely unnecessary. Had the guidelines been properly drawn up in the beginning we might not be in the situation in which we find ourselves today. Why are we in that situation? If all our potential for wind was reached, only 2 per cent of Scotland would be used. Surely to goodness we can come to a solution that allows 2 per cent of Scotland's landmass to be used to reach our potential? We need to get the planning framework right.

What other factors are leading to problems? We have a problem with the grid that is leading to a concentration of resources in particular areas of Scotland, particularly down the east coast. The grid is not satisfactory in the very place that it should be, which is on the west coast, where we get most of the wind. Another concentration factor is caused by the Ministry of Defence, which blankets parts of Scotland that cannot be used. The effect of that is to push people in a particular direction, which causes further concentration. SNH also causes concentration because it, too, blankets areas of Scotland and says that developers can go to only certain parts of Scotland. We are losing the 2 per cent—more and more of it is disappearing.

Another problem is the claim that is made by local authorities about lack of resources. I do not know whether the claim is true, but I am not entirely convinced by the argument. If we are not building as many houses as we used to and if fewer applications for industrial developments are coming through because the economy is not growing as fast as it can, surely local authorities should be doing something about that. One argument suggests that local authorities should be directed to put enough planners in place—they should have the resources to make this work.

Equally, at the moment, lots of consultants are running all over Scotland in an attempt to make a fast buck. The race for those fast bucks is also causing problems. I could go on for ever on that one, but my time is up and I had better stop.

18:08

Mr Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Murdo Fraser's motion raises a vital and emotive issue and, in that sense, it is welcome.

The planning process needs to balance the potential for development with the concerns of local residents. A balance needs to be struck and that will not happen if a moratorium is instructed.

Like other members, I ask the Executive to do all that it can to encourage alternative forms of renewable energy. The minister is well aware of the excellent research that is being done at Robert Gordon University into tidal power and of the potential for the development of offshore wind in the Beatrice field, which is being promoted by Talisman Energy. We should do more to ensure that communities that are near wind farm developments benefit from them.

The essence of my contribution is that there should be no moratorium. Consideration of proposals must be robust. That said, I am aware that companies that want to build wind farms find that they have to make a substantial number of applications in order for one proposal to be accepted. It should be remembered that some wind farm proposals have greater public support than others do. The minister is aware of proposals in Aberdeen for wind turbines to be located off the coast of the city. I am not saying that polls are a scientific measure, but one that was conducted in Aberdeen by the *Evening Express* on the proposals saw an 84 per cent vote in favour of the proposals and only an 11 per cent vote against.

Of course, there needs to be more consultation than that, but I believe that the vote is an indication of the substantial body of opinion in Aberdeen. People want the city to be the energy capital of Europe now and in the long term. I do not believe that such aspirations should be blocked by a moratorium. I also do not believe that proposals should be stalled before proper consultation takes place. I agree that we have to take on board local concerns about specific proposals. However, if we are going to be serious about the need to make progress in the development of renewable energy, as we must be, we cannot support a moratorium.

18:09

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): I am grateful to Murdo Fraser for securing this debate. Members' business debates have rarely produced such a clear divide across the chamber or provided members with such a clear choice about the position they should take. The debate also gives me an opportunity to set out why I believe that we have put in place the right planning policies and the right policies to support renewable energy.

The starting point for our renewable energy policy is the need to tackle climate change. That is

why the UK Government has set a target of generating 10 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by the end of this decade, and 20 per cent by the end of the next. Moreover, in Scotland, we have set targets for the same objective of 18 per cent by the end of this decade and 40 per cent by the end of the next one.

We have set higher targets in Scotland for three reasons. First, thanks to our hydroelectricity industry and Tom Johnston's vision 60 years ago, we start from a higher base than elsewhere. Secondly, as members have pointed out, we have in Scotland a tremendous resource of renewable energy in wind, wave and tidal power. Thirdly, we want to take full advantage of the economic development potential that renewable energy has to offer. Although we cannot quantify that potential with any certainty, Scottish Renewables estimates that, if we get the policy framework and the infrastructure right, the industry could be worth more than £1 billion a year and provide more than 20,000 Scottish jobs by 2020.

Fergus Ewing: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald: I am afraid that I must press on.

We cannot take for granted either the potential for cleaner electricity or the potential for business and jobs. If we are to fulfil Scotland's renewables potential, we must establish policies that attract investment and innovation. Such an approach must include a planning policy that supports onshore wind energy development.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald: I am afraid that I am very short of time.

That is the planning policy that Murdo Fraser has criticised. He argues that the current planning regime provides inadequate guidance and demands a moratorium until new planning guidance is in place. However, I believe that he is not giving our planning framework the credit that it deserves.

Murdo Fraser: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald: If the Presiding Officer will give me more than six minutes, I will be happy to give way to all members' interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry. Several members did not get into the debate and you are absolutely right to say that I have had to cut back your time.

Lewis Macdonald: In that case, I will take Murdo Fraser, because he lodged the motion.

Murdo Fraser: I am very grateful to the minister for giving way under the circumstances.

If the current planning guidance is so adequate, will the minister tell us why SNH, the Government's own adviser on this issue, has said that we need a new national framework?

Lewis Macdonald: I want to answer the key point that the national planning policy framework is not adequate to its purpose. In fact, it is only three years since we reviewed our planning policy on renewable energy developments under NPPG 6, and planning advice note 45 on renewable energy technologies was reviewed only last year. That framework allows us to meet our aspirations and to maintain the high quality of the Scottish environment. NPPG 6 requires the planning system to make positive provision for energy policy

"while at the same time: meeting the international and national statutory obligations to protect designated areas, species and habitats ... from inappropriate forms of development; and minimising the effects on local communities."

Cumulative impacts of developments must also be taken into account. In our view, those guiding principles strike the right balance.

We are very interested in developing a community stake in wind farms—indeed, Highlands and Islands Enterprise has explored that very area—and in doing what we can to provide support to local communities that wish to develop renewable energy for their own use. Indeed, that is already being carried out with a £5 million grant scheme called the Scottish community and householder renewables initiative. We want to develop such initiatives.

Central to many speeches that were critical of the existing planning framework was the argument that central Government should lay down a strategic framework for where wind farm development should take place. In fact, existing planning policy allows councils to do precisely that. They can use their structural and local plans either to define broad areas of search and areas where they would approve developments only in exceptional circumstances, or else to set down the criteria by which any application would be judged. Indeed, they can do both.

Councils are doing that very thing. For example, in its structure plan, Dumfries and Galloway Council has established a wind energy diagram that indicates potential, intermediate and sensitive areas. Stirling Council is currently consulting on precisely the same approach, and Fife Council has also followed that approach. On the other hand, Argyll and Bute Council, with its considerable practical experience of the industry, has chosen to take a different route by adopting an approach based on criteria alone.

To pick up on a point that George Lyon made about the impact of development plans, those

larger schemes that come to Scottish ministers under sections 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 are governed by the development plans of local authorities. Therefore, if a local authority chooses to give locational guidance, that will apply to those developments as well. We believe that it is right that those judgments are made at local level.

This planning system is also delivering renewable energy. I simply note that fewer than 10 per cent of the applications going through the system in the past five years have failed. In other words, the system is delivering renewable energy and environmental protection. A few weeks ago, as Alasdair Morrison mentioned, I visited Arnish, which symbolises the jobs potential that renewable energy offers Scotland. I therefore restate our position that the planning policy, the planning guideline and the energy policy that we have in place are the right ones to deliver for Scotland.

Meeting closed at 18:16.

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