

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 21 January 2004
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 21 January 2004

(Afternoon)

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Mrs Sheena MacGillivray, deputy head of Nairn Academy.

Mrs Sheena MacGillivray (Deputy Head of Nairn Academy): Last summer, I was one of 34 global teachers recruited by Link Community Development to work in schools in the Eastern Cape. Living for five weeks in that poorest province of South Africa gave me plenty of time to reflect on what was important to me. It reinforced my belief that the most important thing in my life is people.

My Xhosa family—the Gomos—were wonderful, and they and my colleagues at Welsh Senior Secondary School gave me real insight into their life and culture. These people are living with the legacy of apartheid and colonialism. Their education system is still suffering from years of neglect, when African schools received one tenth of the money allocated to white ones. How can children learn to value education if for years they have been told that no matter how hard they work and how many exams they pass, they will never be anything more than a manual labourer?

Death is never far away from these people. I experienced the trauma of a stillbirth in my Xhosa family, and was left to wonder whether things would have been different with better medical treatment and decent roads. I was part of an AIDS awareness programme, and tried to get people to talk about the issue as well as change their behaviour.

It all sounds very depressing, yet there is hope. The village is in the process of having electricity installed, and I am hopeful that, through local fundraising, I may be able to help them get clean water. Working with charities like Link Community Development, which has a permanent presence in the area, and new district chiefs means that education can only improve.

However, they still need our help, not just in the form of money, but in the giving of our time. Living and working with people gives the volunteer so

much. Although it was a tremendous professional development opportunity for me, I think it has given my Scottish community more. With the benefit of my first-hand experience, I have been able to provide materials to enhance a number of school subjects and, through photographs and talks, highlight issues such as fair trade and the importance of clean water.

Scotland has always been an outward-looking country, and it is great to see my pupils keen to find out more about the world. They would like to link with my African school, and would love to organise an exchange programme. I am keen to encourage that, as I believe that it is through direct personal contact that we can make the world a better place.

National Waste Plan

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-769, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on behalf of the Environment and Rural Development Committee, on the committee's report on its inquiry into the national waste plan.

14:33

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Waste and what we do with it is a huge challenge, which is why the Environment and Rural Development Committee chose to examine the national waste strategy. First, I thank committee members for their energy and support on this issue, and all those people who came along and gave evidence to the committee, orally and in writing, including the minister Ross Finnie, whom I know lots of people will be thinking about today. We all wish him well in his recovery. I also thank the committee clerks for their sterling work in helping us to compile our final report.

Our report shows what everybody knows: the plain fact that Scotland is way behind the rest of Europe in waste reduction, reuse and recycling. It does not have to be like that. Our challenge is to turn around current waste trends. In Austria, for example, 75 per cent of municipal solid waste is recycled.

In a sense, our report is shocking. It identifies many points on which the committee considers the Scottish Executive has got it right, which is why, of course, we got no press coverage whatsoever. However, if members read our report they will see that we have identified quite a few areas in which we feel that faster action is needed from the Executive, and also areas in which the Executive needs to re-examine issues, where there are contradictions between what the Executive intends with the national waste strategy and the practical delivery implications.

At the moment, we are all producing more rubbish every year. As an example, the residents of Edinburgh produce enough rubbish to fill up Murrayfield stadium six times over every year. In Scotland, the average home produces approximately a tonne of rubbish per year, most of which ends up buried in the ground.

Our inquiry aimed to help develop the national waste strategy and to try to help turn around the legacy that the Parliament inherited. We are grateful to the minister for giving us a copy of the Scottish Executive's response in advance of the debate. Many of the comments in our report are positive, although I will be pressing the minister on several areas where we think that further progress is needed.

The national waste strategy was published in 1999 and that was the first time that waste management issues were brought together at a national level. We have 11 waste strategy areas where local groupings, combining the local authorities and other stakeholders, develop area waste plans and feed them in to the national waste plan. We know that European Union legislation has reinforced the political imperative to move away from our outdated reliance on landfill.

The national waste plan is not an implementation plan as such; it is a framework for action. It is shaped around the choices that are made in accordance with the best practicable environmental option.

Last year, the Environment and Rural Development Committee decided that this should be our first piece of work. We wanted to evaluate the current position to see how far implementation of the national waste plan had gone. We wanted particularly to consider progress on achieving key targets, what money was available through the strategic waste fund, and whether the best practicable environmental option was being achieved in practice. We wanted to examine the impact of area waste plans on existing community and voluntary partnerships. We wanted to find out how the initiatives to develop appropriate markets for waste material were going. We wanted to examine developments in the management of non-municipal waste. We also wanted to decide whether the key targets and priorities in the plan are right. We wanted to examine the relationship between the Executive, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the local authorities, the non-governmental organisations, community partnerships and local people—the other stakeholders in the plan. Finally, we wanted to see where the plan fitted with current European policy, best practice and where we thought the EU was likely to go with its future obligations. That is the context within which we did our work.

The national waste plan contains targets for municipal waste, but approximately 9 million tonnes of waste is produced each year by the commercial and industrial sector in Scotland. Three quarters of the waste that is produced in Scotland is non-municipal. The committee recommended that we should make urgent progress in setting challenging targets for the reduction of landfill of key non-municipal waste streams. That is not currently addressed in the national plan; we believe that that is a gap that has to be filled urgently. The Scottish Executive has acknowledged the committee's focus on integrating those perspectives and there is a commitment to publish a framework by mid-2004. We believe that that work is urgent and essential and we support the minister in making it happen.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am interested in the statistic that three quarters of our waste is non-municipal. Is the member aware how much of the remaining waste comes from the public sector or central Government sectors such as the Ministry of Defence? Does she have any comments to make on that?

Sarah Boyack: I do not have any comment to make on the Ministry of Defence. I will address procurement later on, because there are huge issues surrounding reusing and recycling waste rather than dumping it in landfill. That applies to the Government as well as the private sector.

The next key issue that the committee considered was that of land use planning. The committee urged the minister to produce as soon as possible an action plan and timetable for reform of the planning guidelines to ensure that all new housing includes provision for separating waste. In most houses at the moment it is not easy to do that. We also want the planning process to become more user friendly and we recommended that formal rights of consultation and other planning procedures should be modernised to ensure that key players can be involved in an equitable and just way. We do not believe that that happens at the moment. However, we welcome the Executive's commitment to studying waste in the planning system. The only comment I would make to the minister is that if that study is timely, it might be able to feed into the proposed planning bill that we know is coming soon from the Executive. It would be good to deal with both those issues at the same time.

The committee believes that the Scottish Executive should consider how our waste infrastructure can be developed rapidly and appropriately, while still being acceptable to communities. The committee considers that that is a huge challenge and that unless we meet it we will not meet the national waste plan targets.

The committee further considered funding. There is a key issue about local authority funding coming through the strategic waste fund. My knowledge of the fund is that there are significant delays in the system—that has certainly been the case in Edinburgh. The committee believes that the strategic waste fund should reach community groups, which do some exciting and innovative work in Scotland, particularly in education. The fact that such groups deliver added benefits locally, such as training, should be considered.

The committee considered market development for renewables, which is a key issue in the provision of long-term stability for dealing with recycling properly. To return to the point I made to Brian Monteith: the committee also considered public procurement. The committee urges the

Executive and the enterprise companies to continue to support the work that is under way to develop the market for recycled materials and reused goods. The Executive is working to change its own purchasing rules to enhance the use of recycled products. The leadership that the Scottish Executive can offer other public bodies and local authorities is critical. However, the public sector potentially has a huge impact that goes well beyond the Executive. That procurement policy should be rolled out throughout the public sector so that that huge market begins to change and to demand recycled goods.

The committee mentions at the start of its report the issue of non-municipal waste and its importance, but another perspective is the issue of business competitiveness. Businesses need to improve their waste management not just for environmental reasons, but to increase their competitiveness. When the committee questioned small businesses they said that they could not easily access advice on the matter and that they did not know how to make the changes that would save them money. We are pleased that the Executive has confirmed more money to two local agencies that provide advice to businesses. That is positive news—the committee would like that to cover the whole of Scotland. One group, the business environment partnership in Midlothian, was an excellent witness to the committee's inquiry. There is a lot of scope for the Executive to go further in considering how new business development opportunities, such as the recycling market, can be encouraged.

The response from the minister on the committee's commitment to urge SEPA and the Community Recycling Network Scotland to get together to consider community representation has been very positive. When I look through the minister's response to our lengthy inquiry there is a lot that goes a long way towards meeting the committee's requests, suggestions and demands. However, there were a number of areas where, it is fair to say, the Executive could do better. I will concentrate my final remarks on those.

I am sure that one of my colleagues will talk about composting. The committee thinks that how the targets are being implemented is potentially counter-productive. We also considered incineration and energy recovery. The committee was clear that incineration can be appropriate in some local circumstances, but it considers that there is a real danger that there could be an economic and contractual incentive just to feed an incinerator, which could override the push to recycle and reuse. That must be considered. The committee also felt that, where incineration of waste is carried out, it should be combined with energy recovery schemes such as district heating, so that there is a double environmental benefit.

The Executive's response avoids tackling that issue head-on.

The committee considered landfill, and believes that the highest possible standards of management should be applied to both new and existing landfill sites. Karen Whitefield and Karen Gillon have strong views on the issue, which they presented to the committee. Groups such as the Greengairs environmental forum highlighted the huge problem with the local management of landfill. The evidence that we took was that the regulations on the table do not always work in practice. The Executive response perhaps sidesteps that issue.

The committee has particularly recommended that landfill regulations should specify a minimum distance that should be maintained between new landfill developments and existing communities. The committee is not clear why that has been rejected by the Executive. It is already used for opencast coalmining, for example. The committee considers that it is a positive way in which landfill could be managed in a manner that is more environmentally acceptable and that is more acceptable to communities.

We also picked up on the need to reduce the amount of waste that we produce. It is not enough just to recycle or reuse our waste; we should create less waste in the first place. That should be incorporated into the national waste plan as a matter of urgency. We have urged the minister to introduce at an early stage a detailed action plan and timetable for the consideration of waste minimisation audits, so that organisations might consider properly how they could change their current plans. It is fair to say that the Executive response to that is generally supportive of the committee's viewpoint, but the response is weak on specifics. We recommended a firm target, which I hope the minister will take on board.

We welcome the minister's acceptance that the national waste plan provides a platform for a radical reduction in waste beyond our current ambitions and that work needs to begin on the practical implications of zero waste. It is great that the minister has accepted that. Developments at EU level on product design will clearly be important if we are to move towards such a concept, but it is clear that a lot of work needs to be done on that. I would be interested to hear the minister's views on that.

As an aside, I might mention that we also asked the Presiding Officer that the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body examine waste minimisation in the Scottish Parliament. I issue a gentle reminder that we would like some views back on that, as we have not had a response to date. I just want to put that on the record.

Committee colleagues will surely comment on recycling, landfill tax and community issues, but there are a couple of final points on which I want to wind up. The national waste plan is intended to reduce the amount of domestic waste that we send to landfill from 90 per cent to 30 per cent by 2020. One way in which that might be done is by reducing excess packaging and by trying to get rid of the irresponsible approach that is currently taken to overpackaging. We might take the chocolate box as an example—given the high dependence on chocolate that some of us may have been through over the Christmas period. Everybody knows the huge amount of waste that there is in just one box of chocolates. That is the kind of area in which we could make a huge practical difference with no adverse social or economic effect and with a big environmental benefit.

We need to reduce the amount of waste that we create and the amount that we send to landfill. To deliver that, we need not only regulations but a change of culture. As consumers, we need to make different demands and, as organisations, we need to ensure that we reduce waste and recycle and reuse waste wherever possible.

Much progress has been made, but it is fair to say that the national waste plan must aim for more than just compliance with EU law. It must be about realising the massive long-term potential benefits that would come from reducing our excessive use of resources. The national waste plan is a good start, but there is a huge amount still to do.

To meet the many demanding targets will require a lot of persuasion and encouragement of business. We also need a huge amount of the right kind of infrastructure to be built in the right places. A lot of public education is also needed. As we go through the process and as we meet each target in the national waste plan, we will need to come up with tougher, more ambitious and more challenging targets.

Our committee believes that the implementation of the national waste plan should be fully supported. Our suggestions, comments and recommendations on the medium-term challenges must be acted upon now if we are to improve our environment, make our businesses more competitive and avoid wasting the precious natural resources that we are currently dumping in our environment. I commend the report to the Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Environment and Rural Development Committee's 4th Report 2003 (Session 2): *Inquiry into the National Waste Plan* (SP Paper 47).

The Presiding Officer: We are about 10 minutes light in the debate, so anybody who wants extra time can have it.

14:49

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): I assure the Presiding Officer that I shall not treat his comment as an incentive to go over my allotted time.

Reflecting on Sarah Boyack's informative speech, I think that it gives new meaning to Forrest Gump's observation:

"Life's a box of chocolates ... You never know what you're gonna get"—

although one can be sure that it will be overwrapped.

I am pleased to speak in today's debate as my colleague Ross Finnie cannot be here. I am sure that members will wish to know that the operation went "as planned", as they say, and that Ross is recovering in the high-dependency unit at Glasgow royal infirmary as we speak. *[Applause.]*

The national waste plan is our blueprint for improving Scotland's record on sustainable waste management. It is supported by a wide range of stakeholders. The practice of burying resources in landfill sites, to which Sarah Boyack referred, is neither environmentally nor economically sustainable. We want to move away from over-dependency on landfill. That is good news for communities across Scotland.

We are working to put in place the infrastructure to reclaim and recycle valuable resources. Achieving the targets in our national waste plan will depend on a fundamental shift in public attitudes to waste. To help raise awareness of the vital role the public can play in meeting those ambitious targets—our policies on waste depend on public participation and support across Scotland—I am pleased to announce today extra core funding for the Scottish waste awareness group.

Our approach is based on partnership, notably with SEPA and with local government. We are providing significant resources to local authorities, to meet the targets that we and the EU have laid down. We expect local authorities to work together to produce joint solutions and economies of scale.

The targets are challenging. We are committed to recycling or composting 25 per cent of municipal solid waste by 2006 and 55 per cent by 2020. Currently, we recycle about 7 per cent, so there is a substantial gap to be plugged. We are also committed to reducing the landfilling of biodegradable municipal waste to 1.5 million tonnes per year by 2006, which is roughly 20 per cent down from the current level of around 1.85

million tonnes. In 2010, 2013 and 2020, the UK has to meet targets laid down by the EU landfill directive. For Scotland, that means reducing the amount of biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill to 1.32 million tonnes by 2010, 0.88 million tonnes by 2013 and 0.62 million tonnes by 2020.

Action to meet Scottish and EU waste targets directly benefits communities across Scotland. The committee was rightly concerned about communities close to landfill sites. Our aim is to move Scotland away from its excessive dependency on landfill. Where landfill has to remain for the foreseeable future, it will be better regulated. Those aims will secure tangible benefits for communities.

Communities across Scotland can be reassured by the resources provided by the Executive to meet our waste targets. We are providing £230 million to local authorities over three years. So far, we have allocated more than £95 million to 23 local authorities. I hope to add to that number in the immediate future.

Local authorities will soon be required to produce integrated waste management plans to put the commitments that they are making to improve sustainable waste management on to a statutory footing. We have just consulted on establishing a landfill allowance scheme for local authorities that will impose limits on the amount of waste that authorities can landfill.

The Executive is taking legislative and administrative action and is providing substantial resources to meet the challenges that we face. However, as the committee recognises, action is required across a wide variety of fronts. The Scottish Executive funds the Scottish waste awareness group, which develops "waste aware" campaigns for local communities. That fact that those campaigns are local is key. They are designed to coincide with the provision of new recycling infrastructure. The advertising and awareness is therefore linked to what is actually available in the area. I am pleased to announce today that the Executive will be providing SWAG with an additional £100,000 this financial year and £400,000 in each of the next two financial years to help fund SWAG core services. That funding is subject to our formally agreeing SWAG's business plan. We agree with the committee about recognising the role of the community sector in relation to education and awareness. As indicated in our response to the committee, the community recycling network for Scotland is now formally represented on the SWAG steering group. Getting the community sector to work to raise awareness is an important part of raising public awareness more generally.

As well as addressing waste awareness, we are taking action in another key area: the development

of markets for recycled products. Good markets already exist in many areas of Scotland and a virtuous circle is created between recycled goods and securing a market for them—for example, there is a strong market in Scotland for recycled glass. Work is taking place to achieve higher value for recycled products. Glass can be used to filter water or to replace sand in golf bunkers. We have announced funding for the Waste and Resources Action Programme, which is a UK body, and for Remade Scotland. We are also preparing a market development plan, which will lay down priorities, ensure that WRAP and Remade work effectively together, and consider whether consortia should be formed by local authorities and others to sell recycled products. The plan will also ensure that the enterprise networks are fully engaged in the process, to stimulate business growth in that market and to create employment—green jobs, if you like—in the sector. We will consult widely with everyone in the chamber and beyond about how best to achieve those aims.

The committee welcomes the work that the Executive is undertaking but it points out that more needs to be done, particularly on non-municipal waste. Sarah Boyack mentioned that again today and we agree that we must tackle that waste stream; three quarters of Scotland's waste is non-municipal. Action is being taken in that area; SEPA has led several waste stream projects that have collected waste data from specific industrial sectors and those projects will lead to recommendations on how to deal with the non-municipal waste stream. As we outlined in some detail in our response to the committee, we and SEPA will publish, by the middle of this year, a framework on how we intend to deal with non-municipal waste in general.

Our response to the committee also mentions targets on packaging waste and the planned extra resources for the business environment partnership and the north-east Scotland business waste minimisation partnership. I urge businesses throughout Scotland to use the waste minimisation services that are available to them. Our approach is market oriented to a certain extent, and if businesses approach us to extend those services we will be happy to accommodate them. We have long since moved on from the era of planned obsolescence; we have identified waste as an unused resource that can benefit the bottom line of business and enterprise in general.

Waste management has a range of benefits for the environment, for communities and for businesses. The action that the Executive is taking in the provision of resources and in legislation moves us towards a reduction in use, an increase in reuse and recycling and away from landfill. That brings benefits to people throughout Scotland.

We welcome the committee's report. We will listen carefully to everything that is said in the debate and we will keep the committee and the Parliament informed.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention in the final moments of his speech?

Allan Wilson: Absolutely.

John Scott: Is it still the Government's intention to reduce the number of landfill sites from 260 to about 80 during a defined period? If so, given that the recycling areas have not yet been constructed, how will the minister meet the targets that are outlined in his election manifesto?

Allan Wilson: It is our intention to reduce our reliance on landfill and, by definition, that will lead to a reduction in the number of landfill sites in the country. We intend to increase our dependence on reuse and recycling and, as a consequence, that will increase the number of reuse and recycling facilities that we create.

We will have to discuss how we get from where we are to where we want to be with planners, to ensure that the process takes on board local concerns. We did not arrive overnight at a reuse and recycling rate of less than 7 per cent. We got where we are because of decades of underinvestment in waste management in the UK.

That situation will not be repaired overnight, either. We intend to move from where we are to where we want to be in a planned manner in the next three years and beyond, to wider European Union targets. We hope to improve our record on waste and to become a country to follow on waste, rather than a country that follows others, as in the past.

15:00

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I thank all the staff who assisted in the production of the report and I echo the Environment and Rural Development Committee convener's comments about that. I welcome the minister to his temporary sojourn on the front line. I hope that he will convey the SNP's good wishes to Ross Finnie in his medical excursions.

Few people can fail to feel at least a little ashamed of Scotland's record on managing waste in an environmentally efficient manner. The problem is made plain in the report. The truth is that we start from a long way back. Scottish figures are appallingly low, especially when they are compared with those of other small European countries, such as Denmark, which has a 63 per cent target for recycling and composting by 2008, and Austria, which recycled 75 per cent of its municipal solid waste in 2002. We could only

dream of such a target, but another country has achieved it.

The committee's report is wide ranging, but of course it could not be made comprehensive in the limited time that was available to us. Of the three waste management components—reduce, reuse and recycle—the report focuses almost entirely on recycling. If we can regard composting as reuse, a nod is made in that direction.

It is obvious that much more needs to be done to reduce at source the amount of waste that we produce in the first place. Perhaps we can return to that focus in the future. The over packaging of products in supermarkets is a bugbear of mine. Sometimes, it seems that we cannot buy a thing that has not been stuck on a polystyrene tray, wrapped in clingfilm, then encased in a cardboard sleeve. That is all pointless packaging that goes straight in the bin as soon as people get home.

Mr Monteith: I am interested to hear the member's views on the extent of packaging. As retailers package their goods in different ways—some go to the extent of what might be considered over packaging and some use fairly bare packaging—does the member exercise her judgment and choose retail outlets that have bare packaging, or does she go somewhere that uses over packaging?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member would be grateful if she lived in an area that had much choice. Many folk, particularly those who go to small corner shops, often do not have a choice. If any of the domestic charging regimes that are occasionally discussed came into play, that pointless packaging would go straight on to the supermarket floor at the checkout if I had anything to do with it. Perhaps we might all consider that for the future.

Instead of going through the report section by section, I will use the limited time that is available to me—although it turns out not to be as limited as I expected it to be—to examine more closely a major issue that the Executive and all of us must resolve, which is how we go beyond the good intentions of the report and the national waste plan and ensure that the targets that have been set can be met in localities throughout the country.

The minister will know that I am concerned about the practical implementation of any such proposals and that I raised my concerns at the Environment and Rural Development Committee last week, in connection with draft EU directives. In preparing the report, the committee recognised the problem, and the report has a section entitled "Key Challenges in Meeting the Targets".

The debate focuses on domestic waste, for which services vary widely throughout the country. I conducted my own mini-survey by comparing

refuse collection and other domestic environmental services in two localities: Crieff, which happens to be where I live, and Knightswood in Glasgow, as an urban alternative.

I stress that I do not want to have a go at individual councils—I simply want to highlight the issues that arise from practical implementation of policies. In Crieff, I can put out my bin once a week and I can bag up paper and cans and put them out on the kerbside every two weeks. There are no bins for those bags, so there is a possibility that bags will be burst and that litter will be strewn about.

Green waste can be collected from the kerbside fortnightly in the summer and every four weeks in the winter if I join a scheme, which has a £10 annual registration charge. That is not a problem for me, but it will be a factor for people who are on a very limited income. Compost bins are available—again for a charge—but there is not much point in producing compost if one does not have a garden, if one's idea of or inclination for gardening is limited to a couple of plant pots sitting on an expanse of paving or if one lives in a flat.

If I have bulky items that I want to be uplifted, I can request a special uplift, for which there is a £15 charge for a collection of up to four or five bulky items. The vaguely arbitrary-sounding nature of the charge is the result of the council's vagueness and not vagueness on my part. Of course, that again involves cluttering up the kerbside, as items must be out by at least by 7.45 am. In practice, that means that those items will be out the night before. There are issues attached to that approach.

I can take anything that is not uplifted to the civic amenity—or skip—site, which is open three days a week. However, there is a bit of a paradox. First, a person must have a car. In Crieff, between one in three and one in four households do not have a car. Secondly, is not there something of a contradiction in environmental terms in recycling by increasing the number of car journeys in order to recycle? I wonder whether anybody has calculated the trade-off that is involved.

Perth and Kinross Council has a plan to get out 45,000 bins for the collection of paper. There are 62,709 households in the area and, currently, there are only 23,000 such bins. However, the plan will depend on approval and—more significantly—money from the Executive. Therefore, we come back to money.

In Glasgow by contrast, there are weekly kerbside collections of refuse and householders can join the green box scheme, in which newspapers, cans and plastic bottles are collected each week from the kerbside. The council provides a special uplift service, which is largely

free, but a charge is made for some items. The charge is quite hefty—£16.22 for each 15-minute period or part period, with a minimum charge of £16.22. I imagine that the charge increases considerably in practice for people who access the service. Again, a lot of work must be done by the householder to ensure that the items that are to be uplifted are presented in the approved manner and there are civic amenity sites where items can be taken—again, if one has private transport to do so.

I will highlight four issues that arise from the provision that is made by those councils. First, there is the potential cost to individuals. Things can depend on individuals' incomes and costs can have a greater or lesser impact on individuals' ability to access the provision. The danger is that going green will become a middle-class pursuit.

Secondly, people must have their own transport, as most of the councils' schemes have a fallback option of taking things to skips. There are still a significant number of households in Scotland for which that is not an option.

Thirdly, the majority of the effort seems to be on increasing domestic recycling—we have discussed that matter already. A huge issue relating to industrial and business recycling must be addressed.

Finally—this is perhaps one of the smallest points, but it is the most important point—the householder must be proactive in getting hold of information about what is available in their area. I welcome the extra money that is going to the Scottish waste awareness group, but that group does not act in many parts of Scotland, so there is really no existing provision.

From paragraph 61 onwards, the committee's report deals with education, which is a key issue. Digging out information about what is available from councils seems to be a matter that is entirely for the householder, which may be related to council concerns about the overall cost to them of some schemes. The councils and Government should be proactive in making information available. That is one of the key problems that we face. When people want to access a service, they simply do not know about it, which is a problem.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) *rose*—

Roseanna Cunningham: I have definitely gone over my time and I do not know whether the Presiding Officer wishes me to let Jamie Stone intervene.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Stone may intervene.

Mr Stone: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer; time is clearly on our side.

I am interested in what Roseanna Cunningham is saying. She has outlined the responsibilities of Government and the councils and has highlighted that the issue is one of cash, but I ask her to expand on how we or the United Kingdom Government might tweak the landfill tax regime, because there are opportunities in that and there have been criticisms of it in the past. I know that that is not a devolved matter, but I am sure that Roseanna Cunningham would not mind stravaiging into that sort of area.

Roseanna Cunningham: We had to finesse the relevant section of the committee's report to ensure that it was possible for those such as me to argue for the repatriation of moneys for use directly in Scotland. There are issues about the landfill tax that could be taken on board in this area. All such issues must be tackled if the waste plan is to become an implemented reality, and I look forward to the minister's response. Some of the points that I have raised have seemed quite minor on the surface, but they are in fact some of the biggest obstacles to our moving forward in Scotland.

15:11

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Scotland's record on waste is not good. As the minister pointed out, 7 per cent of household waste that is collected in Scotland is recycled. As a result, our figures do not compare at all well with those in other European countries. Between 1999 and 2003, the recycling figure has improved by only 1.1 per cent, which undermines the Scottish Executive's ability to deliver its target of 25 per cent of municipal waste being recycled by 2006.

I commend the committee's report and the work that it has done to scrutinise the Executive's national waste plan. I support many of the committee's recommendations but, as some members might remember, I had some difficulty in allowing one or two points to pass. Those are the subjects on which I intend to dwell rather more heavily than I will on some of those with which members have already dealt.

I cannot support the committee's repeated calls for new action plans and targets for measuring the success of the national waste plan. Although the obvious base targets for the amount of recycling and composting that are to be carried out are necessary, overloading the issue with goals that are dictated from the centre will serve only to restrict local authorities from discovering the best solutions for their areas in the long term. To develop individual solutions, local authorities need flexibility, and having constantly to cross the Executive's t's and dot its i's will deny them that flexibility.

The committee reported that many of the groups that gave evidence raised concerns that the current planning system caused delay, that a culture of objection to all waste developments had arisen and that that would prevent any progress from being made towards the Executive's targets. One witness highlighted the fact that

"the current planning system is unlikely to deliver the necessary infrastructure in time, if at all."

The Executive has not done enough to address the problems of the planning system in Scotland. The system is completely out of date, because there has been no review of planning legislation since 1947. The Executive's review of strategic planning is only tinkering at the edges of the real issues when a total review of planning legislation is required; the aim of the review must be to simplify and speed up the planning process.

Sarah Boyack: We have had a large number of reviews of the planning system in Scotland over the past few years, but we have not had a new planning bill. As I understand it, the Executive intends to introduce a bill in this parliamentary session, so we will get action. The question is whether the bill will be right, but Alex Johnstone cannot say that there have not been any reviews.

Alex Johnstone: I look forward to the opportunities that that bill will create when it comes along.

I support the committee's view that there should be no acceptance of incineration without energy recovery, but I would be prepared for incinerators to be used more widely. Although they are not right for every area, the success of plants such as the Lerwick waste-to-energy plant in Shetland demonstrates that they have an important and useful role to play in reducing the amount of waste that goes to landfill. Furthermore, while we wait for the market in recyclates to grow, such plants might also be the most appropriate economic choice.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): If, by 2020, 14 per cent of our waste is being incinerated and we then decide that that is not the best practical environmental option and that we want to shift to another environmental option, how would we do that if we had built the plants, they were in operation and the business case for them had been made? Given the capital investment that is required to get an incineration plant up and running, we would not be able to get out of incineration.

Alex Johnstone: I understand the concerns that the member expresses, but the Executive's response to the committee report, which failed to go as far as the committee requested, indicated that it understands—as I understand and as Mark Ruskell needs to understand—that solutions must be found. We do not have the option of deciding

on a course of action and simply turning our backs on it if it does not deliver. The waste that is created in Scotland today must be dealt with. If we do not deal with it by some means, we will have a problem that we cannot solve. That is not acceptable. As a consequence, we need to be broadminded on this issue.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): The member, who represents North East Scotland, will be familiar with the proposal for an incinerator at Altens in Aberdeen, which is causing huge controversy in the city. Does he agree with Friends of the Earth, which says that if the city reaches its targets by 2020 that facility will be three to four times over capacity?

Alex Johnstone: I am well aware of the controversy that exists where the decision to incinerate waste has been, or is likely to be, taken. However, the opportunities that incineration affords to meet the targets and commitments that cannot be met in the meantime by any other means—with the provision that Mark Ruskell has suggested—are one of the issues that we must keep on the agenda if we are to progress. That is what I want to do at the moment.

An issue that has come to my attention too late to be raised as part of the committee's inquiry, but which is nonetheless worthy of mention today, is that of small waste oil burners. From a number of written questions that I have asked, the minister will be aware of the concerns that Scottish businesses, in particular, have about the Waste Incineration (Scotland) Regulations 2003, which may mean, in effect, that small waste oil burners cannot be used in that context in Scotland.

In a written answer, the minister states:

"The equivalent regulations for England and Wales do not include any threshold for small waste oil burners."—*[Official Report, Written Answers, 20 January 2004; S2W-5142.]*

I suggest that the minister has got that wrong and refer him to section 2.4 of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs document "Guidance on Directive 2000/76/EC on the incineration of waste", which states clearly:

"The Government considers that units which are not included within the scope of the Directive ... include small waste burners and small space heaters or other waste oil burners (used for example on farms) and small space heaters or other waste oil burners (used for example on garage premises)."

Will the minister pledge to re-examine how small waste oil burners are being treated in the equivalent regulations for England and Wales and reconsider the Scottish Executive's position, to ensure that the Scottish businesses that could be affected by it are not disadvantaged and that we at least have a level playing field with England and Wales?

I will take a close interest in SEPA's study of household incentives, paying particular attention to direct charging for household waste. I refer to schemes in which the cost of disposing of household waste is separated from the council tax, so that a household pays a direct charge. The most effective schemes of this type charge by weight, providing an incentive for householders to produce less waste. The charge would not be punitively high, because according to Professor Jim Baird the cost of household waste collection and disposal in Scotland is currently about £1.50 per household per week.

Different types of charging scheme are increasingly being introduced throughout Europe and North America. As a consequence, the amount of waste that is produced has fallen dramatically in some areas. Charging has not only reduced the amount of waste, but has gone a long way towards encouraging individuals to participate in recycling programmes to a much greater extent.

The minister suggested in his response to the committee that he did not dismiss the possibility of direct charging, but he did not accept that it was the means by which he wished to proceed at the moment. I urge the minister to retain charging as part of the potential armoury that he has at his disposal for dealing with the growing waste problem.

Allan Wilson: I give the member the reassurance that he seeks regarding small waste oil burners.

My official response to the charging regime that Alex Johnstone envisages is on the record. How would he prevent charging from impacting disproportionately on the poorest in our society?

Alex Johnstone: A great deal of experience, which covers the ability to pay, is being accrued in other countries, both in Europe and North America. It also covers an ancillary issue, which was raised at the committee and has been raised with me on other occasions—in some areas, waste charging might result in an increase in the amount of fly tipping that goes on. As the minister said, and according to the report, direct charging schemes might not have come to Scotland yet, but it is essential that we retain such schemes as an option in the long term. The effectiveness of that method in reducing waste and encouraging recycling has been proven to such an extent in other countries that it might be irresponsible of us to dismiss it at this stage.

Before I close, I wish to associate myself and my party with the remarks that have been made about the minister, Ross Finnie. I look forward to debating with him again in months to come, but in the meantime, it is nice to have Allan Wilson to cover for him.

Although aspects of the report concern me, I am happy for my name to be associated with it. I believe that it is a major contribution towards encouraging the successful application of the national waste plan in Scotland.

15:21

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): The Lib Dems are pleased to hear that Ross Finnie has come through his operation successfully and that he has now embarked on the road to recovery. We also welcome Allan Wilson as he takes up the whole portfolio single-handedly. Well done that man!

It might have been thought premature for the Environment and Rural Development Committee to examine how the national waste plan is working so soon after the plan's inception and when we have until 2010 to meet the targets that were set by the landfill directive. In the event, the committee's inquiry has proved to be a valuable exercise that has flagged up a number of issues and concerns and it has been much easier and more useful to address those at this early stage than later.

For me, the main issue that falls into that category is where the voluntary sector fits into the new scenario. Local authorities and the private business sector have access to funding and they see commercial opportunities in areas, whereas the voluntary sector has hitherto ploughed a pioneering, but sometimes lonely, furrow. It is not fair to make sweeping generalisations, but it is fair to say that the experience of the voluntary sector in that regard varies widely throughout the country.

Some of the difficulties in incorporating voluntary activities into the waste plan relate to the very factors that can be the strength of the voluntary sector. Many schemes are locally based and locally focused, and they address local situations. They are known about locally, but not further afield. There has been, therefore, a deficit of information about the size and diversity of voluntary sector activity, a lack of cohesion in the sector and no coherent voice to represent those schemes. Those difficulties have been recognised and they are being addressed. Information is being gathered and the Community Recycling Network Scotland can collate and articulate the views of the sector and act to protect its interests.

The second strand of concern that relates specifically to the voluntary sector is how to ensure that organisations that deliver recycling, but which also have a social inclusion remit—to use the jargon—do not fall through the funding net. The best-value criteria are not set up to take that dimension into account. That has also been recognised and it is being dealt with. As many organisations have said, it would be a tragedy if

the waste plan were implemented in ways that damaged—even inadvertently—some of the excellent work that is being done in the voluntary sector.

Another area of concern that was flagged up in the committee's work was the danger of embarking on a course of action now that would deliver a short-term objective, but which might compromise a future course of action or limit choices further down the line. An example of that from the evidence that we took relates to glass. The emphasis has been on recycling glass rather than on reusing glass containers. As a result, producers have redesigned glass containers and bottles over the years to be as glass-use efficient as possible and as thin as they can be. However, that means that bottles are no longer robust enough to make reuse a viable proposition. That is an example of the need to consider the matter from a whole-life perspective and to make quite difficult evaluations of what to include in calculations about what is or is not environmentally friendly.

Taking a little time now to look beyond the near horizon, to think things through and to try to plot all the potential implications could pay dividends later. I am sure that all the agencies involved would hope to do that; however, it is all too easy to get bogged down in immediate matters. Perhaps the mere fact that the committee has undertaken this work will serve as a reminder of the importance of thinking long term while dealing with the job in hand.

The national waste plan was derived from local area waste plans that were put together by certain groups—mainly local authorities. It was a good process; the creation of the groups made sense as far as geography and economies of scale were concerned. One of the strengths of the national approach is that it has not assumed that one size or solution fits all.

Although the national waste plan is a good thing, it is only one element in a very wide picture. Many more aspects need to be dealt with. After all, municipal waste accounts for only 20 per cent of the total waste that is generated. The main focus of the plan is on recycling, but the underlying problem is waste production. Waste reduction treats the disease, not the symptoms. In fact, the worst-case scenario is that all our recycling efforts could be wiped out if the level of waste production continues to increase year on year. That is why campaigns to raise public awareness and measures to encourage producers to design out waste are important.

We can all lead by example, corporately in our procurement policies and individually by our own behaviour. For example, we could use scrap paper instead of expensive virgin paper—or, indeed,

headed paper—for making rough notes. We could switch off our personal computers when we go home at night or the lights if we are the last to leave a room. Doing even very little things like those can collectively deliver a great deal.

Surveys have shown that people are prepared to do their bit; however, they need some help from the statutory authorities with the provision of facilities and by way of advice and information. Although the public can do something about waste and their wasteful habits, they create only 20 per cent of the waste that is generated. Obviously, the industrial and business sectors can make even greater contributions, very often to their own considerable benefit. In a wider context, treating waste not as waste but as a secondary resource opens up considerable economic potential.

Our attitudes to waste are changing. I suppose that a natural cycle underlies that process. We have moved from the necessity of wasting nothing during the war years to our thoughtless enjoyment of the consumer society and much higher standards of living and now to a re-recognition that making waste is not sensible and has a cost that neither society nor the environment can sustain. That is the wider picture; our job is to create the framework for implementing the waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse, recycle and recover. The waste plan will help. However, accepting the committee's recommendations will be a further help and I commend the report to Parliament.

15:28

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands (Lab)): I welcome this opportunity to speak in support of the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report on the national waste plan. The plan seeks to deal with our historically poor record of waste management. I think that "abysmal" would be the right word in that context; I used that very word in last June's debate on the Landfill (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2003 (Draft).

Our record has been abysmal because people and Governments have had no real interest in minimising the terrible amount of waste that we produce. In last June's debate, I made comparisons with Germany, particularly with regard to separate rubbish collections and sorting arrangements for household rubbish. At the time, the minister assured me that, with the assistance of the Executive's strategic waste fund, local authorities in Scotland were increasingly adopting a number of similar schemes. The evidence that the committee has taken endorses that comment.

When I was listening to Nora Radcliffe's speech, I could not help thinking that she and I were on the same wavelength about reuse and the role of

community groups. I remember that when the committee took evidence, Nora Radcliffe was concerned about the reuse of wine bottles. We were told that because wine bottles had to travel so far to be reused, the environmental balance would be wrong. We took that as the gospel truth because we were told that we could not do it. However, I found out that in Germany soft drink manufacturers such as Coca-Cola have an agreement with the German Government whereby if the bottle has a green top the consumer pays a deposit on it and they can return it. That system has been used for a number of years with beer bottles in Germany and is now being used by multinational firms in conjunction with the German Government.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I lived in Germany for six years and the system there is different from the one that we have here. The system there is about the retail business. Most people go to the Getränkemarkt, where they buy in bulk and return the bottles in bulk. The key to the system in Germany is getting the retailers to co-operate.

Maureen Macmillan: Yes, but I do not see why we should not get the retailers here to co-operate.

The word that I have written down in my speech is one that I cannot pronounce: it is the national Mehrwegpfand, but since I do not have any German I dare say that no one could understand what I have just said. The system is not only for glass but for returnable plastic bottles. I do not see why the Government cannot get together with retailers to ensure that there is a national system for returning containers.

Mr Monteith: To recycle, one has to have a market for the product that is being recycled. With regard to wine bottles—and beer bottles for that matter—there is a significant difference between green glass and brown glass, such that a market for green glass exists and the market for brown glass is very difficult. Would the member care to comment on how one resolves the difficulties when the market is not there? When members of the public put bottles into the bottle bank, they are not aware of any difference and they are not aware of the difficulty in disposing of brown glass.

Maureen Macmillan: I dare say that everybody has heard that after a member of the public separates their different colours of glass into different containers, the glass is all dumped together when the containers are emptied. However, I was concentrating on the reuse of bottles so that they would be refilled by the cola manufacturer or whoever.

I believe that Scotland's "other national drink" runs a campaign here, which I was not aware of because I am more inclined to have a nip of

Scotland's first national drink than a glass of the other national drink. If one manufacturer in Scotland can do it, other manufacturers could follow suit. The Executive's response to the committee's report noted that a scheme in the Lothians was about to start up or had just started up. I urge the Executive to consider the issue.

Not-for-profit organisations, which are often cornerstones of employment in remote areas of rural communities, have a role in delivering the national waste plan. Rural communities have faced a particular challenge in delivering the waste strategy and they have done it very well. That became clear during the committee's inquiry, when the evidence that was given by Argyll and Bute Council, in particular, was very impressive.

I pay tribute to some of those excellent schemes. In a UK context, the recycling sector is worth about £13 billion a year, compared with only about £5 billion for the waste management sector, and it supports about 140,000 jobs nationally. That is reflected proportionally in the number of jobs that the sector provides in rural areas. A good example is on Mull, where collections of paper and cardboard are offered to commercial customers. There are the waste busters in Campbeltown and social firms such as HomeAid Caithness and TouchWood in Skye. One firm that is in partnership with Highland Council in the waste implementation plan is ILM (Highland) in Alness. I am concerned about the funding and support that those organisations get, because it is not always secure. I visited ILM in Alness the other day. The firm is still waiting to hear about its transforming waste funding and if it does not hear about that during the next six weeks it will have to close down its operation, which deals with the reuse and recycling of white goods.

I wanted to say a bit about incinerators, but I do not think that I have time to do so. In the context of remote island communities, there is a place for incinerators and we must consider the balance of the environmental benefit—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I did not switch off your microphone. I do not know what happened.

15:35

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): I think that that could be called a sharp exit.

I want to consider the issue from a local government perspective. Although municipal waste represents only about a quarter of the total amount of waste that is collected in the country, it is the issue about which most members of the public are concerned. The history of municipal waste collection is not good. There is no tradition of imposing on local government statutory duties

to meet recycling targets: indeed, for many years, local authorities were positively encouraged to take the cheapest route when it came to recycling. Budget cuts, spending pressures in other statutory areas and so-called best value have led to a situation in which much of the infrastructure that is needed to meet recycling targets simply does not exist, or exists on only a piecemeal basis, with experiments on different methods of collection being carried out on a small scale in areas throughout the country.

Another problem, which was mentioned earlier, is that we are playing catch-up. Over a long period, other European nations have adopted a very different culture in their approach to waste management, while we in this country have preferred the cheaper solution of throwing things into incinerators or holes in the ground.

The problem has been exacerbated for local authorities because they have no control—or very little control—over the increasing amount of waste that is being produced year in, year out in Scotland. Local authorities have no legislative powers to introduce, for example, taxation as a means of suppressing consumption. Reference was made to the practice in Germany of paying compulsory deposits on bottles and other containers. I returned from holiday this year with one or two German beer bottles, and although it would have been nice to have been able to return them, I suspected that the cost of going back to Germany would have been too much, so the bottles went into the bottle bank.

In the Republic of Ireland, a highly successful tax on plastic bags was introduced, which I believe has cut plastic bag consumption by nearly 90 per cent. The powers of this Parliament are so weak that it cannot impose such a tax.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I take it that the member is aware of Mike Pringle's proposed members' bill, which would give local authorities the power to impose such a tax. Will he indicate his support for that proposal?

Mr McFee: I am well aware of the proposal. The fact is that this Parliament cannot impose a national tax on plastic bags, although it can give local authorities the power to levy such a tax. Rather than go down the convoluted route of introducing the measure through 32 local authorities and perhaps having different policies in different parts of Scotland, it would be far better if Parliament possessed the powers to deal with the matter nationally. That would be a very useful method of waste management; failure to address the problem would be among the biggest wastes.

Mr Monteith: I appreciate the member's argument against local collection of a tax on plastic bags. Does that mean that the member is

also against a local council tax or, indeed, any local tax? Does he favour the Scottish Socialist Party model, which is to introduce a national tax to pay for council services?

Mr McFee: In secondary 2, my maths teacher taught me about the dangers of extrapolation. Brian Monteith has just exemplified those dangers—if he would be quiet for a moment, he might learn something. I favour Parliament's having the powers to do what it wishes to do.

Allan Wilson rose—

Mr McFee: If the minister does not mind, I will make some progress. If I have some extra time at the end, I will let him in.

Two major difficulties face local authorities: one is collection of waste and the other is having a market for the goods that are produced from it. The present system of collecting and moving waste is extremely inefficient and we need to move towards a system of roadside collection. The idea of getting into a car to drive 3 miles to put three or four bottles into a bottle bank is ludicrous. We require greater public involvement at source; we should ask people to separate waste in their own bins and refuse-collection sacks. All the problems of collection are surmountable. In many respects, the problems of collection should be the easiest to resolve—if there is the political will and if finance is available.

However, by far the most important issue to be addressed is that of markets. There is no point in an authority dramatically improving its recycling rates and separating the different types of waste if there is no market for the products that it will produce. Many local authorities have been swayed against greater recycling of waste because of the lack of suitable markets for their produce. Despite the excellent work of local waste management partnerships, problems still exist; for example, the huge variations in the price of basic items such as glass and paper when local authorities come to sell their products.

There are activities such as the recycling of used car tyres to provide fuel for its furnace by Blue Circle Ltd in Dunbar. The Environment and Rural Development Committee's report also mentions the Remade project at the Shanks centre at Glasgow Caledonian University. Such projects to help to develop markets and uses for waste materials are all very well as far as they go, but unless the sector is significantly boosted we will simply separate waste products only to return them to landfill. That is the danger if the marketplace is not developed.

If the national waste plan is to succeed, the Scottish Executive must be more proactive in helping to develop new markets and in ensuring continuity of supply to new facilities. We have to

maintain stable prices and a demand for products that are made from waste.

15:42

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate and I congratulate the Environment and Rural Development Committee on its report. It asks thoughtful and thought-provoking questions. If its recommendations were to be implemented by the Executive, the national waste plan would be the stronger for it. I am only sorry that the opportunity has been missed to recommend tightening up of the most basic of all waste strategies, which is where we as individuals put our waste.

I cannot believe that I am alone in abhorring the increasing amount of litter that so bedevils our countryside and townscapes. I have a bit of history on this: I once received a torrent of verbal abuse for overtaking a car, forcing it to a stop, and returning a crisp packet that the occupant had seen fit to throw out of the window. I thought that the end of my life had arrived. It might be stretching the point to suggest that dealing with litter should be part of the nation's waste strategy, but I believe that the time has come to do something robust about that particular social disgrace.

I want to focus on one specific part of the report—the section on contracts that is contained in paragraphs 49 to 53, which I am surprised have not been brought up already. The committee notes that only about four waste strategy areas are putting private finance initiative contracts in place. My constituency of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale forms part of one of those areas. Close inspection of the PFI, or public-private partnership, that the local council is on the verge of signing, completely endorses the concerns that the committee has identified. It cannot be right that, the closer a contract comes to being signed, the greater the number of unanswered questions about it that arise. However, that is the case with the Dumfries and Galloway proposal. The general principle is that domestic waste from the eastern half of my constituency—Kirkcudbrightshire—will be collected as usual by the council and then taken to a waste-transfer station, to be situated at an as yet undetermined site in central Kirkcudbrightshire. The original site was rejected following an inquiry.

At that transfer station, the waste will be compacted and sent to a plant nearly 20 miles away—near Dumfries—to be turned into fuel. The fuel was to have been converted into energy for the national grid in a pyrolysis plant, but no one is prepared to pay for, back or fund that plant—it is not part of the PPP—so the preferred bidder has built in a seven-year comfort zone, during which

they will have to come up with a client for the fuel. In the meantime, the fuel will be returned to landfill, almost certainly at Dalbeattie, which was the original site of the waste-transfer station. No one has yet answered the question of what will happen if no client can be found for the fuel, but I would hazard a guess that it will simply continue to go to landfill, which would be a complete negation of the conversion process.

Furthermore, the eco-deco plant—that is indeed its name—that will transform the waste into the unwanted fuel, will require all the waste that is currently generated within its catchment area in order for it to operate. The Executive has rightly put resources into recycling at source, because that could and should reduce the amount of waste that is available, which should be the number 1 target of any meaningful waste strategy. That means that we are in imminent danger of falling into the trap that the committee has wisely identified in paragraphs 50 to 52; namely, that the volume of waste that will be required by the PPP means that the council could be locked into a 25-year contract to provide a certain tonnage of waste, which in eight or 10 years' time will not be provided within the catchment area. That throws up the alarming possibility that the council will have to import waste—it might even have to pay to do so—to fulfil its contractual obligations, which would be to the eternal detriment of Scotland's environment and the Dumfries and Galloway council tax payer. That simply does not add up.

I am truly sorry that, in paragraph 52 of its report, the committee notes that

“a detailed examination of contract arrangements is beyond the scope”

of its inquiry, because I earnestly believe that an in-depth inquiry into Dumfries and Galloway Council's contract arrangement would provide substantial evidence against proceeding with the PPP.

Can it be right for the council to move the goalposts after a preferred bidder has been identified, as has been alleged in relation to the historic risk that has been attached to existing landfill sites? Can it be right for an existing landfill site to be extended, through the contract, into the only known site in Scotland where the bog bush-cricket lives—I bet that not many members knew about that—with the vague assurance that a new habitat for that rare species will be created by the bidder and monitored by Scottish Natural Heritage? I do not take huge comfort from that. I have even travelled to Brussels to raise my constituents' concerns that European directives on habitat and bird protection may be breached by the proposal—the European commissioner concerned has been fully alerted to that possibility.

Paragraph 53 states:

"The Committee recommends that the Minister should examine carefully the nature and length of contracts which are suitable for waste management facilities",

if for no other reason than to avoid the establishment of the perverse incentive of generating more waste in order to fulfil a PPP contract. That is a genuine fear. I believe that there is an urgent need to conduct such an examination in Dumfries and Galloway and I am sure that all elected politicians with an interest in that region will endorse that view. I urge the minister to take the opportunity that the report offers to carry out such an examination for the sake of the region's council tax payers.

15:48

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I apologise for being late for the debate; unfortunately—like one or two others, including Mr Fraser—I had to do a television interview. I, too, congratulate the members of the Environment and Rural Development Committee on their production of a fine report.

I want to develop the point that Alex Fergusson started with, which was about litter. In the Highlands, as in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale and many other parts of Scotland, our tourism industry relies on Scotland's having a clean and unspoiled image. Every bit of litter, mess and fly tipping counts against our visitors getting the best experience.

Some years ago, when I was a member of the then Ross and Cromarty District Council, I became involved in a clean-up scheme that was known as the mean green clean-up scheme, which was based at my old school, Tain Royal Academy. That scheme was very successful in that it got children, members of the community council and the wider community involved; we had litter pick-up schemes around Easter Ross. We made them fun events and we issued gloves and bags. It was all done within safety guidelines. They were good outings, and we would end it all with all the children in the school getting crisps and Coke. The scheme went further by getting into recycling and composting.

My point, with which I am sure everyone would agree, is that one way to minimise waste is to get in with the young. All of us who visit modern studies classes—which I am sure we all do from time to time—know that the young are very hot on such issues, so there is a rich vein to be mined. It is not simply a case of a community council, councillor, or even an MSP writing to a head teacher to say, "Your kids are chucking litter in the street." That is not the helpful approach. The helpful approach is to get together with them and

to involve the community. That is my first point: we can get in there and work with the young and, in doing so, we will grow a generation that is more litter and waste aware than we are today. That can only be good for the future.

My second point is that farmers' markets are an increasingly successful way of supporting the hard-pressed farmers and crofters in my area and those in many other parts of Scotland. I accept Roseanna Cunningham's points about supermarket packaging. The fact is that if one goes to a farmers' market, anything that one buys, from a piece of venison to tatties to a piece of salmon, comes in one—usually recycled—bag from the Co-op or Tesco. The litter that arises from that is minimal. It is far less than standard supermarket checkout packaging, which Roseanna Cunningham rightly dislikes. As well as assisting our farmers and crofters, farmers' markets are one small way—they are a step in the right direction—of tackling the litter and waste problem.

My final point is very much a personal hobby-horse, and I apologise to members who have heard me say it before. We should encourage the bigger supermarkets, or any supermarket, perhaps via the planning system, to use a certain percentage of their shelf space for local produce and to work in parallel with farmers' markets. The King Edwards or Edzell Blues that would be delivered by the local farmer would be loose on the shelves and would be put in one package, as opposed to the multiple packaging that we often see in supermarkets.

In tackling waste—which, in turn, will help on the wider front—great advances could be made along those particular avenues and, at the same time, we would be doing a great deal to underpin local economies in very fragile areas.

15:52

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate. I am particularly grateful to the Environment and Rural Development Committee for allowing the views of my constituents in Greengairs to help shape the final report, which is impressive in terms of its comprehensive coverage of the central issues that are associated with waste management, and in relation to its balanced and well-considered recommendations. I congratulate all those who contributed to the report on producing a valuable catalyst for the continuing debate about waste management, which is necessary in Scotland.

There can be no doubt that waste disposal and reduction are among the major problems that face our society. There are no easy solutions, neither is

the problem unique to Scotland. The raft of legislation and guidelines that is being produced at European level is testament to the fact that waste management is a significant problem that affects every developed country. As the report points out, Scotland's

"record on recycling and other environmentally and economically efficient management of waste is extremely poor."

Along with the targets that are set out in the partnership agreement, the national waste strategy provides evidence of the Scottish Executive's commitment to tackling the problem.

I am sure that members will not be surprised to hear that I will concentrate on paragraphs 36 to 38 of the report, which discuss the impact of landfill on adjacent communities. I will also touch briefly on the committee's recommendations on education and planning.

The historically great reliance on landfill has, arguably, affected the village of Greengairs in my constituency more than it has any other community in Scotland. Greengairs is surrounded by one of Europe's largest landfill sites and its people have suffered the effects of that proximity for many years. They have been forced to endure everything from noxious fumes to plagues of flies; from damaged roads that have been eroded by the continuous heavy traffic to the blasts from the opencast mines that are eventually used for landfill. To say that my constituents in Greengairs have had more than their fair share of suffering as a result of the landfill site is a gross understatement. I am therefore very pleased that the committee's report acknowledged that point and listened to the powerful evidence that said that no other community should be blighted by the effects of landfill to the extent that the people of Greengairs have endured.

I accept that we have to deal effectively with waste. I also accept that, in the short-term, landfill will be required and that such decisions will not be popular with the communities that are affected by them. However, I also agree with the committee's recommendation that we have to have a clear strategy to ensure that the required infrastructure does not impact disproportionately on any one community. That has been the problem for the people in Greengairs: they have suffered from being the focus of those activities for much of central Scotland.

I also welcome the committee's recommendation that the minister consider amending regulations to specify a minimum distance between a landfill site and a community. That is very important.

The committee report highlights the important part that education must play in the creation of a

Scotland where less waste is produced, and where more of what is produced is recycled. Effective municipal recycling projects are dependent on a well-educated public who understand the benefits of recycling. Education of the public about something as simple as sorting waste prior to collection can significantly reduce contamination levels in recycling bins. In turn, that means a reduction in recycling costs because fewer staff need be employed to sort waste at the recycling plant. I agree strongly with the committee report that the process of public education must start in school.

I am pleased that, in North Lanarkshire, we have more eco-schools than any other local authority area in Scotland.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Does the member accept, given the evidence that was taken by the committee, that education has to extend to industry, which seems to be ignorant of the effects that it has on communities such as Greengairs, and which is not prepared to consider other options?

Karen Whitefield: That is important. One of the positive effects of the landfill site at Greengairs is that the primary school has eco-status. The school has been good at talking to Shanks Group plc about how landfill impacts on the community, raising awareness of the issues and working in partnership with the company to find solutions.

The report raised some issues about planning. In particular, the committee stated that communities must be involved more effectively in the planning process. There is a need for that process to be seen to be more equitable. The experience of the people in Greengairs provides compelling evidence that communities' views must be taken on board. Central to making that process more equitable is the need to monitor the standards of operations, along with effective enforcement of any conditions that are imposed when planning applications are granted. For too long, too many operators have agreed to a host of conditions, knowing full well that the local authority and SEPA do not have the resources to enforce regulations. It is not difficult for companies to make such commitments knowing that they will never have to deliver on them. It is therefore vital that resources be put in place to make landfill operators face up to their responsibilities.

15:59

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): We in the Green group add our best wishes to Ross Finnie for a speedy recovery.

The Environment and Rural Development Committee is to be congratulated on its comprehensive inquiry into the national waste

plan. I will focus on two of the issues that it covered.

The work of community businesses in reuse and recycling must be acknowledged and supported properly but, in the race to achieve tonnage targets, some local authorities are already bypassing those invaluable groups. They are invaluable, because no price can be put on the social, economic and community benefits that they bring to the most disadvantaged people. It is at that level that the real education on the value of reuse takes place, and it is where waste is seen as a resource and a job creator.

The minister said that we should move away from our over-dependency on landfill, which confirms to me that Executive waste policy is still all about managing waste rather than reducing it. There is a real opportunity for the Executive to change that position. The national waste plan has been criticised for being short on vision when it comes to the radical, but eminently practical, concept of zero waste. It is a concept that brings under its umbrella every aspect that the committee considered. What a boost it would be to the Parliament's image if the Executive took on that innovative concept. The central argument for zero waste is simple and, in the context of global ecological awareness, it is unchallengeable.

The Executive gives the impression that it sees zero waste as being a noble concept that is worthy of consideration for the future, but that view misses the concept's potential in the present. For many years, the idea of reinventing our perception of waste has been catching on. Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States all have successful working examples of zero waste, and of changing their linear systems of making things, using them then dumping them to a more innovative circular system in which anything that is extracted from the natural world as a useful resource is used repeatedly until the end of its life, at which point it is processed in a way that ensures that its value is returned to nature. Composting is just one vital element in that circle.

The environmental benefits of zero waste are clear, but there are also wider benefits to society and business. Zero waste, the birthplace of which was industry, leads naturally to innovation in business, in design, in the use of materials, in the reuse of goods and in processing materials at the end of their life.

The Scottish Executive is developing a green jobs strategy and adoption of zero waste would boost green job numbers dramatically.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Will the member tell us more about zero waste, an idea which I support? Such a policy would affect not just the Scottish Parliament and its policies, but

the UK, Europe and the multinationals that are involved.

Shiona Baird: There is a global aspect, but we need not be concerned about getting ourselves involved in that. The city of Canberra has adopted a zero-waste policy. Zero waste is like all the targets that we set; it is question of working towards an ultimate goal. Zero waste is the end of a sequence of events, but we must take the first step in working towards it. Everything that we do in the Scottish Parliament will influence what happens in Scottish industry and will send a message to the UK Parliament, which is equally important in getting the message across. We must not stop and say that we cannot do it just because we feel that to involve the rest of the European Community would be too much. The real point that I am trying to get across to the Executive is that we must take our stand now. As I said, design and the use of materials create green jobs, which relates to what the Executive is trying to achieve in its enterprise culture.

I mentioned Australia, but New Zealand has recognised all the benefits of zero waste and has adopted the strategy nationally; it is the one country that has advanced zero waste nationally.

For us to move forward, the Executive must adopt zero waste as a formal policy not in the future but now. The Scottish Executive talks about the need for Scotland to be enterprising and pioneering; adoption of the concept of zero waste would be proof positive that the Executive is serious about that. It would show that the Executive is serious about protecting Scotland's environment, communities and jobs and it would display its capacity for innovation.

When the minister is playing football for the Parliament's team, I am sure that he expects nothing less than 100 per cent from his colleagues—he probably expects 110 per cent. What would be the point in going on to the pitch if he expected only 25 per cent? We need to see the same level of commitment from the minister and the Scottish Executive on waste. Nothing less than 100 per cent commitment will do.

16:05

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that it brings a smile to many members of the public and to the sketch writers who haunt this place that the Parliament is debating the production of rubbish. Nonetheless, today's debate is important.

I welcome the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report, which flags up many questions that need to be asked. It keeps the pressure on the Scottish Executive to deliver on the issue in the years ahead. We are making

progress. Over the past two or three years, we have at least started to discuss waste issues in the Scottish Parliament, which is a huge step forward from what happened in the years prior to the establishment of the Parliament.

It is shameful that, whereas Austria regularly recycles 75 per cent of its municipal waste, Scotland puts 91 per cent of its waste into landfill and recycles only 4 per cent. I have no doubt that the committee and the Executive are considering how Scotland can learn from other countries that take a pride in their environment and want to protect their resources. We need to learn how they achieve those targets and we need to adopt some of their practices here in Scotland.

As Sarah Boyack mentioned, Europe has had much to do with the fact that waste recycling has come on to our agenda. She was quite clever in saying that the European Union reinforced the imperative to recycle; the reality is that the Scottish Parliament discusses such matters because the Scottish Executive is required to respond to EU regulations, such as the packaging regulations and the waste electrical and electronic equipment regulations that are coming on stream, or the landfill regulations that we have had in the past. The Scottish Executive and, indeed, Scotland are playing catch-up.

Today's debate has two themes. First, it is about managing waste. Secondly, it is about waste minimisation. Clearly, dealing with the latter makes dealing with the former much easier. We should put much more emphasis on reducing Scotland's waste in the first place. I would be interested to know the breakdown of the Government's expenditure so far on achieving those two objectives.

To reduce waste, we will clearly need to change the behaviour of householders and of businesses. One of the biggest challenges is to raise awareness about what individuals and businesses can do. There has been much talk about educating the public and businesses, but I am not sure how that will be done. There is a real danger that Scotland will have lots of initiatives but that no one will know about them. Will leaflets—on recycled paper, of course—be put through people's doors, or will television adverts be used to put the message across that people need to reduce waste and manage their waste more effectively?

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept that, when it comes to looking for ways of encouraging people to reduce and recycle waste, we have few arrows in our quiver? In the end, direct charging will probably be the only way of persuading people about what is the right thing to do.

Richard Lochhead: I will deal with the need for a carrot-and-stick approach in a moment.

We need to make people aware of what is available to them. Until a few months ago, I lived in Aberdeen city centre and had to travel quite far by car to recycle anything. Off the top of my head, the only places that I could think of that had recycling facilities were the supermarkets at the retail parks. That is fair enough for people who have a car and who have the time to get there. However, I now live in a village just outside Aberdeen, where the recycling facility is just two minutes down the road. It is a lot easier for me to recycle now. Those are two contrasting situations. People throughout Scotland face such choices; what they can do often depends on where they live.

On the composting initiatives, I think that composting is the way to go, but how do people get hold of a compost bin? I do not know how to do that. At home, we have talked about composting in the past week or so and I want to pursue the issue, but I do not know how to go about it—I will need to find out. I welcome initiatives that are under way in Aberdeenshire to work with community councils, such as the one in Braemar, in order to establish community facilities for composting. I wish those initiatives all the best.

Incineration plants have been a controversial issue for the past few years in Aberdeen and constantly dominate the newspaper columns in the region. In mid-February, the local planning committee will make a decision on the proposed £40 million plant. Hundreds of letters have been sent to the planning committee and there has been a petition with several thousand names on it. One of the reasons why so many people oppose the plant is that it would be only two thirds of a mile from the nearest homes. In its briefing for today's debate, Friends of the Earth points out that, if Aberdeen City Council reaches its recycling and waste targets over the next few years, the capacity of the proposed facility will, by 2020, be three to four times over what is needed. That overcapacity might cause local authorities and other agencies to take their feet off the pedals in relation to waste reduction. We could end up with a situation in which they think that they can simply send their waste to Aberdeen.

The carrot-and-stick approach is the only way forward. It is important to consider how we can offer incentives to companies to develop recycling technology and new technologies to ensure that what they produce can be recycled. The difficulty in that is that the Scottish Parliament is limited in what it can do. We are unable to give research and development incentives through the tax system, for example. As we cannot use tax breaks as an incentive, we will have to find innovative

ways of providing incentives while putting pressure on the United Kingdom Government in the meantime.

I agree with the report when it says that local enterprise companies should be producing plans to ensure that companies across Scotland take advantage of the new objective of reducing waste and try to create jobs through doing that. That is an important point.

I urge the committee to keep its eye on this important issue and to continue to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's performance.

16:12

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I welcome the chance to speak today. Like Karen Whitefield, I am not on the Environment and Rural Development Committee, which I realise makes it a privilege for me to speak on this matter. The debate has been worth while, as all our debates on sustainable development are. I commend Sarah Boyack and her committee for their comprehensive report, which tackles many aspects of the issue; indeed, there is hardly an area of waste that the report does not examine.

As has been stated, 75 per cent of waste is business waste. Speaking to Stirling Council, I have found that the voluntary nature of the business waste scheme means that the issue is not being addressed properly. That is why I welcome the minister's announcement that, by the middle of this year, there will be a framework for examining the issue of non-municipal solid waste.

Our present system has created problems for businesses. The domestic uplift alternates each week between recyclable material and the rest of the household waste. That means that businesses have an uplift every two weeks. I can see that that might be a problem, particularly for small businesses with limited storage space. Furthermore, the scheme is voluntary and is joined only by those businesses that are prepared to separate their waste appropriately. It is essential that we involve the business community in our thinking on the matter and enter into partnerships with the Federation of Small Businesses, for example.

As community planning comes on stream at a broad level and community level, I hope that businesses will be involved. That could also help to address some of the planning issues that have been spoken about. I hope that community planning will also be helpful in addressing some of the issues that Karen Whitefield raised about landfill.

Larger businesses have a part to play and I welcome the Green party's comments about zero

waste. The issue must be tackled not only by the Scottish Parliament, but at Westminster and in Europe. We are looking for a major global change, although I accept that we must make a start in Scotland. The pupils of St Ninian's Primary School have made a start by writing to Tesco and Sainsbury's to ask whether they will make an effort to reduce the amount of packaging that they use—I still need to find out what response the pupils received. New products must also be considered and, as the minister said, we must get higher value for recycled products and look for alternative uses for products other than glass, which is the most reused product at present.

My second point, which I have begun to address already, concerns planning. The whole issue of planning is being considered and we look forward to the proposed planning bill. In Stirling, we have started to have meetings and to get community councils together—the business community will also be helpful—to consider the issues that will be important in the changes to planning legislation, particularly on landfill and housing. Robin Harper is not here, but one of his themes is that communal recycling should be taken into account much more in planning for new build.

The third issue is funding. I know from talking to Stirling Council that there are variations between Scotland's councils and that councils do not start from the same point. Some have landfill sites and others share them. I ask the minister how the funding that goes to local councils takes account of that. Perhaps he will answer the question to reassure me on that point.

My fourth point is on community awareness and, as all members have said, the importance of schools and education. The Stirling assembly has a sub-group that monitors what is happening about waste; it is considering litter, an issue that Jamie Stone raised, and how we should work with schools. Many schools now seek eco-school status. Those are small beginnings, but they are coming together.

As Sarah Boyack said, there is a long way to go and a lot of issues to consider, particularly on reducing the amount of waste. However, we have made a good start and I support the report.

16:18

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): Members of all parties will welcome the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report to the Parliament. Its proposals are fine as far as they go. We accept that, as Sarah Boyack said, the report is a framework. However, the proposals are dangling in mid-air. Unless we work out what legislation is needed to force certain sections of society, including big companies, to

comply and how much that will cost, we will not tackle the problem. I put the question to Sarah Boyack and Allan Wilson: how much do we think it will cost to put a community-based recycling plan in place? To do so nationwide would take several years. There is no point in making a proposal in the report without saying how much investment the Scottish Executive will need to put in. I accept that a change in culture is needed—countries such as Denmark and Germany have gone a lot further than we have—but the culture cannot be changed without a mechanism to do that.

I will speak about a point in the report that the Tories dwelled on. I ordered a mobile phone from the Parliament and, after five minutes of trying, with my teeth, to open the envelope in which it was delivered, I had to go and find a pair of scissors. When I had finally opened the envelope, I found that it contained a box. When I opened that box, I found another box. I opened that box to find another package and finally I got to the small mobile phone. All that packaging—which members can see piled up on my desk—illustrates the problem that we are dealing with. I did not solicit that packaging or want it in my post. If an attempt had been made to deliver it to my home, I would have had to make a special trip to the delivery office to collect it. What will we do with such unsolicited packaging?

Mr Monteith: If the member has read the small print, will she tell us whether any of that packaging is made of recycled material?

Frances Curran: I think that the cardboard boxes are, but the plastic envelope is not. However, that is not the point.

The packaging makes me think that I am a conveyor belt and that households are a conveyor belt in the process. We must think about the start and the end of the process. The committee says that it

“urges the Minister to produce an action plan and to consider tougher targets”

on packaging. That is fine, but how will we ensure that packaging such as that round my mobile phone is cut back? What are the penalties for companies that do not adhere to targets? The system seems to involve proposals and a voluntary code. How will companies that do not comply be prosecuted? How will we force companies to comply? That is the start of the process.

The only more-developed proposal for dealing with the mess on my desk is to tax householders for disposing of such packaging, in order to reduce waste. I want it recorded in the *Official Report* that the Tories are arguing for increases in taxes whereas the Scottish Socialist Party opposes the idea. Such packaging is unsolicited and should be

dealt with elsewhere. The proposed tax would be regressive.

The report mentions the Republic of Ireland and Dublin. I say to the minister and the committee that they should not adopt the measure that has been adopted there. This year, we have supported the campaign to scrap the bin tax in Ireland, where 20 people have been to jail for preventing bin lorries that will not pick up rubbish bags from going out.

Alex Johnstone *rose*—

Frances Curran: I need to finish my point.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Frances Curran: On you go.

Sarah Boyack: The member has asked one or two of us some pretty direct questions. If she read the report, she would see that we noted the success of the packaging recovery scheme in increasing recovery rates from 30 per cent in 1997 to 50 per cent in 2002, which means that 4.96 million tonnes less are going to landfill. Packaging regulations that work have clear impacts. They hit companies throughout Europe.

Frances Curran has not talked about the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive, which will force companies to take back to source white goods, to ensure that they are recycled or reused more effectively.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): The member has made her point.

Sarah Boyack: The committee makes lots of suggestions.

Frances Curran: I have seconds left, so I must finish my point.

The white goods initiative is fantastic, but packaging measures have not gone far enough. If the bin tax is introduced, the measures on households will be punitive. Why not start with companies, rather than households?

Richard Lochhead *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has one minute.

Frances Curran: I do not have time to take an intervention—I have 20 seconds left.

Please do not impose a bin tax. If a bin tax is levied, I give notice that we will be involved in organising a non-payment campaign, because it is unacceptable that the only way of changing households' culture, which must be done, is by introducing a new tax and being punitive. The Executive wants to persuade industry and others to invest in community recycling—everybody else is to be persuaded, but we are to be fined for the

waste that we put on the kerbside. Only households are to be subject to a punitive measure. It is a mistake for the committee even to consider consulting on such a measure.

16:24

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I was struck by what Sarah Boyack said at the end of her speech about a box of chocolates with hardly any chocolates in it and wondered whether she had heard of Revels. I remember adverts in the 1960s and 1970s in which Revels were poured into and over the side of a box. The good news is that coconut Revels have been got rid of, but the bad news is that there are still coffee Revels.

However, Sarah Boyack's point is important. I was reminded of Christmas and saw an image of Christmas morning and excited little faces, with little Alex, little Brian, little Bruce and little Sarah coming downstairs. Piles of presents were under the Christmas tree. Five minutes later, there were two piles—a little pile that contained the presents and a huge pile consisting of the rubbish from the packaging and wrapping. It is important that we do not simply address the issue of packaging, as Frances Curran rightly said. We must also remind people that the first part of the waste hierarchy concerns reducing waste.

Alex Johnstone *rose—*

Iain Smith: I give way to little Alex.

Alex Johnstone: Does Mr Smith agree that if we followed the policies that have been proposed by the SSP in respect of rejecting multiple packaging, pass-the-parcel could be outlawed?

Iain Smith: I would not want to outlaw pass-the-parcel. However, one should obviously use recycled packaging paper for it or wrap up presents in old newspapers and have shiny wrapping only on the outside.

It is important that we consider how to reduce the amount of packaging. Most members have not mentioned the economic benefits of reducing packaging. Businesses should not think of economic costs. It is in their interests to reduce the amount of waste that they create. If businesses in Scotland reduced the amount of non-municipal waste by 20 per cent, we would hardly need to worry about household waste, as non-municipal waste comprises 80 per cent of total waste. If businesses concentrated on reducing waste, there would be economic benefits.

I was surprised that only the Greens mentioned the economic benefits of a green jobs strategy, but I was pleased that Shiona Baird said that there are benefits and opportunities from such a strategy. If we can get companies in Scotland to be innovative and to look for new ways of reusing and recycling

materials, there will be real job opportunities. Some 140,000 jobs in the United Kingdom have been created by recycling opportunities. Many more jobs could be created in Scotland if innovations are worked on. I am sure that the green jobs strategy will address some of those issues.

There are opportunities for joint ventures between local authorities and businesses to deal with waste. In the chamber in the past, I have criticised Fife Council's appalling recycling record. I am pleased to say that its record is improving, but one of the reasons for that is that it is working with a private company in Fife—Smith Anderson—to develop a waste paper collection scheme. Throughout much of Fife, people can put their waste paper into blue bins, which are collected once a month. That is helpful. The paper goes directly to Smith Anderson, which recycles it and uses it in the production of paper bags.

That takes me to Mike Pringle's proposal relating to polythene bags. We must remember that most polythene bags in which people get their goods in shops are imported. We therefore import waste into the country. Once a polythene bag is used, it is simply stuck in a bin or, worse, it litters the countryside. We should not import stuff that will go straight into landfill. I hope that members will strongly consider Mike Pringle's proposal, which has been successful in Ireland.

Nora Radcliffe and Maureen Macmillan were right to mention the importance of reuse, which is the second part of the waste hierarchy. Last summer, with Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Nicola Sturgeon and Bill Butler, I went on a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branch visit to Prince Edward Island, where we saw an interesting waste-watch scheme. The sale of soft drinks in non-returnable containers has been banned. There are no cans or plastic bottles for soft drinks—people have to use glass, returnable bottles. A coincidental effect of that is that not many cans and plastic bottles litter the countryside. Furthermore, the amount of waste going into landfill has been reduced.

The waste watch scheme is interesting and effective. Every household separates its waste: the biodegradable and combustible materials go into one collection, all the recyclable stuff goes into another collection and non-recyclable materials go into a third collection. There are separate streams for the process. The scheme involves households and businesses. Moreover, there are three types of bins in the streets for different types of litter. Hotels and tourists are also involved; there is a simple guide. Such things can and should be done. We can learn from such practices.

I admire the SNP, as it fulfils much of the waste hierarchy. For example, it has successfully reduced the number of MSPs that it has; in debates, it constantly reuses the same tired, old arguments that the electorate have comprehensively rejected; and many SNP members appear keen to recycle their leaders. What the SNP is not able to do is recover. That is by the way.

In the partnership agreement, we have a strong commitment to the environment and to developing the waste strategy. That commitment includes measures such as creating significant opportunities for new products that are manufactured from waste and tasking Scottish Enterprise to assist the development of such facilities; setting targets for local authorities to recycle 25 per cent of waste by 2006 and 55 per cent by 2020; requiring public bodies to conduct waste minimisation audits, which is an important part of meeting the target; reforming planning guidelines on kerbside collection and separation; strengthening local authority powers on enforcement to tackle fly-tipping; and ensuring that the public purchasing rules enhance the status of recycled goods and those that are capable of reuse. Those are important aspects of the partnership agreement and I commend the fact that the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report recognises them.

16:31

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I will wait until the microphone comes on—it has now, which is good.

Iain Smith: Not for us.

Mr Monteith: I am sure that Iain Smith will be able to hear me, even from where he is sitting. I am delighted that he was such a shining example of Liberal, consensual politics in the way in which he was so pleasant to his SNP colleagues. His was an inspiring model for us all to follow, although I assure members that I will not follow it.

I am pleased to be able to participate in the debate. I wish Ross Finnie all the best and hope that he is enjoying being able to watch the debate through the webcast, which, I am sure, will make him wish to return to the Parliament even more quickly.

In my time as an MSP, I have had the privilege—if I can call it that—of visiting many proposed landfill or waste reclamation sites and, indeed, some sites that already operate in those capacities, as well as other places where waste activities are carried out, such as scrap yards. As the Conservative member with the task of winding up—literally and metaphorically—it is my job, while knowing my party's brief, to come to the debate

with a blank sheet of paper, to listen to what members say and, one hopes, to be inspired. Sadly, I have been rather underwhelmed.

I make my speech finding that, in the end, the person with whom I have the most in common, other than my colleagues sitting around me—

Mr Stone: Does that include me?

Mr Monteith: Alas, it does not yet include Jamie Stone, but we are always open to offers.

The person with whom I find that I agree most is Bruce McFee. As many members know, he and I have an umbilical link: I write strategy papers for the Conservative party and he distributes them to the press for me.

Mr McFee: It is called recycling.

Mr Monteith: Indeed. It is one way of ensuring that they are used time and again. However, our association is getting too close for comfort even in this politically correct Parliament.

To Joe or Josephine Public, the mention of waste in the context of the Scottish Parliament brings to mind, as Richard Lochhead suggested, epithets and slogans such as “waste of money”, “waste of time” and “waste of space”. I do not share that view—if there was a referendum tomorrow, I would vote yes-yes, although we can have that debate another time. However, the Parliament is our midden and we have to live by it and try to clean it up.

It is important that, in such a debate, we should consider what is on offer and ask, “What is the waste strategy? What is in the committee's report?” However, the debate has not lived up to the detailed and hard work that lies behind the committee's report. Much of what we heard today has been worthy, well wishing and utopian, but it has not taken into account some of the good work that is already being done and the good practice that already exists and it does not consider a subject that Bruce McFee raised—the importance of markets.

Much of what we aspire to cannot be delivered unless the markets—whether one believes in that system or not—exist to make it work. I will give a couple of examples. Scrap paper is one. In the paperless world that is the Scottish Parliament, we all try to use scrap paper, but we must also be cognisant of the fact that paper production can lead to many trees, which make a helpful contribution to the environment, being grown for new and virgin use. Many newspaper publishers, in particular, ensure that they source their newsprint from providers of new forestation. Let us use scrap paper, but let us talk about and recognise the change in the market for new products and how that business has moved on.

Secondly, let us recycle bottles, but let us also recognise the difficulties in collecting them and charging for collection. As my colleague Alex Johnstone indicated, our general view is that the best way in which to proceed is for the polluter to pay, if that can be achieved. There is no doubt that it is not enough just to encourage people to recycle. To make the system work, we must ensure that there are markets at the end of it. If we do not, brown glass will not be recycled, because it is not used.

Mr Ruskell: The member has spoken about the difficulty of making brown glass into a useful product. Is he aware that a company in West Lothian is grinding up brown glass into sand that can be used in industrial processes more effectively than the sand that we derive from the environment? There are innovative end points for products such as brown glass.

Mr Monteith: I am not aware of the company to which the member refers, but I am thankful to him—in a consensual manner—for mentioning it. That is the type of market that needs to be created. Most molten glass that is used for new bottles is green glass; brown glass is not used for that purpose. The key to making the waste industry far more attractive to far more people is to create markets for such products.

The issue of plastic bags has been raised. The experience of Ireland suggests that, on the face of it, putting a tax on plastic bags is an attractive option. However, we must beware of penalising the poor by introducing such a tax. People who are less well off are less likely to go to supermarkets in their cars and will require plastic bags. When considering these issues, we must look to establish markets to ensure that waste is reclaimed and is of value.

16:37

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The vast majority of speakers have contributed to a very interesting debate. The exception was Iain Smith, who made a pathetic speech that he should not bother to recycle. Consumers have the right to reject what is offered to them, and I hope that the consumers in the chamber will reject the sentiments that he expressed.

The strategic waste fund is essential to the way in which this process operates. The Government has a duty to ensure that people's access to it is facilitated. It is a theme of mine throughout that one of the ways of meeting the targets that have been set is to ensure that each of the different players can operate in tune. In evidence, the Environment and Rural Development Committee was given examples that suggested that that might be in doubt.

Local authorities must create integrated waste management plans, which require ministerial approval. A significant number of authorities have secured that approval, but others have not. In the areas where waste management plans are awaiting approval, the process cannot be started. That is one of the elements that will make it difficult to meet the targets. In a moment, I will provide an example of that.

It is important to recognise that the voluntary sector has done a great deal to start the education process. Nora Radcliffe spoke about that to some extent and made the point that the sector, which relied on landfill tax funds, should not be left behind. It is important that it does not lose out in future and has access to the strategic waste fund. There are several hoops through which it must jump; we would like to reduce the number of those.

Maureen Macmillan referred to ILM (Highland), whose work involves the recycling, repair and reuse of white goods, notably for the Homestart scheme in the inner Moray firth area. ILM (Highland) has been in operation for only a short while. Having accrued funds, it must await various stages of approvals from the Highland Council and other bodies before it can get going. It is essential that it does get going, because the Homestart project will not only meet the Highlands' requirement under the European waste electrical and electronic equipment directive to recycle 4kg of waste per person by 2006 but, on the back of that, create six full-time jobs and 17 training places. Having visited the ILM plant in the Alness area, which is being very much helped at the moment, I know that those involved in Homestart very much welcome the white goods that have already been received. Many other areas and groups of less well-off people can benefit from such schemes, which is why it is so important to get the whole plan integrated.

Karen Whitefield mentioned the problems of Greengairs. I am quite sure that members from throughout the country are concerned that landfill must be controlled—another job for local authorities. As was put poignantly, the conditions that are placed on the companies that operate such sites are at times difficult to control. The committee's report seeks to find ways in which the Executive can tighten up how the companies in that sector operate. We look forward to seeing how that is developed.

Many of the recommendations may be applied at the local level. Roseanna Cunningham spoke of the cost to the public of having their waste taken away to be recycled, reused or whatever else. In the past—before my time—people used to collect jam jars to get into the pictures. In my days, I have to admit that we used to collect screwtop beer or

lemonade bottles and return them to shops, which was another way of getting small amounts of pocket money. Those excellent approaches to reuse from the past must be encouraged by regulation, so that glass of a thick enough gauge is used to manufacture bottles in the future. We know about the problems that existed with milk bottles in the past. Nevertheless, people do like to get their milk in bottles. If we could create conditions in which people have to use glass that is not of such a light weight that it cannot be reused, that would be very useful.

Mr Monteith: Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: Yes—I give way to Brian Monteith.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member is just into the last minute of his speech. There is not time, Mr Gibson. Do continue.

Rob Gibson: That is excellent. I am glad that I do not have to take an intervention, because I am sure that, in my last minute, I can say something more relevant than Brian Monteith could.

The committee noted that the enterprise companies are not to the fore. They talk the talk about waste management, but they are not walking the walk in ensuring that local companies are getting information. Local authorities and the enterprise companies need to provide householders and companies with packs that explain what the possibilities are for reuse, recycling and so on in their areas. That is a primary target. Such packs should consist of a good deal more than a wee leaflet through people's doors.

Not only retailers but customers must be responsible. It might have been difficult for Frances Curran to deal with the pile of waste that she has on the desk next to her, but we may reject the packaging on many of the things that we buy from the supermarket there and then. Many supermarkets have been helpful, but the consumer has a responsibility not to accept over-packaged goods and to get rid of that extra packaging, and to encourage their families to do the same.

We could be as good recyclers and reusers as people in Denmark and Germany are. Scotland can be like those countries, and I hope that in due course we will address the profligacy that I have described. To do so, our own people need to have greater self-esteem. The waste plan is about encouraging that, and we support it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call Allan Wilson to close for the Executive. You have seven minutes, minister.

16:44

Allan Wilson: That is indeed news to me, Presiding Officer. I had anticipated making an opening speech but not a closing one.

Mr Monteith: Will the minister give way? *[Laughter.]* Might it help him to consider the issue of milk bottles? As a youth, I used to deliver milk regularly and remember that I carried pint-sized milk bottles in my hands. However, the consumer has moved on; milk is now far cheaper and can be purchased in six-pint plastic containers. Is it not the case that consumers have dictated that glass should be used less now that they can buy in bulk and at a cheaper price?

Allan Wilson: I am very glad that the member has raised the economic aspects of the debate, because I am prepared to turn to those in my summing-up.

I should say that I was intrigued by the fact that, in his speech, Mr Monteith agreed with Mr McFee. Indeed, I think that he was practically the only speaker in the debate who had a measure of agreement with Mr McFee. Of course, it will come as no surprise to find that I disagreed with almost everything that Mr McFee said.

Perhaps Frances Curran gave the most interesting speech on the economics of reuse and recycling. However, I have to say that I do not agree with her command economy approach to the problems of reuse and recycling, how to raise public awareness and how to secure our economic and environmental objectives. Indeed, we need only consider the former Soviet Union as an example of the considerable environmental impact that a failed command economy has on its people.

Frances Curran: Does the minister accept that, in trying to make the Scottish Executive's environmental policies look good by comparing them with those of the Soviet Union, he is simply grasping at straws?

Allan Wilson: No. On the contrary, I used the example of the former Soviet Union as a failed command economy to point out that neither that economy nor the market economy that Mr Monteith advocates provides the solution to this problem. There is indeed a third way. *[Applause.]* Thank you. That third way recognises the public sector's contribution to improving our environmental performance. We need that contribution both from the Executive and from local government, which represents its communities' interests and seeks to improve environmental performance in order to improve the quality of life in those communities. There is no single private sector market solution to the problems of environmental degradation caused by the waste maximisation process that Frances Curran outlined.

Sarah Boyack: I welcome the minister's explanation of how we can influence and shape the market in a mixed economy. I fully appreciate his point that the role of regulations, particularly with regard to this issue, could create a level playing field for companies. We are all striving to ensure that companies tackle the task of recycling and reusing more, but they must do so competitively across the whole of Europe to ensure that we are not disadvantaged. I should also reiterate the point in our report about procurement. As well as playing a leadership role, the Executive can establish a framework for public procurement across the whole public sector to influence markets and raise standards.

Allan Wilson: Indeed. That was precisely my point. As an organisation, we can act in a way that instigates and generates a market response. That said, the market itself is not in a position wholly to address the environmental degradation that we see all around us and the majority of which has been caused by market failure.

Mr Monteith: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: When I return to that point, I will be pleased to let the member back in.

As far as public procurement is concerned, we can obviously make a very important contribution to the whole. The NHS probably offers the classic example: as the biggest single employer in the Scottish economy, it can make a valuable contribution towards waste minimisation, waste reduction, reuse and recycling by setting targets and by creating an environmental policy that guides its public procurement policies.

I do not agree with what my Liberal colleagues said about introducing charges as a way of influencing that process. I agree with what Frances Curran said about not moving to a system or regime that is based on individual charging. I disagree with what Mr McFee said, as this issue is nothing to do with the powers that are available to this Parliament or any other Parliament; it is to do with how those powers are exercised in the interests of the people and the communities that we represent.

Mr Ruskell *rose—*

Mike Rumbles *rose—*

Mr Monteith *rose—*

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

Allan Wilson: Of course, if there were going to be a move towards a charging regime, as is proposed in Ireland, the fundamental question that must be answered is how the people on the lowest incomes would be protected. The poorest people are the ones who would be the most adversely

and disproportionately affected by the system that the nationalists and the Conservatives seem to be proposing.

On that point, Mr Monteith is welcome to intervene.

Mr Monteith: I cannot.

Allan Wilson: You cannot?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. The minister is now winding up.

Allan Wilson: Okay.

With those few words, I am pleased to welcome the contributions made by members throughout the chamber in what has been a valuable debate. We will take on board everything that has been said. Within the short time that is available to me I cannot answer every point that has been raised, but I will endeavour to get back to members with a clear and concise response on any issue that remains outstanding. I thank the committee for its report.

16:52

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Thank you, Presiding Officer—I had been expecting to speak.

I welcome the debate, the response that the committee's report has received and the Executive's response. I reiterate the thanks that have already been expressed to all those who have taken part, both in the debate and in the committee's evidence taking, which was very interesting and enjoyable.

The report highlights several broad issues, most of which have been discussed. I will try to pick up on the points that have been made. Forgive me if I do not mention who raised those points, as I may not have time to do so or I may not have noted that down.

The committee considered non-municipal solid waste, waste minimisation, market development for recycled products, the role of community groups, and planning. I want to leave myself time to say a word about composting and nappies, because I would not want to disappoint my colleagues.

I will say a little bit about non-municipal waste, which was essentially outwith the remit of the report—although we had to mention it—because the report was on the national waste plan, which deals only with municipal solid waste. I welcome the Executive's commitment that SEPA and it will publish a detailed framework for dealing with non-municipal waste, which—as has been said repeatedly—makes up 75 per cent of waste, by mid-2004. We look forward to that and I will say no

more about the issue now.

Market development for recycled products and reprocessing capacity were raised by a few members. I agree with Bruce McFee and others that there is a lack of reprocessing facilities in Scotland. I hope that the Scottish Executive and the enterprise agencies will be active in stimulating growth in the sector and that we will reap the benefits of the jobs that ensue. That cannot be left for the market to do itself; we need a steer on the issue and I hope that the enterprise agencies will, under Executive direction, be involved actively.

The Executive's response to the committee's request that it ensure that the opportunities for job creation and waste management are fully developed was a little weak. However, we were promised a consultation with business groups early this year and I hope that the matter will be taken forward with some vigour.

I note one or two other points that have been made about the variability of uplift facilities throughout the country. Those points have been noted, so I will not go into the matter in too much detail. However, I will say that the aim must be for householders to be able to separate their waste and have it picked up from their doorsteps—that is done in other countries. I will not get into the debate about charging, but I will mention that my understanding is that in Germany people are charged only for the bin into which they put their non-recyclable waste. That bin can be of a size chosen by the householder, so if they think that they can keep their non-recyclable waste down to a minimum, they pay very little for a very small bin. People are not charged for the bins that are provided for the uplift of compostable waste or recyclable materials. Such measures could be considered, but I am not prepared to die in a ditch over that today.

The role of community groups was mentioned, as were various specific community groups. It is acknowledged that for some years, community and voluntary groups have been providing reuse, refurbishment and recycling facilities in areas in which local authorities were not yet doing so. The committee heard in evidence that now that local authorities are becoming involved in recycling and composting, some community groups feel that they are being squeezed out. There have been reports of bin wars in some areas.

I welcome the Executive's acknowledgement that the community sector has an important role to play in waste awareness education and I welcome the fact that additional funding has been made to groups that have experienced difficulties as a result of the changes to the landfill tax credit scheme. However, the Executive's response did not give a sufficiently clear indication that community groups are valuable, not only for their

role in education, but for recycling, which produces a recycled end-product and takes recyclable waste out of landfill, and for the additional benefit that is brought through the creation of jobs or work experience opportunities for people who would otherwise have difficulty in finding such opportunities.

It rather appears as though the strategic waste fund money will have to be awarded purely on a value-for-money basis, without taking into account the benefits of such schemes. I hope that that will not be the case and I would welcome ministerial assurance on that.

We heard some powerful speeches today and the committee heard powerful evidence about planning issues and the environmental injustices that are suffered by some communities that have to deal with landfill sites on their doorstep. It was disappointing that the Executive did not think that it would be appropriate to specify, as the committee suggested, a minimum distance between new landfill sites and residential areas. It is not clear why the Executive took that view, as such distances are specified when other facilities are proposed.

Nothing—except a hospital closure—makes a community protest as much as a proposal to site an incinerator in its midst. Alex Johnstone might talk about a culture of objection, but to local people their protest is more like a fight for environmental justice. The Lerwick incinerator was a very special case, given the islands' situation—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I am reluctant to disturb the member in the flow of her speech, but the level of conversation has reached a high pitch and I would be grateful if members would hear out the rest of her speech courteously.

Eleanor Scott: Thank you, Presiding Officer, I appreciate that.

For lots of reasons that have been mentioned, such as the obligation to fulfil PPP contracts or the need to provide a continuous waste stream when we consider the reduction of waste, incineration is not the way forward for many areas in Scotland.

As I am a Green, composting is dear to my heart. There have been moves to develop community composting facilities, which are regarded as a good way of disposing of green waste and are certainly preferable to the disposal of such waste in landfill sites. However, some distortions have arisen as a result of those moves. Councils uplift green waste—which is in essence garden waste—from relatively rural areas and compost it centrally, although it would be much better to compost garden waste in the garden. There have been projects to stimulate home composting. I understand that there was an issue

about whether green waste that was taken out of the waste stream by being composted at home would count towards the targets for waste reduction. I hope that that question can be resolved and that home composting will be regarded as more environmentally friendly than community composting—although there is obviously a place for community composting.

I would disappoint my colleagues on the committee if I did not mention nappies. I might have failed to persuade some of my colleagues who are at the nappy-using stage of their child rearing, but there are modern, viable alternatives to disposable nappies, which are washable and shaped like disposable nappies, with an integral nappy lining. There is a campaign for real nappies. The issue is serious, because nappies account for about 10 per cent of the waste that is put into landfill and they remain there for hundreds of years. We can do a bit better than that; sticking a nappy in the washing machine is as easy as sticking it in the bin. I brought one in to show my colleagues, though I have to say that they remained unconvinced. However, I have not given up hope yet.

Finally, I want to talk about waste minimisation, which is key. Many people have made that point in various ways. In its report, the committee strongly recommended that the minister should develop robust and challenging waste reduction and reuse targets as a matter of urgency. We welcome the Executive's statement that it is committed to stopping and then reversing the increase in waste arisings—if we did not do that, of course, we would be running to stay still. However, we were disappointed by the lack of targets.

I echo the views of my Green colleagues: we should follow the example of other countries that are further down the road of developing a modern and acceptable approach to waste. We should look seriously at the concept of zero waste. To be fair, the Scottish Executive has not ruled that out, which I welcome. We know that embracing the concept of zero waste starts us on the road to a serious reduction in landfill, and not just a tinkering at the edges. We know that it is a powerful driver to innovation in business, in terms of design, of the use of materials, and of their eventual disposal. We want Scotland to lead the world in that and not just to tag along at the bottom of the league. That has been shamefully the case up till now, although I do not hold the Executive responsible for that. The concept could make a significant contribution to the green jobs strategy that the Executive is committed to.

I do not want to repeat a lot of what Shiona Baird said, but I would like to end by quoting the minister—not something I do regularly. I was struck by a phrase of his with which I have to

agree. He said that he hoped that Scotland would become a “country to follow” and not one that follows others. In waste management, we have been following others, in European and world terms. I would like to see us leading. I welcome the minister's statement and I commend the report to the Parliament.

Business Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-800, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 28 January 2004

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution in respect of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 29 January 2004

9.30 am Executive Debate on Modernising the Court System – A New Supreme Court

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm Stage 1 Debate on the Budget Bill

followed by Motion on the Health Protection Agency Bill - UK Legislation

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 February 2004

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 February 2004

9.30 am Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.30 pm

Question Time

3.10 pm

Executive Business

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

and (b) (i) that consideration of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 5 March 2004; (ii) that consideration of the Breastfeeding etc. (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 17 September 2004; and (iii) that the completion date for consideration of the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 27 February 2004.—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Patricia Ferguson to move motion S2M-799, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S2M-805, on the establishment of a committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Solvent Emissions (Scotland) Regulations 2004 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Labour Party.

Membership: Gordon Jackson (Lab), Christine May (Lab), Tricia Marwick (SNP), Mr Ted Brocklebank (Conservative) and Mike Pringle (LD).—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are three questions to be put. The first question is, that motion S2M-769, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on the national waste plan, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Environment and Rural Development Committee's 4th Report 2003 (Session 2): *Inquiry into the National Waste Plan* (SP Paper 47).

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S2M-799, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Solvent Emissions (Scotland) Regulations 2004 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The third and last question is, that motion S2M-805, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the establishment of a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Labour Party.

Membership: Gordon Jackson (Lab), Christine May (Lab), Tricia Marwick (SNP), Mr Ted Brocklebank (Conservative) and Mike Pringle (LD).

Renewable Energy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-569, in the name of Christine May, on the economic potential of the renewable energy industry. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the outstanding economic potential presented by the renewable energy industry, not only in the field of wind power but also through other forms of energy such as biomass and wave power and further recognises that, if the Scottish Executive is to meet all of its renewable energy targets, it needs to do all it can to encourage all forms of renewable energy so that the market is there to support future projects.

17:05

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I start by thanking all my colleagues in the chamber for coming to debate what I believe is a very important issue within the wider topic of renewable energy. I will outline why it is vital for the Scottish economy and for the future of the renewables sector in Scotland that work is done now to enable existing and future companies in Scotland to reach their full potential.

Some 5,500 jobs are sustained by the renewables sector in the United Kingdom, 1,300 of which are in Scotland, and, as members will have noted at the weekend, the Department of Trade and Industry's recent supply chain gap analysis predicts that there could be up to 35,000 such jobs in the UK by 2020, of which 10,000 could be in Scotland. I do not need to tell members—especially my colleagues on the Enterprise and Culture Committee, who spent the past couple of days with me in Campbeltown—that Scotland has a huge renewable energy potential, not just in wind. If we realise it fully, we may find that that estimate of 10,000 jobs is conservative.

The location of those potential jobs is important. Broadly speaking, the areas of the country that are best suited to wind, wave and tidal power are situated in rural and remoter areas, which can benefit greatly from an increase in the number of skilled jobs that are available. It is especially important that numbers of jobs should accrue to those areas so that they reap the benefits of having sometimes ugly, usually intrusive energy installations on their doorsteps. There are also fabrication and support-service skills lying unused in many of our former engineering and shipbuilding heartlands, which can and must be used to meet the need for and to supply the fabrication and support skills of the emerging technology.

There is no question but that the political will is there to ensure that a high proportion of our power will be generated by carbon-neutral sources, but much needs to be done to ensure that Scottish companies benefit from our drive towards renewable energy. That means that companies that are working on breakthrough technologies need to be given the funding to bring those technologies forward to the point at which they are a marketable, economical product, rather than just a quaint little interesting project with a name like something out of "The Magic Roundabout" and school dinner money to play with.

It does not help for some Opposition members to offer conflicting arguments in the way that one party's energy spokesperson has done, by being quoted in the local paper as saying that she was in favour of onshore wind farms and then—a week later—participating in a debate calling for a total moratorium on wind farms. It should be—indeed, it is—possible to oppose unacceptable applications without getting in the way of efforts to lead the way in forging a better world for our children. It would also be helpful to bring the wider and sometimes difficult debate on renewable energy to the public instead of focusing solely on wind, which can be only one part of our wider strategy.

I will use a local example to illustrate just how much potential there is in Scotland. In Methil in my constituency, there is a lot of interest—spearheaded by Scottish Enterprise Fife—in developing the former Kvaerner yard into an energy park and I am grateful for the support for that proposal that has been forthcoming from all members in the area, including list members. The site is already being used by Burntisland Fabrications Ltd and Forthwright Fabrication Ltd, which have just built a wave machine on site and are involved in oil-industry fabrication.

There is also a lot of interest from foreign and UK companies that would like to use the site for anything from fabricating wind turbines—tower and all—and wave machines to erecting wind turbines on site. The site is ideal for those purposes because it has large buildings and easy access to the sea. It is in one of the most deprived areas of Fife and would benefit significantly from the injection of money and skilled jobs that such an energy park could bring.

I turn to the money from the Scottish renewables obligation that is lying in the coffers of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. I welcome the minister's recent written answer to me confirming that his department is promoting an amendment to the UK Energy Bill, which will allow £10 million to be paid into the Scottish consolidated fund. I seek an assurance from the minister that that money will all be used to promote renewable energy projects, such as the possible energy park in

Methil, and to support the efforts of Scottish Enterprise and the intermediary technology institute for energy in advancing renewables technology in Scotland.

Our visit to Campbeltown over the past two days showed us what can be done for a community by investment in renewable energy technology but, as I have said before, using wind cannot be the be-all and end-all. I was visited today by two members of the energy academy at Heriot-Watt University, who are doing some blue-sky work on hydrogen and clean coal technology. It behoves us to remember that as well as the economic potential from the renewables industry, there is economic potential in cleaning our existing sources of energy supply. In the rush for renewables, we are in danger of forgetting that. Those two must go hand in hand, as must work on conservation.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green)
rose—

Christine May: Does Chris Ballance want to intervene on that point?

Chris Ballance: I was going to say that conservation is important.

Christine May: Indeed. Conservation is important, as are the small projects that benefit local communities. There has to be space in our strategy and our plans for all those things, and sources of funding have to be available, not just for revenue, but for capital. I ask the minister to comment on that, if he is in a position to do so, at the end of the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As a considerable number of members wish to speak in the debate—15 in all—I will have to make it a very strict three minutes each, because I am not allowed to go beyond 6 o'clock.

17:12

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): This is an interesting debate, which was preceded by an extremely aggressive press release that attempted to suggest that members opposite to Christine May—members on my party's benches—are blowing hot and cold on renewable energy. The press release is an incredible collection of half-truths, fabrications and extracts, yet the content of the debate is about attempting to get people to work together. We would prefer by far to work together with people to ensure that Scotland has renewable energy, and we would like to think that it is possible that Labour members would try to do the same.

The political will—if it exists—must have steel in its backbone to put off the problems that face us.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: No, thank you very much.

Other members of the Labour party are scaremongering about power cuts and the inability of the Executive to meet the targets that have been set for renewable energy. That is not helpful to the debate in Scotland or to people working together. I hope that Labour members will do their best to quell the words of the old nuclear warriors who are trying to take advantage of the difficulties of moving to a renewables programme as the basis for energy in Scotland. It is extremely annoying to people in Scotland to be told that we have to go back to old technologies that create so much waste when we are trying to move forward to those that do not. As we are talking about frequent power cuts, it would be good to cut some of what those speakers say.

In the Highlands, our council has been attempting to get national guidelines for many of the onshore renewable energy items. Many councils want such national guidelines because existing guidelines are inadequate. I ask the minister to respond to that point, as I do not have time to deal with it in detail.

We have to ask people to try to save energy so that we do not view the amount of energy that is currently being produced as essential in the future. If we were saving energy, we would be able to cut out much of the nuclear power and anticipate the debate about removing it. I ask members to take those matters on board and I am interested in hearing what the minister has to say.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Given that the debate is oversubscribed, can I propose that it be extended by another 20 minutes?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will ask someone to do that later. However, even if I extend the debate, we cannot go past 6 o'clock.

17:15

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I congratulate Christine May on securing today's debate. Her timing is, as ever, impeccable because it follows upon the Enterprise and Culture Committee's evidence taking in Campbeltown. Some of us were blown flat by the wind at the top of the hill; I see Murdo Fraser smiling. Specs and hats were forcibly removed by the elements.

I turn to the issue of tidal power. I am aware that the University of St Andrews and the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen have set up an interesting project to build a large underwater propeller-cum-turbine. The Pentland firth, between

Caithness and Orkney—between my constituency and that of Jim Wallace—is one of the most treacherous bits of water around Scotland, as people in the Highlands know. It is famous for the tidal rip that surges through it. People who know about the tidal power industry have described it as potentially being the Saudi Arabia of tidal power. The project is in its early stages but I commend the Scottish Executive for putting its money where its mouth is. No less than £177,000 has gone to the project from the Scottish Enterprise proof-of-concept fund. Amen to all that; it could be something for the future. It has been suggested that tidal power in the Pentland firth alone might create something like 6,000 jobs. Members can imagine what a bonanza that would be for Orkney, north Sutherland and Caithness.

Arising from and linked to that point is another. We took evidence from Scottish Power and others in Campbeltown. Although I cannot prejudge the Enterprise and Culture Committee's report or predict what it will say, I pushed the witnesses on the nightmare scenario of what we would do when the wind does not blow. Their answer was that we would rely on coal-fired stations, and they pushed the nuclear industry for that reason. The fact is that, using electrolysis, we can create substantial quantities of hydrogen that can be burnt, with a by-product of only water. Hydrogen is the ultimate clean fuel.

I am delighted to say that, as members can see from the picture that I am holding up, in the Pentland firth project, hydrogen storage tanks are incorporated in the boom above the propeller. Therefore, during the change of tides or when the wind does not blow, the hydrogen can be burnt. I believe that that is the way forward. The project is exciting for my constituency and for Orkney, and it could set the trend for Scotland and the world over.

17:18

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I commend Christine May and her motion, and I welcome another opportunity to discuss the important issue of renewable energy. Members will recall that I lodged a motion, which was debated last November, on the slightly different, but related, issue of planning policy for wind farms. That debate attracted a great deal of public interest.

I therefore start with wind power, the issue that is covered in Christine May's motion. Members will be aware that concerns have been raised throughout Scotland about the proliferation of planning applications for wind farms. During the November debate, I called for a moratorium on the granting of planning applications for wind farms where there was local opposition to them until

such time as new planning guidance was issued. There seems to be a growing consensus that we need better planning guidance on the issue. The Enterprise and Culture Committee has heard from people from all different sectors; not just objectors but those involved in the development of wind power.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I am terribly sorry but I have only three minutes.

We have heard evidence that the existing planning guidance is inadequate because it does not take account of the cumulative impact of wind farms, and there is no opportunity for the development of local strategies. There are issues that have to be addressed. I am delighted to see that some Liberal Democrat councillors in Aberdeenshire now support my call for a moratorium, which I am sure will give the Liberal Democrat members present something to think about.

The motion is about the economic potential of renewable energy, which I acknowledge. The Enterprise and Culture Committee visited the Vestas-Celtic Wind Technology Ltd plant in Campbeltown, and it is indisputable that the plant has created jobs in what was an economic and employment black spot. However, I have two caveats. I suspect strongly that if there were no subsidies, no one would be building any onshore wind farms, because there are question marks over their efficiency. There is also concern about the potential economic downside to wind farms and about the possibility that widespread development of wind farms in scenic areas will do nothing for our tourism industry, which is a vital part of our economy.

There are, of course, wider issues. As Christine May acknowledged, there are other technologies such as wave and tidal power. I am little bit concerned that by concentrating too much on wind power, we might miss economic opportunities in the other technologies. Although we have factories producing wind farms for Scotland, the technology for them was developed elsewhere, so we are left simply with production jobs. I hope that we can learn from that, so that Scotland can be at the forefront of developing other forms of renewable energy, such as tidal and wave power. Given our great natural resources, we have the opportunity to be ahead of the game.

Let us not put all our eggs in one basket. Let us consider how we can develop other technologies and ensure that it is not just onshore wind farms that are the priority. I could raise many other matters, but time does not permit it. This has been a welcome opportunity to debate the issues once

more and I am sure that this will not be the last word on the matter. I look forward to the conclusion of the Enterprise and Culture Committee's report on renewable energy.

17:21

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): There was me thinking that participating in debates was part of an MSP's job description—clearly not in the political background that Christine May comes from.

The Presiding Officer might be a little puzzled about what is happening in here. I suspect that she will not have read the press release that was put out on the back of this debate, which I could categorise as falling into one of three categories. It is either just totally stupid, wilfully ignorant or, perhaps more truthfully, maliciously mendacious.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: No. I have only three minutes.

I will quote something that was said during the debate in November, to which Murdo Fraser referred. A member said:

"I strongly support ... renewable energy. ... However, we must ensure that the locations of wind farms are suitable."

I agree. The member said:

"A strategic approach will guide ... developments to areas where the effects on our natural heritage are minimised."

I agree. The member also said:

"The planning framework ... will seek to address energy issues. ... but it must also identify environmentally sensitive sites where development is inappropriate."

Again I agree. In a prescient condemnation of Ms May's current attitude, the member also said:

"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."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2003; c 3113-4.]

I agree. See Rhona Brankin, see me: we agree. It is a pity that the member who brought this debate to the chamber did not concentrate on the issue that she was trying to debate, rather than the nonsensical rubbish that she put out today. The fundamental problem with wind farms is the lack of a national strategy.

We have debated the issue before and I expect that we will debate it again. It is not just members in the chamber who have concerns, but Scottish Natural Heritage. There is a real problem that needs to be addressed. Taking the attitude of members such as Christine May is not going to make the problem go away. Nor will it help if she ignores the big problem in her party, which is that

proponents such as Brian Wilson, in their desperate attempts to push nuclear power on Scotland, want to do down the commitment to renewable energy and to pretend that it will not work. One of the biggest problems that Christine May and her colleagues have to address is the fact that Brian Wilson and others want to push us down the road of an environmentally unsustainable nuclear power programme. I would like to hear whether anything will be said about that today.

Yes, we need to get in on the ground floor of some of the developing renewables, particularly wave power. We have missed our chance on much of what is going on with wind farms: we have let the Danes and the Norwegians make all the running and we are not going to get some of the benefits that we might have. Let us not miss the boat again when it comes to wave power. Let us address the issue so that we do not go down one single road on renewable energy. We need to address the problem and develop technologies right across the board.

17:25

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): I welcome this debate on the economic potential of the Scottish renewables industry, which is an issue that is at the very heart of the Green party's policies on the environment and the economy. I use the word "economy" advisedly. There are those who take pleasure in labelling the Greens as luddites. I would counter that because, when we see possibilities for economic growth that do not pose an unacceptable threat to the environment, we embrace them whole-heartedly.

Up to now, the renewables debate has been dominated by a vocal minority who are opposed to wind energy. I ask that we hear more of the views of the silent majority, who see renewable energy as a welcome alternative to polluting energy and a source of badly needed employment. Renewable energy is a win-win opportunity for Scotland that we will continue to support to the best of our abilities.

The Scottish Executive has made some impressive pledges on the future of renewables and we welcome those commitments. By 2020, the Executive wants 40 per cent of our electricity to be generated by renewable means. That is a realistic target, to which we will hold the Executive. However, even that ambitious goal is only the beginning. Scotland has renewable sources that could generate all our power and leave us plenty left over to export to our English neighbours.

Those who see a future comprised merely of wind turbines can take heart from the possibilities that are offered by technologies such as offshore

wind, wave and tidal energy. It has been calculated that tidal energy from around Orkney alone has the potential to generate over 10 gigawatts of electricity, which is more than today's Scottish electricity demand. Such power would be both predictable and unobtrusive.

Although the renewable resource exists, the infrastructure that is required to carry those enormous amounts of power is lacking. We need urgent investment in the national grid to ensure that the remote locations where wave, tidal and offshore wind resources are located have adequate grid connections to be able to connect the supply with the demand.

The British electricity trading and transmission arrangements—BETTA—are designed to benefit both consumers and generators. However, certain aspects of the arrangements seem to be designed to act as a massive disincentive to the investment that the Scottish renewables industry so badly needs. Because the supply of renewable energy is often situated far away from centres of population and demand, Scottish renewable operators would face massively increased costs for every unit of electricity that they supply to the grid. Such a scheme may be “BETTA” for generators in the English shires, but it will be a great deal worse for our renewable generators.

It would be a travesty if regulations drawn up in Whitehall were to stifle investment and opportunities in the Scottish renewables industry. I call upon the Scottish Executive to make representations to the UK Government to ensure that BETTA does not disadvantage the renewables industry, which offers so much promise to Scotland and the wider Scottish economy.

17:28

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Let me start off by congratulating Christine May on securing this important debate. Like others, I want to promote Scotland's renewables industry's win-win potential that could create jobs and prosperity while safeguarding our environment. I know that the partnership agreement has a clear green thread that links commitments on actions with policy in order to create a clear framework for delivering sustainable development in Scotland.

We need to embrace renewable energy if we are to get the economic benefits that it can bring. Christine May was absolutely right to highlight the potential for job creation, but I want to focus on the jobs that could be created across the whole of Scotland. It is important that the Vestas-Celtic project in Campbeltown is taking jobs to one of the most economically depressed parts of Scotland. In an area such as Campbeltown, the creation of 300

jobs has a massive impact. We need to see more jobs like that in fabrication and in the creation of renewables technologies across Scotland.

We have a target that 40 per cent of all our electricity needs should come from renewable sources by 2020. I know that the Executive is looking at how we will deliver that and how we might further increase the proportion of electricity that is supplied from renewable sources. Any increase in the targets requires parallel work to be done on the national grid now. Other members have already commented on BETTA, but a key point is the need to strengthen the grid in Scotland. Given that, as far as the national grid is concerned, many of our renewable sources are at the end of the tree, we need a prioritisation process to ensure that new wave and wind developments can be connected to the grid. There is also an issue about the renewables obligation. We need to ensure that we have long-term financial security to ensure that the financial sector is prepared to invest in renewables.

I want to focus on something that nobody else has talked about yet. The motion is right to talk about the need to explore all forms of renewable energy and the one that I want to explore is solar energy in the form of solar heat and solar electricity. Scotland has a huge opportunity in that regard. Published research has shown that we have one of the best climates for solar power in Europe. That might not meet our expectations, but solar energy is a huge opportunity when considered in the light of our energy demand throughout the year and our cold climate. A domestic solar or air heating system in Scotland can provide massive carbon dioxide savings. Just 4sq m of panelling can provide about half of the hot water that a house in Scotland will use in a year. Including installation, a domestic solar water system costs £1,500 and solar heating costs between £400 and £700. Once those costs have been met, the energy is free. I ask the Executive to build that into its procurement process for new schools and for the massive amount of public sector housing that will be built through housing associations. We should ensure that solar energy is built in with the bricks. This is a way in which we can deliver social justice, create new jobs, save people money and save our environment.

Finally, these technologies are delivered in Scotland. Solartwin is a Scottish company. We should be including these Scottish companies in our procurement systems. We should set targets that ensure that we support the industry. I hope that the minister will specifically address the point about the opportunities that Scotland has with regard to solar energy.

17:31

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): In this debate, we take as read the environmental imperative to develop renewable energy. From the environmentalists' point of view, the economic potential might be the icing on the cake, but it is a huge imperative to companies that are building business, individuals who are looking for jobs or an Executive that is committed to a healthy economy. I would like some of the barriers to the full development of the economic potential of renewable energy to be tackled a little more vigorously. There should be a little less timidity about expanding wind generation. The impact that unnecessary delays in development have on Scotland based companies that need a steady and predictable sequence of orders to secure investment and maintain their work force is not always appreciated.

I would emphatically not want to subvert the planning system, but I have to say that, on occasion, there has been a reluctance to be decisive in dealing with planning applications and that that has created delays that have had adverse impacts.

Wind is only one of a range of resources that is available to us. We need them all. Scotland was in the vanguard of the delivery of wind technology but we lost our initial lead because we did not support the embryonic technology through its development to commercial application and a profitable industry. We are now in the vanguard of wind and tidal energy development and I hope that we have learned the lesson of wind power well—I wish that I felt more confident about that.

I worry about the funding that is available for development. A lot will depend on how the intermediate technology institutes operate and I hope that some of the funding stream will be available to small and developing companies as well as to academic institutions. For example, siGEN, a company in my part of the world, is doing excellent and pioneering work on hydrogen fuel cell technology, but lives from hand to mouth in relation to funding.

The enterprise companies have an important role. It would be extremely helpful if the Executive would make it clear to enterprise companies that, in order to do their job properly, they need to be less risk averse. A significant proportion of their financial support for innovation will disappear if they do their job properly.

Another threat to the exploitation of renewable energy is how the electricity market operates. Provisions in the UK Energy Bill will be crucial in fostering the generation of electricity from renewable sources.

Scotland has the raw resources and the intellectual resources to prosper, if they are matched by political encouragement and financial investment.

17:39

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Obviously, there is broad consensus about the need to develop renewable energy.

I say sincerely to Christine May that it is a pity that the debate has been marred by the press release that was issued earlier today. I remember that when she spoke in a previous debate, she said that she was against deceit and duplicity in politics. It would be a great tragedy for the Parliament if members' business debates were allowed to descend into an exchange of cheap jibes. In this case, many of the jibes were wholly inaccurate. I recognise that Christine May is a new member and I say to her that this incident is unfortunate. Perhaps the press release should have been headed, "Dear Jack, will you gie us a job the next time that you have a reshuffle?"

Christine May: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: Sorry, I do not have time. I am sure that Jack will gie you a job.

Mr Stone: What about me?

Alex Neil: Jamie Stone is guaranteed to get a job, especially after getting gag of the week. I hope that I get injury time for this, by the way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you will not. You have only a minute and a bit left.

Alex Neil: The earliest form of renewable energy in Scotland was, of course, hydro power. The motion is not about renewable energy per se, but about its economic potential. The best example of huge economic potential coming from renewable energy is the development of the hydroelectric industry in the Highlands and Islands in the 1940s under the direction of Tom Johnston. The important lesson to be learned from the development of hydro power is not just the fact that an enormous number of jobs were gained during the construction period, when the dams were built, the pylons laid and the connections made.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute left.

Alex Neil: The establishment of hydroelectric power also allowed the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to be developed economically and it attracted other industries that are totally unrelated to renewable energy. We must consider how we can do the same with whatever form of renewable energy we develop in future.

There are three essential ingredients for success. First, there must be a steady flow of projects to attract manufacturing activity. Without that, we will not be able to get the investment that we need in the downstream activity. Secondly, the economic development agencies must play a major role—and yes, subsidy is required at that stage. Subsidy is often required in new industries, so let us give subsidies to get the industry off the ground. The final ingredient is critical mass. There must be enough of any form of renewable energy for us to realise its economic potential. Finally, Presiding Officer, can I say—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you cannot. Will you sit down, please.

Alex Neil: We are back to this three-minute speech stuff, which is one of the reasons why—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Neil, you are cutting someone else out of the debate. Will you sit down, please.

Alex Neil:—this Parliament's reputation out there is becoming so poor.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Because of the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 of standing orders that the debate be extended until 6 o'clock.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Members' Business on 21 January 2004 be extended by up to 20 minutes.—[Mr Mark Ruskell.]

Motion agreed to.

17:38

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Christine May on securing the debate. I have not seen her press release, so I am afraid that I cannot comment on it.

I agree fully about the importance of renewables and the jobs that they provide, but I agree with Murdo Fraser that a moratorium on all opposed onshore wind farm planning applications is the best way to ensure that decisions are not taken that could irreversibly affect some of our most sensitive environments. Few parts of the country are more attractive than north-east Fife, with its mixture of rural and coastal scenery, including historic villages such as Falkland and Ceres and fishing communities such as Crail and Pittenweem. They attract tourists in huge numbers and tourism plays a vital part in the local economy.

The Scottish Executive's planning policy on renewable energy, as stated in national planning policy guideline 6, is that

"developments should not be permitted where they would

have a significant long term detrimental impact on the amenity of people living nearby".

However, Scottish Power proposes a large scale wind farm on Clatto hill, which is one of the most visible uplands in north-east Fife. At 93m high, each of the proposed 18 turbines will be one and a half times the height of the Scott monument. They will be widely visible from many of Fife's most visited tourist spots, as well as from Dundee to the north and Edinburgh to the south. Few more serious acts of visual desecration could be perpetrated anywhere in Scotland. I hope that Christine May, whose constituency adjoins the site, agrees with that judgment.

The proposal also contradicts the Cupar and Howe of Fife local plan, which was adopted in March 2003, on several counts. The plan says that outwith settlement limits,

"development will only be supported where it ... can demonstrate that neutral or positive net environmental impact will occur."

The proposed development will have neither a neutral nor a positive environmental impact. The plan also says that countryside developments must be

"sympathetic to the local landscape character in terms of scale, form, use of materials, and visual impact."

The development is totally unsympathetic to the local landscape's character.

Reaching renewables targets is important, but surely it is no more important than protecting for future generations the qualities of amenity and beauty that set so much of Scotland apart, and few places more so than north-east Fife. That is why we need a moratorium now on opposed wind farm planning applications and why I support fully the line that is taken by Murdo Fraser and some SNP members who have spoken.

17:41

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank Christine May for introducing this important topic for discussion. In this century, Scotland will be able to meet 100 per cent of its electricity needs from renewable energy, but we will encounter some problems in achieving that. One problem is that we will need predictable sources of renewable energy supply to meet the base-load requirement. To do that, we will need wave, tidal and biomass energy in addition to wind power.

Mr Stone: And hydrogen.

Mr Ruskell: Hydrogen energy is a possibility, too.

The problem is that those forms of renewable energy are far-market renewables, which means

that they are not currently competitive. However, they could over time become competitive through a development process. I would like the minister to give an assurance that the forum for renewable energy development in Scotland, which is a ministerial working group, will provide a route map with milestones and targets for developing each form of renewable energy.

We also need co-ordination between academia, industry and Government and we need investment. I support calls from prominent academics for a university of energy in Scotland to help to focus academic collaboration.

I am glad that Christine May referred to Methil, because the former oil rig fabrication yard at Methil has tremendous potential as a renewable energy park, at which a cluster of companies could work together and create synergy. The potential also exists to generate electricity on the site using wind power. As important as that is the fact that we would put all the underused manufacturing skills in Fife to positive use at a renewable energy park.

We must have confidence in our manufacturing skills. I welcome Scottish Enterprise's support for the renewable energy park, but it is unhelpful for Scottish Enterprise and the local press to downplay the future of manufacturing in Fife. We also need investment in the site in Methil in order to develop its infrastructure. I ask the minister again what match funding the Executive will be prepared to offer inward investors who want to invest in the former Kvaerner yard at Methil.

On a recent visit to the Kvaerner yard, I went into the old office block and saw all the old pictures of the platforms and structures that had been built at the site over the years. That was a proud tradition of considerable achievements, but it responded to last century's priority: oil. We need a response to this century's priorities, which are renewable energy and tackling climate change.

17:44

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I have been asked to tender the apologies of George Lyon, our chief whip, who has unfortunately had to leave the chamber hurriedly.

The debate is on renewable energy, which presents a massive opportunity for Scotland to reduce harmful emissions and to create thousands of jobs in related manufacturing industry. There is an interesting announcement in the press today about a massive investment in the grid line from the north of Scotland down to the central belt. Some 500 jobs and investment of £200 million have been mentioned.

The Scottish economy and people can and should benefit from renewable energy.

Communities can gain from generating their own energy or from receiving rental income, and the potential for manufacturing jobs—which the location of Vestas in Campbeltown illustrates—must be exploited. Several members have mentioned Vestas, which came to invest around £12 million in Scotland only because of the positive attitude to wind power and the activity in the industry. Currently, it employs 210 people in Campbeltown and 50 people throughout the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Equally important, it supports 20 jobs in haulage, 60 to 70 jobs at the Stornoway Arnish yard, 60 to 70 jobs in Nigg and 50 jobs around Aberdeen in supply industries. Huge potential therefore exists.

Some campaigners want a moratorium on wind farms, but there are communities, farmers, crofters and individuals throughout Scotland who want to gain from the location of wind turbines on their land. We do not think that one group should be able to impose its views to such an extent on others. The Knoydart community, for example, is now receiving energy from its own hydroelectric scheme. That scheme had been starved of investment for years under private landowners, but it has now been refurbished after the community purchased their land. The Assynt crofters have done the same. They have created their own hydroelectric scheme and now enjoy its benefits.

The current furore over wind farm applications could sour people's attitudes to other forms of renewable energy that offer even greater potential for Scotland. We have heard about wave and tidal power in particular; they have great potential. Wavegen Projects Ltd in Inverness is doing a tremendous amount of research into such areas.

I see that my time is running out. In conclusion, I suggest that if we do not switch to cleaner forms of energy, climate change will severely and irrevocably alter much of our landscape as well as the animal and plant life that it contains.

17:47

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I join members in congratulating Christine May on securing this debate. Like her and other members who have spoken, I am a member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee and have therefore been somewhat immersed over recent weeks in the issue that we are discussing. I would like briefly to add a few points to the debate, although I do not want to pre-empt any conclusions that the committee might ultimately draw on the issue.

First, I want to address the perennial issue of wind farm developments, which has again been raised. Wind farm developments are a classic area in which politicians cannot have their cake and eat

it. I remain to be convinced that there is a great new green thread running through the Scottish Tories—populism and opportunism have much more to do with their calls for a moratorium. If we are serious about even beginning to think about reaching the aspirational targets that the Executive has set, we cannot simply set our faces against developments in the way that some members have suggested. Of course, we must be sensitive to environmental concerns, visual impacts and so on, but there are many developments throughout Scotland that show that a balance can be achieved.

I want to make two specific points, to which I would like the minister to respond. First, I echo the point that several members have made about the need for us to build on lessons that have been learned and, indeed, on successes to date in the development of onshore wind in respect of employment and a wider energy policy. It is crucial that we ensure that there is pace and momentum behind Scotland's development of newer technologies, such as wave, tidal, biomass, photovoltaics and several other technologies that have been mentioned. It is true that this country is rich in natural resources. We should learn the lessons of the past and be quicker at creating research, development, marketing and manufacturing opportunities in those technologies than we have been in the past with onshore wind development.

The second issue to which I would like the minister to respond and which has not really been referred to is skills gaps. If we are going to make progress on renewable energy, achieve the targets for renewables and maximise employment opportunities, we need to have the right skills in the right place at the right time. There are serious problems with engineering capacity throughout Scotland in a range of sectors, but specifically in renewable energy. That is something on which the Enterprise and Culture Committee has already heard evidence. I note also from the visit to Campbeltown, which has been mentioned, and the visit to Vestas-Celtic Wind Technology's facility that there are real problems in securing traditional trades, such as welding. Those issues need to be addressed—and quickly—if we are to maximise the potential in renewable energy.

I pay tribute to somebody else in the debate: Sarah Boyack. It is worth recording that, in the Enterprise and Culture Committee's visit to Campbeltown, a large number of people made specific reference to the actions that she took in the Parliament's early years to lay the foundation stones that have allowed us to get to where we are now. We have short memories in politics, and her work should be remembered.

17:50

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I certainly supported Sarah Boyack's plea for support for Scottish renewable energy companies. I should state for the record that I have a shareholding in a Scottish utility company. Sadly, it is rather a small share.

I will address the real topic of the debate—the economic potential of renewable energy—and the barriers that Nora Radcliffe mentioned. I will touch on two barriers, because that is all that time permits.

The first barrier is the lack of any national strategy for the development of wind power. Its development has been ad hoc, deil tak the hindmost, ill thought out and disorganised. The Scottish National Party is and always has been supportive of renewable energy. I have supported it in my constituency. I have supported the development that adjoins John Farquhar Munro's constituency, namely, the hydro scheme at Glen Doe. I have supported the biomass plans for the Arjo Wiggins Carbonless Papers Ltd paper mill at Corpach, which are still waiting for an answer from the Department of Trade and Industry. I have also supported communities that, by and large, although one or two people are opposed, want proper community benefit. That is a lacuna, which I discussed with the minister at a meeting and which he said could not be implemented because, if we did, Scottish companies would find that all the wind farm developments would suddenly plonk themselves in Wales and England because the companies would be scared off, which is absolute nonsense.

The second barrier concerns biomass. It should be encouraged, but in practice many biomass industries go down, as did Torren Energy in my constituency. Where was the support for that venture? There were words on a page, but practical support was non-existent.

There is something that the UK Government has been failing to do and must do quickly if biomass, which in turn depends on a healthy timber industry, is to develop. It concerns the problem of certification. I do not have time to go into it in great detail, but at the moment the Forest Stewardship Council, which is an unelected and unaccountable body based in Mexico, controls what UK-produced wood is used. Many people believe that an alternative from the Pan-European Forest Certification Council, which has received a great deal of support from many quarters, should be extended, but the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been dilatory in pursuing that.

If we are to have successful biomass, we must prevent an unfair disadvantage being placed on

our panelled-products industry, which in turn means that we must be able to avail ourselves of the wall of wood, because we will see a rise from 6,000,000m³ to 10,000,000m³ of wood available for production by 2017. If we are to avail ourselves of that massive opportunity of the best renewable source of energy, the Government must tackle the red tape and do what it says that it will do, not just debate words on a page from a member whose sole purpose was to make a cheap and ineffective political attack.

17:54

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): I start by congratulating Christine May on securing the debate and on speaking to the motion constructively and positively.

I will deal first with some of the negative points that have been made in the debate. Like Susan Deacon, I point out that all those who demand a moratorium, whether temporary or permanent, on wind energy development are entirely missing the point of how we achieve the economic potential of renewable energy.

In our debate on wind farms late last year, I made it clear that the complaints about a lack of planning guidance were simply not founded. Murdo Fraser mentioned the planning guidance today and I should tell him that NPPG 6 allows cumulative impact to be taken into account and enables councils to take a locational approach to renewables in their development plans, as a number of councils have done.

Many applications for wind energy and other renewables developments are being made. That is to be welcomed, rather than condemned. As Alex Neil, Nora Radcliffe and other members have said, the future growth of companies and jobs in renewable energy in Scotland depends on orders from developers that have made successful applications. That cannot happen unless the planning system is geared—as it is—to encouraging applications to be made and to encouraging good schemes to go ahead.

Murdo Fraser: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald: I am pressed for time, but I will come back to the member in a moment.

I am sad that some members do not yet understand that we live in a very competitive world. We will not capture the economic benefits of renewable energy just by wishing to do so. We have competitors. If Scotland wants the economic benefits of renewable energy, it must support the development of the technology.

Murdo Fraser: I return to the issue of planning guidance. If current planning guidance is so

perfect, why has the Enterprise and Culture Committee received representations on the issue from across the board—from bodies as diverse as power companies and Argyll and Bute Council, which at our meeting yesterday indicated that it believed that planning guidance was not sufficient?

Lewis Macdonald: There are pressures on local authorities—that is in the nature of any planning process in which developments are proposed. However, the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament is to look to the wider national benefit. Community benefit matters at local level—I encourage local authorities and communities to work together on issues of community benefit to share their experience. However, the focus of the Scottish Executive's policy and of the Scottish Parliament must be the benefit for the national community.

I look forward to visiting Campbeltown and the Vestas plant next week. I also look forward to visiting Methil—later this year, I hope—as that project progresses. It is not yet at the funding stage, but I hope that it will reach that stage. I hope that I will have the opportunity to see the project as it develops in Christine May's constituency.

We must be very clear about how we proceed to capture the economic benefits of renewable energy. This debate is timely for a number of reasons. First, as has been mentioned, only last Friday the Scottish Executive, together with the Department of Trade and Industry, published the results of a study that we commissioned jointly with the enterprise networks into the current state of the renewable energy industry across the United Kingdom and the prospects for future growth. The renewable supply chain gap analysis report found that—excluding the large hydro plant that has existed for some years—the renewable energy industry already sustains approximately 8,000 jobs across the UK. Approximately a quarter of those jobs are here in Scotland. The total monetary value of the industry is of the order of £290 million. Again, between a quarter and a third of that can be attributed to Scotland. Looking to the future, the study found that, across the UK, between 17,000 and 35,000 jobs could be sustained by 2020 and that Scotland could look to attract at least a quarter of those. We are determined to do much better than that.

Secondly, the debate is timely because only on Monday I chaired the second meeting of the forum for renewable energy development in Scotland. FREDS represents the energy industries—electricity generators, offshore oil operators and the cutting-edge new-tech companies in the renewables sector. It also includes representatives of investors, scientists, trade unions, the DTI

agency Renewables UK and the enterprise networks. On Monday, we were joined for the first time by Tony Amor, the new chief executive of the intermediary technology institutes for energy.

All that expertise comes together because we share the agenda that is set out in the motion—how to get the best out of renewables in business and jobs for Scotland. We see the attainment of our targets as a two-stage process. We have set targets for renewable energy to provide 18 per cent of our electricity by the end of this decade and 40 per cent by the end of the next. To meet those targets, the energy production that we need from renewable sources in this decade must come from the technologies that are already in the marketplace: hydro power and wind power. However, the technologies that are not yet in the marketplace and that a number of members have highlighted are essential if we are to achieve our targets for the next decade. That is why FREDS has focused on marine energy and the potential for wind and tidal energy, on biomass, which it will consider later this year, and on a range of other technologies that have been mentioned, such as solar power, photovoltaics and the hydrogen and fuel cell potential that exists. FREDS is therefore very clear in its focus.

Vestas is a tremendous example of how we can exploit wind energy, and there are already jobs in hydro, but if we are to capture the economic potential of renewables and create the thousands of jobs that we believe it will be possible to create from them, we need not only to manufacture things and provide services, but to be at the leading edge of the technology.

The big picture is that, if we want that leading-edge technology to be here in Scotland and if we want to create the intellectual property for it, thereby bringing long-term economic benefits to Scotland, we must position ourselves as the country within the United Kingdom and the European Union that is most friendly to, supportive of and encouraging towards renewable energy in general. I hope that the Enterprise and Culture Committee recognises that, as it is certainly the agenda of the Scottish Executive and our partners in FREDS.

If we want renewable energy to generate economic benefits, we must look beyond the short-term, local issues to the wider national interest and we must pull together. At the start of the debate, members talked about the need for an approach based on unity. Such an approach can work and the benefits can be delivered only if the absolute imperative of getting behind renewable energy from start to finish is recognised.

Meeting closed at 18:01.

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