

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 19 May 2004

Session 2

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 19 May 2004

Debates

Col.

HEALTH SERVICES	8401
<i>Motion moved—[David McLetchie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Malcolm Chisholm].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Shona Robison].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Carolyn Leckie].</i>	
David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)	8401
The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm)	8407
Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP)	8411
Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)	8414
Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)	8417
Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)	8420
Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)	8421
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)	8424
David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)	8426
Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)	8428
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)	8430
Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)	8432
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	8434
Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)	8436
Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)	8438
Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)	8441
Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	8443
Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)	8445
Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)	8448
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)	8450
Carolyn Leckie	8452
George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)	8454
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	8456
The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe)	8459
Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con)	8461
POINT OF ORDER	8466
MARINE ENVIRONMENT	8467
<i>Motion moved—[Allan Wilson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Roseanna Cunningham].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Johnstone].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Robin Harper].</i>	
The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson)	8467
Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP)	8472
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	8476
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)	8478
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)	8481
Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)	8484
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	8486
John Scott (Ayr) (Con)	8488
Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)	8490
John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)	8493
Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)	8494
Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	8496
Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	8499
Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	8501
Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP)	8503
Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)	8506
Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	8508

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)	8510
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	8512
Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)	8514
Allan Wilson	8517
POINT OF ORDER	8521
BUSINESS MOTION	8523
<i>Motion moved—[Patricia Ferguson]—and agreed to.</i>	
The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Patricia Ferguson)	8523
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	8525
<i>Motions moved—[Patricia Ferguson].</i>	
DECISION TIME	8526
LIVESTOCK IMPROVEMENT SCHEME	8539
<i>Motion debated—[Mr Jamie McGrigor].</i>	
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	8539
Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)	8542
Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)	8543
John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)	8545
Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP)	8546
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	8548
Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	8549
Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	8551
George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)	8552
John Scott (Ayr) (Con)	8554
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	8555
The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson)	8556

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 19 May 2004

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

Health Services

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1326, In the name of David McLetchie, on health issues, and three amendments to the motion. I invite members who wish to contribute to the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

09:30

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Health care is the issue that consistently tops the list of the public's priorities and quite rightly so; health care is often a matter of life and death. Even when it is not, every one of us deserves the reassurance of knowing that care, when we, our family and friends need it, will be provided speedily and that it will be of a high quality. Sadly, five years on from the establishment of Parliament, far too many people in Scotland do not feel that the national health service provides them with that security.

Throughout this morning's debate, my colleagues will discuss a range of health issues. Bill Aitken will talk about the proposed closures of the Queen Mother's maternity hospital and of accident and emergency services in Glasgow. Nanette Milne will look at maternity services on a Scotland-wide basis. David Mundell will talk about rural health issues and Mary Scanlon will look at the interface between health and care. I am sure that other members will want to contribute other issues to the debate.

I will focus on the broader issue of how we should deliver a national health service for our people. Although our health service too often fails to deliver quality services, that does not mean that nothing has improved. As Professor Nick Bosanquet—professor of health policy at Imperial College, London—pointed out in his excellent study for the Policy Institute entitled "A Healthy Future for Scotland", there have been positive developments. For example, mortality rates in Scotland have gone down; mortality from coronary heart disease is 40 per cent lower than it was in the early 1990s and the survival rate for stroke patients is better than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom, although we should note that the United Kingdom as a whole still compares unfavourably

with other countries in that respect. Scotland has been a leader in the use of telemedicine and special access programmes—which have been of benefit to rural communities—and in the extension of the role of community pharmacies.

I do not want to pretend that all is doom and gloom. However, we should not allow those improvements to obscure the problems that mean that the health service is too often a source of concern rather than a source of security. Those problems stem from the fact that, although more money is undoubtedly going into the NHS in Scotland, it is not leading to commensurate improvements in the numbers of patients who are treated or to reductions in waiting lists and times.

Poor productivity in our health service is the problem that dares not speak its name. I welcome the recognition of that fact in the amendment that has been lodged by Shona Robison on behalf of the Scottish National Party, but I suspect that we might not agree on the cure. However, agreement on a diagnosis is a good starting point for any discussion. Poor productivity is an inevitable consequence of our nationalised system. Until we are prepared to take the necessary steps to promote choice for patients, to liberalise the supply of health care and to establish the Government as a funder but not necessarily a monopoly provider of health care, the public will never get the service that they demand, deserve and pay for.

I would not, nor would any of my colleagues, dispute the increase in funding that the NHS in Scotland has received. We have said on numerous occasions that we welcome that increase, just as we continue to hope—probably in vain—that other parties will recognise the real-terms increases in funding that occurred year on year under the previous Conservative Government.

Spending on the health service is already above the European Union average as a proportion of our gross domestic product. According to the recent and comprehensive Nuffield Trust report,

"on every measure of resource input, whether it is the availability of hospital beds, the number of doctors and nurses in hospitals and the community or the prescribing of medicines, Scotland's health care system is better resourced than any other part of the UK."

It is just that the figures show that the system is not delivering the level of patient care that we all want. A 30 per cent increase in funding since 1999 has been matched, unbelievably, by an increase of more than 20,000 in numbers on hospital waiting lists, while the number of hospital treatments has declined by 40,000 over the same period. Contrary to what the First Minister told me at the most recent First Minister's question time, that is not because more patients are being

treated as out-patients. I hope that he and the Minister for Health and Community Care have the grace to acknowledge that the number of out-patients who are seen in our hospitals is also down by more than 200,000 since 1999.

I know that the minister will tell me that more patients are being treated in local clinics. If that is indeed true, it would be welcome. However, as the Audit Scotland report on out-patients indicated, figures on out-patient numbers have only just begun to be collected and no properly comparable numbers are available. In any event, the alleged increase in the number of patients who are treated locally is not leading to a reduction in the number of patients on the waiting lists. Why is it, in that case, that the extra money is not producing extra results but is instead producing quite the opposite? The answer is that the money is being poorly directed.

The health service in England is not particularly good in that respect either, but even it is outperforming the NHS in Scotland in productivity terms. Effectiveness in use of medical time as measured by finished consultant episodes per staff member is 55 per cent lower in Scotland—126 episodes compared to 196 in England. That has been combined with a rise in the cost of procedures by about 20 per cent in accident and emergency procedures, 24 per cent in acute operations, 49 per cent in treatment for day cases and an unbelievable 181 per cent in treatment for out-patients. Those figures are all up on the figures from just three years ago.

As Professor Bosanquet, whom I mentioned earlier, concludes in his study:

“the performance level of Scotland’s health services reflects a tragic waste of talent and under-use of the country’s excellent trained health staff.”

That is an epitaph with which it is difficult to disagree.

The deep-seated problems of our health service are an intrinsic feature of its virtual monopoly status. Costs in monopolies rise because without competition there is no incentive to be efficient. In a monopoly, it does not matter whether value for money is secured because patients have no option but to accept what is on offer. It is regrettable that the Executive parties do not accept what I would say is a self-evident truth instead of retaining a Stalinist devotion to centralised planning and management of the NHS. In that, they are joined by the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Socialist Party, whose grip would be even tighter.

I have never claimed that the health service, which was inherited from us in 1997, was perfect. There was still much work to do, as there is today. However, instead of building on our reforms, which

were designed to decentralise management authority in the service and to move away from top-down direction, Labour in Scotland has dismantled those reforms in an act of ideological vandalism that had no regard for patient interests.

That has not happened to anything like the same extent south of the border, which makes for an interesting contrast. In Scotland, fund holding and trusts have been abolished. In a classic piece of doublespeak of which George Orwell would have been proud, the Executive calls that decentralisation. However, many independent commentators have seen through the deception. In his comprehensive study for Civitas and the David Hume Institute that compares the NHS in England and Scotland, Benedict Irvine says:

“We see greater choice and competition on the supply-side in England, while healthcare is becoming more integrated in Scotland.”

Professor Bosanquet is also sceptical about the Executive’s claims. He describes its policies as “vague and ill-defined” and goes on to maintain:

“The aspiration for devolution of power has to be set against the day-to-day reality of greater ministerial intervention.”

We in Scotland are moving in precisely the opposite direction from our neighbours in western Europe and even from our closest neighbour in England. In those countries, a growing consensus is emerging around the principles that are necessary for successful health care reform. The basic building block of any reform must be ready access for all patients to a Government-guaranteed high standard of care. All countries are trying to achieve that and many have discovered alternative methods of provision that have delivered more responsive and demonstratively higher-quality services than we have in Scotland. That does not mean that we should import such solutions wholesale, but we should at least try to learn from the experiences of others.

The principle of universal access is at the heart of the NHS, but there is currently no equality of access in the NHS. People in the most deprived areas wait about three weeks longer for surgery than do people in better-off areas. Therefore, those who trumpet the virtues of equality are simply deluding themselves and conning the public. Invariably, the preference of the defenders of the current system is to level down, but that merely lowers standards for those who currently enjoy quality care, while doing little for those who do not. Instead, we should encourage standards to rise for all through promotion of choice and competition.

The truth is that the NHS provides a standard of care that is considered acceptable by doctors within the budgets that are available to them. As a

result, it fails in many areas to meet the standards that can be seen in other western European countries. That is why there is growing consensus that we must, if we are to put patients first, give them real choice about the services that they receive.

Our aim is to extend such choice to everyone through patient passports. Entry to the system would still be through a patient's general practitioner and consultant, but once patients have had their diagnosis, they would be able to take the standard tariff funding for their treatment anywhere within the NHS in Scotland and England, so that money would follow the patient through the system. For the first time, every patient would have access to a truly national health service, rather than to a regional health service in which access is determined by people's postcodes.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The member's argument is that the Conservatives will drain money out of the NHS budget which, as Oliver Letwin has made clear, the Conservatives do not intend to increase beyond what Labour has already pledged. The end result of money's being drained away and the subsidising of those who currently go private would be that the output capacity of current NHS services would be reduced. The system would be made worse rather than better as a result of what the member advocates.

David McLetchie: The problem is that Mr Lyon does not look at the health service as a whole because he is obsessed with focusing on there being a single provider of health services and health care. The member should look at what happens in other European countries; he should look at ideas that are being considered by, for example, his Liberal Democrat colleague Chris Huhne, who chaired the Liberal Democrat public services policy commission. He will then see that his party south of the border is considering the sort of measures in respect of increasing the range of providers that I am advocating in the Scottish Parliament. That is the reality. The Liberal Democrats' problem in Scotland is that they are slaves to the public sector monopoly orthodoxy that bedevils the provision of health services in this country. The member should open his eyes, look abroad and go and have a wee chat with his colleagues. He would then understand what we are trying to do.

We are talking about access to a truly national health service. Undoubtedly, many patients would choose a local hospital for treatment, but others would exercise choice that is based on shorter waiting times or acknowledged expertise. What matters is not the basis for patient decisions, but the fact that the choice is in their hands.

That is why we also want to go further and extend the idea of passports so that a much higher

proportion of the population can receive treatment from providers other than the NHS, and why we believe that patients should be able to take a proportion of the standard tariff with them to the voluntary, not-for-profit and private sectors for treatment. At first, such extension of choice would obviously be limited by the fact that those sectors are relatively small in this country, but one of the main benefits of our policy is that it would provide a clear incentive for greater investment in capacity, which is essential to improving health services overall and expanding patient choice.

For reform to be successful, putting patient choice at the heart of the health service must be accompanied by reform that sets providers of health care free to cater for those choices, thereby creating real competition. As we made clear in our manifesto for last year's Scottish Parliament elections, we would enable hospitals in Scotland to apply for foundation status. They would continue to be part of the NHS, but would operate as not-for-profit organisations with their own directors and far greater operational freedom. That independence would enable them more effectively to meet the needs of patients. As money would follow patients, well-run hospitals would become well-funded hospitals.

We would also open the way in Scotland for new providers in the private and voluntary sectors to be set up that are similar to the diagnostic and treatment centres that are being introduced and run by the private sector at the Government's behest south of the border. Because the choices of patients would shape the future direction of our service, it would much more accurately match supply and demand and there would also be a more co-ordinated service, if that was what patients wanted.

That is our vision of the future of the health service in Scotland. We do not expect the other parties to agree with that vision, but they are out of step with international trends. We will continue to point that out and argue for an agenda that puts patients first in order to create a health service in Scotland that our people need and deserve.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that, despite a substantial increase in funding for the NHS in Scotland, services for patients have not improved over the last five years with fewer in-patient, day case and out-patient treatments occurring and more patients waiting longer for treatment; notes that, despite the best efforts of NHS staff, the current monolithic, centrally-run system of providing healthcare is not delivering the results our people are entitled to expect; recognises that fundamental reform is needed of the NHS in Scotland to achieve the standards of many other health services in European countries and to provide value for money for our taxpayers, and calls on the Scottish Executive to give patients genuine choice over the treatment they receive, establish foundation hospitals within NHSScotland and promote the development of the independent sector.

09:46

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): I begin by paying tribute to the dedicated and hard-working staff of the NHS and to the whole health care team—nurses, allied health professionals, support staff and medical staff—whose productivity has been cruelly criticised by the Conservative party this morning. I would be the first to admit that continuing improvements in health services are required and I am the first to work for those, but to state—as the motion states—that services “have not improved” is a total travesty that is based on party-political dogma.

There are at least five problems with the motion. First, it is totally silent on quality; secondly, it totally ignores much of the new activity in the NHS, which has not yet been reflected in official figures; thirdly, it disregards the progress that has been made on waiting times; fourthly, it distorts and caricatures our reform agenda; and fifthly, it conceals the Conservatives’ real health agenda.

On the first problem, I say frequently that the starting point for improving quality is the experience of every patient who passes through the health care system. That is why we emphasise the involvement of patients in the development of services and learning from the experience of patients over and above patient choice for all—which we support—rather than patient choice for the few, which the Conservatives advocate through patient passports. There is much more to do, but we should acknowledge the considerable progress that has been made through patient involvement; for example, in the cancer strategy, in the coronary heart disease strategy, in the stroke strategy and in the diabetes strategy.

The reduction of unacceptably long working hours is also part of the quality agenda. The days of exhausted junior doctors being expected to care for patients are over; 80 hours a week, as the figure was five years ago, has been reduced to 56 hours a week. In addition, doctors in training are now focusing more on developing their skills and experience, which means that junior doctors rightly spend less time providing a service, with more patient care being provided by trained practitioners. That, of course, has implications for activity, but it is positive in respect of quality.

To help to support quality and safety, we established the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland in 1999, and in 2003 we merged and strengthened the board to reinforce its independence by forming NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland is pursuing a vigorous programme of standard setting, and of reviewing and reporting publicly on performance against those standards. Representatives of patients and the public are involved in all that work.

There is considerable evidence that that programme of work is leading to improvements in patient care. For example, two weeks ago, I attended a conference of all the managed clinical networks for colon cancer in Scotland. They reported significant progress in meeting the NHS quality improvement standard for colon cancer. That could be replicated across the board in respect of many other diseases.

More generally, what has happened to surgical mortality rates? They have fallen to ever-lower levels. What has happened to rates of premature mortality from heart disease, stroke and cancer? They have fallen and continue to fall. Of course much remains to be done. Quality and safety standards do not stand still, but it is important to acknowledge the progress that is being made.

Quality improvements and a reduction in working hours to acceptable levels form the background to an apparent fall in hospital activity. I am certainly not complacent about that, so we are promoting benchmarking to help to improve efficiency. The centre for change and innovation and the national waiting times unit are sharing good practice, as are health boards.

There is more to the matter than meets the eye. The new activities that the Conservative motion ignores are performed in different locations and by different people from those who performed them in the past. Faced with the choice between spending time as an in-patient and being treated as a day case or out-patient, most people choose the day case or out-patient option. Following an illness, older people would much rather be cared for at home than in hospital. It makes good clinical sense to concentrate complex treatment in hospitals and to move rehabilitation, management of chronic disease, therapy, diagnostic testing and monitoring procedures to primary and community care and to people’s homes as far as possible.

It also makes sense to ensure that care is provided by the most appropriate staff in the most appropriate way. For example, a community nurse or therapist spends more time with a patient than a hospital consultant or general practitioner can afford to. People can consult a community pharmacist about the most effective treatment for a minor ailment.

David McLetchie: Does the minister acknowledge that the number of out-patients who are seen in hospital has fallen by 200,000 in the past four years?

Malcolm Chisholm: That relates precisely to the point that I am describing. Of course the official figures have reduced, but my point—David McLetchie would have heard it if he had been listening to my speech—is that much activity in out-patient departments and elsewhere is not reflected in the official figures.

In February, the website of the information and statistics division of the NHS included for the first time figures for patients who were seen in nurse-led clinics. The number of patients who attended such clinics in January this year was more than 22,000 for acute specialties and another 32,000 attendances were made for non-acute specialties. The early estimate is that nurse-led clinics account for about 10 per cent of activity at consultant out-patient clinics. A significant amount of NHS activity has not previously been recorded, so the activity figures that the Conservatives quote omit those numbers.

The Conservatives' figures also do not reflect the increasing amount of treatment that used to be given in hospitals but which is now provided in primary care settings by a wide range of health care professionals. The Conservatives quoted only general practitioner consultations, but 2.6 million patients were seen by allied health professionals such as speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists in the first six months of 2003-04, which represents about 5 million patient interactions a year. New figures that were published at the end of last year provide an estimate of 10 million face-to-face contacts each year in primary care between patients and practice teams of nurses, district nurses and health visitors. Patients who have conditions including asthma, diabetes and mental health issues can expect practice team members other than GPs to see them.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): All parties tend to bandy about statistics in health debates in the Parliament. We all take responsibility for that, but does not that underline the need for an in-depth root-and-branch inquiry into what lies behind those statistics and who is telling the truth?

Malcolm Chisholm: Audit Scotland will publish the report of such an inquiry on 3 June, so the proposal in the SNP's amendment is redundant.

Shona Robison: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will not give way. I ask the Presiding Officer how long I have taken for my speech, because I do not have a sense of that.

The Presiding Officer: You have taken eight minutes. You have another four minutes.

Malcolm Chisholm: I will miss out some of the examples that I had intended to give of new activity.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: Obviously, I can accept no more interventions, given how long I have taken.

The many innovative ways of working are certainly not hallmarks of the monolithic, centrally

run health care service that the motion describes. We are encouraging and supporting new ways of working that place patients at the centre of care and which devolve responsibility to suitably trained staff who work in wards, clinics, health centres and the community.

The new community health partnerships will help to devolve resources and decision making to the front line and will help the public and patients to become more closely involved in local NHS decisions that affect them. Community health partnerships will reinforce the joint working between the NHS and local authorities that already benefits patients. Far from operating a centrally run model, we are working with patients and the NHS to support integrated systems whereby the patient's pathway is streamlined through managed clinical networks that link primary and hospital care and which cross NHS board boundaries. Under such systems, decisions are made and resources are committed as near as possible to the front line.

I am surprised that the Conservatives have the brass neck even to mention waiting figures. Unfortunately for them, I was the Opposition health spokesperson in 1996 and I remember full well complaining about waits of more than a year for heart surgery. Next month, that figure will drop to 18 weeks in Scotland. I also remember that in the 1990s, the maximum waiting time for in-patient treatment was 18 months; it is now nine months and will fall steadily towards six months by the end of 2005. The Conservatives should at least acknowledge the progress that has been made on in-patient waiting. They quote bogus figures on waiting lists. As they know, we have adopted a single list, so the figures do not compare like with like. I also remind them that 50 per cent of in-patients do not wait at all.

My amendment acknowledges that more needs to be done on out-patient waiting, which is why I have been pleased recently to launch several initiatives. The centre for change and innovation has led those initiatives as part of its out-patient programme. The unacceptably long out-patient waits that my amendment highlights will fall in the next year.

I find the motion to be disappointing because it deals with means rather than ends. It talks about activity rather than about achievements such as reduced premature mortality from cancer and heart disease, and it talks about structures rather than about outcomes such as reduced waiting times. In the real world, structures are not the top priority for the people of Scotland. What matters is safe, high-quality health care, care and treatment as near to home as possible and shorter waiting times. All that is based on the fundamental NHS principle of care that is funded from general taxation and given according to need.

The Conservatives would fundamentally challenge all that through their patient passport and in other ways. They would provide money to supplement people's private health care payments, which would create an inequitable system that would undermine clinical priority and need, and they would give choice to those who can afford to pay, rather than provide choice for all, which we support.

I move amendment S2M-1326.4, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"commends staff across the NHS for the quality improvements achieved over the last five years, the new forms of activity such as nurse-led clinics and the progress being made towards a six-month maximum wait for in-patient treatment by the end of 2005; notes that progress has been made at the same time as the working hours of medical and other staff have been brought into line with accepted norms; commends recent initiatives to tackle long out-patient waiting times, and supports further reform of NHSScotland through the development of community health partnerships and managed clinical networks, an increasing emphasis on involving patients and learning from their experiences and a sustained drive on health improvement and the prevention of ill-health in partnership with other agencies."

09:57

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Here we are again, debating problems in the health service. I place on record again the SNP's support for the efforts of hard-working staff in the NHS.

During their conference in Dundee—I hope that they enjoyed some good Dundee hospitality while they were there—the Tories said that they had learned some humility and that they would never again impose their ideas on an unwilling Scotland. However, today they are attempting to push the privatisation agenda, which shows that actions speak louder than words.

Mr McLetchie gave the game away when he was interviewed on Radio Scotland last week. Apart from insisting that the interviewer should refer to Thatcher as Lady Thatcher, he tried to extol the virtues of what Thatcher achieved for Scotland. Rather than Stalinist devotion, Mr McLetchie still has Thatcherite devotion in spades. It is clear that some Tories, including the Tory leader, have never really changed their spots.

The Tory motion repeats almost word for word a Tory motion that was debated in the chamber only six months ago and was overwhelmingly rejected as the way forward for the health service by the Parliament and by the people of Scotland, so it feels a bit like groundhog day. Only yesterday, we heard from House of Commons Health Committee members that that committee—including its Conservative members—is united in its concern about the negative impact of foundation hospitals south of the border. There is no appetite for privatisation in Scotland.

Although I do not take issue with the first part of the Tory motion, which is a statement of fact, at the end of the motion the Tories yet again try to argue that foundation hospitals and the independent sector are somehow an easy solution to the ills of the health service—even though there is absolutely no evidence to support that claim. I have no doubt that foundation hospitals would drain even more resources from the NHS, which would be paying for people to be treated in the private sector.

However, neither is the status quo acceptable for patients in Scotland. There is not simply a straight choice between the status quo and privatisation; I believe that it is possible to have a public health service that delivers for patients. For that to happen, we have to be honest about the extent of the problem. We must not pretend that everything in the garden is rosy, as does today's amendment from the Executive.

The Minister for Health and Community Care cannot ignore the facts—or, indeed, the concerns of his own back benchers, to whom I will return. In a letter to the Health Committee dated 10 May, on the subject of comments that he had made in evidence to the committee the previous week, Mr Chisholm provided information on the use of agency nurses. The information shows that, although the number of hours worked by agency nurses has declined—which we all welcome, because they cost more than NHS nurses—the overall cost of agency nurses has risen from £24.5 million in 2001-02 to more than £28 million in 2002-03. It is incredible that it is actually costing the NHS more to pay for fewer agency nurse hours—nearly 168,000 fewer hours. How can that be? Further explanation is required. If we are to look after the public purse, there must be further investigation.

I do not want to bombard people with statistics but I wish to highlight some key figures. Despite increased revenue expenditure, the total output of in-patients and day cases, of new and return out-patients, and of general practitioner consultations, declined significantly between 1998-99 and 2002-03. That also requires an explanation. The performance of the Scottish NHS declined relative to the English NHS between 1990 and 2002—despite increased funding. That also requires an explanation.

Between 1998-99 and 2002-03, revenue expenditure has increased by some £800 million in real terms. That increase has been accompanied by a 6.2 per cent fall in in-patient and day case episodes, a 4.3 per cent fall in out-patient consultations, and a 6 per cent fall in GP consultations. That cannot just be brushed under the carpet, as the minister is attempting to do. There has been a substantial fall in productivity

and efficiency in NHS Scotland. This Parliament has a duty to investigate that. To move forward, the Parliament has to acknowledge the problem and then do something about it. The minister cannot dispute the facts any longer.

Looking around the chamber, I see members of all parties who have raised concerns time and again about where investment in the NHS has gone and about the fact that patients have not seen the improvements in care and treatment that that investment should have led to. It is not heresy to say that; it is merely a statement of fact. There is widespread concern across the chamber about delivery in the NHS.

My colleagues on the Health Committee have spoken about their concerns on a number of occasions. During the budget process, it has come to our attention time and again that the Executive itself cannot answer questions on what resources are spent where, and cannot give evidence to support decisions to spend in one area and not another. It also cannot say what output it expects to achieve for its investments.

The complacency of the Executive amendment is in stark contrast to the real concerns that are being expressed by Labour back benchers. The amendment takes us no further forward. The minister must know that many members sitting behind him do not believe what he is saying either. Duncan McNeil was quoted in April as saying:

"Across Scotland, from Inverclyde to Ayrshire, to the Highlands, to Glasgow, to Perth and beyond, staffing pressures are collapsing—or are being used as an excuse to collapse—maternity and paediatric services.

Communities are left outraged, MSPs frustrated, and patients short-changed."

Kate Maclean has also raised her concerns. At a Health Committee meeting she said:

"I think that your answer is a bit glib and does not acknowledge how serious the additional pressures are."—[*Official Report, Health Committee, 4 May 2004; c 812.*]

She was talking about pressures on health boards.

As I say, there are concerns across the chamber. That is why I make a plea to all members to join me today in taking some action to address the problems. My amendment calls for a root-and-branch inquiry by Audit Scotland into the performance of NHS Scotland. Audit Scotland is presently conducting an overview inquiry but, in informal discussions, it says that it is likely to call for a more detailed investigation of what is happening in the NHS. That is exactly what we are calling for. Rather than waste any more time, let us all agree that that is a way forward. We need to know why additional resources invested in the NHS do not appear to have improved outcomes for patients.

I move amendment S2M-1326.2, to leave out from "the current" to end and insert:

"the productivity and efficiency of NHSScotland is declining, and therefore calls on Audit Scotland to undertake a full root-and-branch inquiry into why the performance of NHSScotland has not improved given the substantial increase in funding."

10:06

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): My amendment is radically different from what is on offer from the main parties. I am absolutely astonished that, in all the speeches so far, not once has the private finance initiative been mentioned. I suppose that people just want to hide from it. I will come back to that point.

Our health record is damning—one in three children lives in poverty and there is increased diabetes and obesity. There are also phenomenal rates of malnutrition on admission to hospital. The four sickest constituencies in Britain are in Glasgow, yet Greater Glasgow NHS Board proposed drastic cuts to the NHS provision in the city. Treatment for serious diseases such as breast cancer is delayed. There is a problem and we should all have the honesty to acknowledge that. NHS boards are cutting, closing and centralising at a rate of knots. Organisational change is no longer an event, but part of the job description. Stressed NHS staff are struggling to cope with more pressure and less time. Yet, in Glasgow, 1,000 jobs are set to go.

Up and down the country there are complaints and campaigns. Communities are in uproar. However, strangely, there are no complaints from the PFI consortia and no complaints from the locum agencies or the pharmaceutical companies. They seem to be the only happy bunnies in the health service. When did anyone last see them packing out a public meeting?

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

Carolyn Leckie: No—I have only six minutes. Sorry.

The Presiding Officer: There is always the odd minute for interventions.

Carolyn Leckie: With the Tories, it is always a case of England, dear England. However, the increased use of the private sector in England, to which the Tory motion refers, is not so rosy. Deals involving Mercury Health Ltd and Anglo-Canadian Clinics Ltd have fallen through, casting severe doubt over whether the 24 independent—that is, private—treatment centres will be operational by 2005 as claimed. Those centres cost the NHS £2 billion—and the Tories complain about the cost of the Parliament.

Some things cost more in Scotland, and rightly so. Because of good trade union organisation, rather than any gifts from the Executive, contracts awarded by the Tories in the first wave of NHS privatisation have been brought back in-house. Sick pay has been given back to low-paid and put-upon workers, and ancillary staff and administrative and clerical staff are paid higher rates in Scotland. That is money well spent. However, the Tories would happily take us back to the days when domestics working for the NHS literally worked until they dropped dead because they could not afford to be off sick.

The Executive has underestimated the cost of NHS consultants' pay rises, which are costing up to twice as much as overpaid NHS managers estimated. For example, those pay rises are costing £8 million in Lothian, which is £5 million more than was estimated. Managers' shoddy arithmetic has saddled NHS boards with an increase in costs that they cannot afford. That is leading to cuts in front-line services. Malcolm Chisholm has already had to bail out local health boards by providing an extra £30 million. More is probably needed.

Fergus Ewing *rose*—

Carolyn Leckie: Unison estimates that consultants received an average pay rise of 15 to 18 per cent—as opposed to the 8.5 per cent that the minister claimed. The failure to plan strategically to fund that pay rise and compliance with the working time directive and the GP contract is breathtakingly incompetent. It now appears that lower-paid NHS staff—the majority of staff in the NHS—are to be asked to pay the price.

The Tories talk about their wonderful foundation hospitals. Will they agree with what Conservative health spokesperson Simon Burns said in August 2003 about the 30 per cent bonuses for foundation hospital managers? He said:

“Patients, particularly those on waiting lists, will be outraged to hear chief executives who aren't exactly badly paid are going to benefit when the money could be better spent on patient care.”

Will Mr McLetchie defend those 30 per cent bonuses? Is that his vision of foundation hospitals?

David McLetchie: Will the member take an intervention?

Carolyn Leckie: Mr McLetchie can respond later. I do not have enough time to let him speak just now.

After 1997, the Tories were spectacularly upstaged on PFI—the subject that dare not speak its name. Geoffrey Robinson loosened up the laws, made PFI less risky for his banker pals and became paymaster general to Peter Mandelson.

Fergus Ewing: Would Comrade Leckie take an intervention from me?

Carolyn Leckie: Since Fergus Ewing is persistent, I will.

Fergus Ewing: Fraternal greetings. Carolyn Leckie states that the pharmaceutical companies should be brought into public ownership. Does that include GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca? If so, what money would be left after the value of those companies had been paid? That purchase would use up all the health budgets for the next two decades. What money would be left to fund any NHS whatsoever?

Carolyn Leckie: Fergus Ewing makes that point only because he accepts the idea that those companies should be paid compensation. [*Laughter.*] I would like those companies to be means tested in the same way as the people who suffer under the Government's regressive tax regimes. The question is political, not economic.

Lothian NHS Board is running a £95 million deficit because of PFI contracts relating to the Edinburgh royal infirmary. The PFI consortium at Hairmyres hospital has just entered into a refinancing deal. [*Laughter.*]

I am glad that members think that this subject is funny. It is not funny.

Despite the profits that have already been made through the PFI deals at Hairmyres, refinancing is set to deliver nearly £1 billion of additional profits to the Hairmyres consortium. Do the other parties in this chamber defend that? If they do, that illustrates that we support the NHS continuing to be a public service and that they are the privatisers.

The Presiding Officer: You have one minute.

Carolyn Leckie: I was going to talk in detail about pharmaceutical companies and the cost of drugs, but perhaps I can return to that in my summing up.

Shona Robison mentioned the increased costs to the NHS of agency nurses, locums and so on. In 2002-03, the charge for an agency nurse was £1,600 a week. The fact that there are not enough beds leads to the establishment of evening and weekend waiting list initiatives that distort clinical priorities and cost time and wages. Core capacity needs to be increased to reduce those costs.

The NHS has been mismanaged by successive Governments and has been exploited by big business. There has been no democratic accountability. The public are at odds with NHS boards because they consistently try to disguise bad news as good while implementing Scottish Executive policies—most disgracefully PFI—in the knowledge that they are sucking the life out of the NHS while operating restrictive budgets.

The Tories constantly make an issue of postcode prescribing, but try to persuade us that an individual patient passport will lead us to a postcode-neutral paradise. That is what I call funny.

I urge members to support the SSP amendment, which is the only one rooted in reality.

I move amendment S2M-1326.3, to leave out from “, despite a” to end and insert:

“Scotland’s health and quality of health services are not improving in relation to the wealth available in the fourth biggest economy in the world; further notes that the NHS has insufficient core capacity and insufficient core staffing of establishments that have increased agency, overtime and locum costs; is concerned that NHS boards have substantial deficits and plan unacceptable reductions in service provision and jobs; believes that resources that should be directly spent on patient care are diverted to ever-increasing profits for private consortia, private health providers of all kinds and pharmaceutical companies; notes that the Scottish Executive and NHS boards have repeatedly failed to strategically plan effectively; believes that all forms of privatisation in the NHS such as PFI/PPP and contracting from private providers should be stopped; further believes that the pharmaceutical companies should be brought into public ownership or, in the meantime, at the very least, the Executive should urgently introduce a drug-pricing regime that will control and deflate drug company profits, and believes that capacity and staffing establishments need to be systematically enlarged.”

10:14

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): “Rooted in reality”—okay.

Our national health service exists to provide a safe, high level of quality care to all patients in Scotland irrespective of how much money they have or where they happen to live. I have to say that it is clear to me that the Conservative party’s plans, outlined by David McLetchie, would fatally undermine those essential underpinning principles of our NHS.

The Conservatives have made it clear that they want to subsidise private health care and, in the process, siphon off much-needed NHS funding. Their proposals for the NHS are all about diverting funds from the public sector to the private sector and are clearly driven by a particular ideological approach to the provision of health care in Scotland.

The patient passport is the innovation at the heart of the Conservative proposals, but I note that it is curiously absent from the Conservative motion and was not mentioned by David McLetchie in his opening speech.

Patient passports are to be introduced to enable patients to be treated free of charge at any NHS hospital, as they are at the moment. However, it involves establishing a level of bureaucracy—yes, a level of red tape—to set up a national tariff for

each and every operation and service within the NHS. Why? Because it will allow everything to be priced, which will, in turn, allow people who can afford it to take 60 per cent of that price out of the NHS and use it to pay for private treatment.

David McLetchie: Does Mr Rumbles accept that, at present, operations in the NHS are costed? That is part of the management process that is in place in the system at present. In what way is it difficult to change a cost into a tariff?

Mike Rumbles: The Conservatives want to price everything in the NHS. Of course, while they will know the price of everything, they will know the value of nothing.

The Tories claim that that innovation would save money for the NHS and ensure that better provision was available to all by shortening queues, because there will be less demand for NHS services. They also claim that it would expand the range of providers and that increasing private providers is one of their major aims. In that context, let us have a look at their proposals in detail.

The average cost of a hip-replacement operation in the NHS is just over £4,000. However, with BUPA the cost is anything between £6,000 and £10,000. Under the Tory proposals, a patient could take 60 per cent of the NHS cost—some £2,400—and use it as a payment towards BUPA treatment. That would mean that they would still have to find some £7,600 towards the operation. The proposal would provide a subsidy to those patients who are able to fund their operations privately anyway. Very nice indeed. Of course that will be welcomed by those who can afford to pay private fees anyway, but what about those who cannot? This is where the argument about the patient passport fails miserably. Let me explain why.

We have an example of the Tories trying this sort of thing before. Back in 1990, the Conservatives introduced a scheme of subsidies for private medical insurance for the over 60s that cost the taxpayer some £560 million. What did it achieve? Far from increasing private medical insurance, as the Tories claimed it would, it simply subsidised it. Those with private medical insurance gained while those without did not. There was no increased uptake of private medical insurance, according to the Inland Revenue.

Now, the Conservatives aim to extend that private subsidy across the health spectrum. The so-called NHS passport is nothing more than a passport out of the NHS. It is a subsidy for those who can and do afford private health care at the expense of those who cannot. Is this not redistribution of wealth by the state? I thought that the Tories did not accept that concept. They seem

to be accepting redistribution in the situation that I have described, although it can be bizarrely but simply categorised as, “to those who have, let us give some more.”

The Conservatives like to portray themselves as the party of the patient. However, they are simply the party of the private patient. There is nothing wrong in being the party of the private patient, but they should be honest about it. The Liberal Democrats believe in a strong and healthy private sector. There would be nothing worse than people having no choice at all other than a complete reliance on the state. However, we cannot accept this new right-wing philosophy of subsidising private health care at the expense of those who cannot afford it. We need and we demand a national health service that provides a safe and high-quality service, which is free for all at the point of use. Where the national health service fails to meet expectations, we need to reform it; that is exactly what the Executive is doing. What we must not do is dream up a system, as the Conservatives have done, that will drain the life blood out of our public services.

I could quote a number of organisations, but, as I am short of time, I will quote just one—the British Medical Association. In a briefing paper, the BMA says that it

“shares the view that patients should be able to access private health care services if they have the money to pay for it. However, it is our view that the Scottish Executive should continue to invest in the modernisation and development of the NHS rather than promoting the independent sector. Promoting use of the independent sector will fail to address the health needs of Scots from deprived areas, who are most likely to need access to health services. The BMA continues to support the fundamental principle of a health service for all that is free at the point of need.”

It will come as no surprise that the Liberal Democrats will not support the Conservative motion at decision time. Although I have been extremely critical of the Conservative motion, I want to congratulate the Conservatives on one thing for which they deserve praise. The Conservatives have presented a health policy that is at odds with the consensus that has been dominant throughout Scottish politics for many years—and the Conservatives are proud of that fact. I do not accuse them of a failure of vision. Indeed, it is helpful that they have brought for debate today their particular vision of a health service in which the well-off are subsidised by the poor.

Conservative health policy is a novel way of looking at the policy of wealth redistribution. Surely people assume that the better-off in society should help those who are less well-off. Now the policy that is advocated by the Conservatives is for the taxpayer to subsidise those who can afford private

health care. The Conservatives have provided a clear and distinctive health policy. I have no doubt that it will be roundly defeated at decision time and that, when the time comes for the next Scottish Parliament election in 2007, the people of Scotland will also roundly reject it.

10:22

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland)

(Con): At the outset I want to stress to the minister that neither I nor any of my colleagues are critical of the staff who work in the NHS. They do a stalwart job under what are sometimes extremely difficult circumstances and we all have the greatest admiration for them. We want NHS staff to be more in control of their professional lives and of their patients' care.

I want to touch on the vexed issue of maternity services in Scotland, which is of concern to our constituents right across the country, as we all know from the correspondence that crosses our desks.

Women in 21st century Scotland have a right to expect safe childbirth and their babies should have the appropriate neonatal care that will give them the best possible start in life. Quite rightly, however, mothers have come to expect to be able to choose where and how they will have their babies. Good antenatal care is key to a safe and healthy pregnancy. Part of the provision of that care is the planning for the individual needs and preferences of mothers. Good planning will ensure that giving birth is as natural and stress-free as possible while, at the same time, safeguarding the safety and well-being of the mother and baby. Most mums want to have their babies as close to home as possible; if not at home. They want to be near to their partners, families and support network at what is probably the most deeply emotional time of their entire lives.

Everyone accepts that safety is paramount and that, on occasion, if complications arise, mothers' wishes will have to be sacrificed in the interests of their own and the baby's well-being. Thankfully, the incidence of maternal mortality is low in Scotland today. Good neonatal care has ensured that infant mortality and morbidity also are at fairly minimal levels. Nobody wants to see that situation change for the worse, but there is a fear in many communities in Scotland that that is what is being faced, despite record financial investment in the NHS.

The falling birth rate in recent years, which of course might not be permanent, has led to problems in the functioning of maternity services, with some units operating below capacity. When one adds to that fact the shortage of trained obstetricians, anaesthetists and neonatal

paediatricians, plus the new deal for junior hospital doctors, the effect of the European working time directive and the new consultants contract, it is not hard to see why maternity services are under threat.

That is no comfort to the mums in Wick. Despite the recent filling of locum vacancies, if the local unit in Wick is downgraded, as proposed, to a midwife-led service, those women could face a journey of over 100 miles to Inverness, over bad roads and in the winter time, if a complication meant that they needed consultant treatment.

Surely in this day and age it is not acceptable for an expectant mother to be advised to spend the five days before their expected date of delivery in hospital or in a bed and breakfast in Inverness as a precautionary measure. Not only would that be costly to the NHS, but what on earth would it do for the morale of those patients? Where was the choice and freedom from stress for the 11 mums who have given birth to their babies in ambulances en route to Glasgow and Paisley since the Vale of Leven hospital lost its maternity services in 2002? Where also is that choice for the patients who will have to be rushed up the dual carriageway from Perth to Dundee, if complications arise, when the unit in Perth loses its consultant cover? I suggest that those patients will take some convincing that their service has improved.

I accept that the problems are not easy to solve, but let us not kid ourselves that the service is altogether what patients want. The Government signed up eagerly to the European working time directive. It did not have proper regard to the consequences of that on the availability of staff. The result of the long-trumpeted new deal for junior hospital doctors somehow seems to have caught us unawares. The massive amount of extra funding that has gone into the health service has unfortunately been more successful in recruiting bureaucrats than specialists to the service.

We hear a great deal from the minister about the importance of patient involvement and public participation in planning the health service that everybody wants. Why is it that the wishes of many communities across Scotland, particularly those in the remote areas in which distances are long and road conditions poor, are not heeded when the maternity services of the future are being planned? I say to the minister that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction out there and that he will ignore it at his peril.

10:27

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To avoid any problems, I will ensure that Shona Robison gets a copy of my speech and of everything that I have ever said about the national

health service. Given her performance as SNP spokesperson for health, she needs all the help that she can get.

Stewart Stevenson: Everything?

Mr McNeil: Yes, my committee work, too.

Investment and modernisation in public services are like chopsticks—useless unless one has the pair. The Tory motion argues that we have had the former in the NHS but not the latter and it condemns us for that. Of course, I welcome the fact that the Tories have said today that they recognise the record investment that the Executive has put into our health service; in the past, they have just whinged on about us fiddling figures and so on.

The Tories are right that the NHS needs to be reformed and modernised. Where we disagree, however, is on what is meant by reform. The Tories want to reform the NHS in the same way as they reformed shipbuilding, steel and coal. I want the NHS to be reformed so that we can get a bigger bang for our buck and put patients at the centre of the service.

To be fair, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party has acknowledged that the Executive has gone some way towards meeting those aims. Indeed, the Executive has swept away the last vestiges of the costly and bureaucratic internal market. Moreover, the Parliament has just passed the National Health Service Reform (Scotland) Bill, which makes health boards co-operate across boundaries—something for which I have called for some time. The bill also gives ministers greater powers to intervene where health services are failing.

David McLetchie: Duncan McNeil spoke about the sweeping away of costly bureaucracy. Will he confirm that the number of administrators in the health service has gone up by nearly 4,000 over the past four years, which is more than the number of additional doctors and nurses and other health professionals who have been employed?

Mr McNeil: I do not describe clerical assistants and the people who run the administration of the NHS as bureaucrats. It is essential that we have good managers who encourage modernisation—I would have thought that the Tories agreed with that. How do we expect to achieve modernisation and reform if we do not have excellent managers in the health service?

We have introduced new contracts for GPs and consultants and the agenda for change process is on-going. Those essential reforms were overdue. Of course, more remains to be done, as the minister acknowledged. We have invested a lot of money in the new contracts and we have great expectations, but we have yet to see the returns on our investment. Unfortunately, senior figures in

the Scottish Executive Health Department are unable to tell me when we might expect patients to benefit from the new contracts.

If we are serious about moving forward, we must avoid making the mistake that the Tories and others make when they consider only what politicians are doing about the health service. We must also examine external factors, such as the role of health professionals. The problems that are being blamed on the European working time directive and the agreement on junior doctors' hours have been well documented.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Does the member agree that questions need to be asked about why the implementation of the agreement on junior doctors' hours is more expensive in Scotland than it is in England? We must also ask why the agreement, far from stopping people working overtime, has offered an incentive to work overtime.

Mr McNeill: There are problems and I am sure that the minister will refer to them when he sums up. Debates between consultants and junior doctors are taking place in hospital wards about matters such as tea breaks and overtime. Many people in the health service welcomed the reforms but think that they have gone too far—patients have certainly felt their impact. The Tories did not mention that this morning, because they presume that health professionals vote for them and that they are acting in those people's interests.

Royal college rules and guidelines appear to be arbitrary and undemocratic and have led to the collapse of services in Inverclyde and the Vale of Leven. Such guidelines should be reconsidered and I hope that the Health Committee's inquiry into work-force planning will prove to be a useful tool in that process.

The Government attempts to effect reform, but the dead hand of professional interest is slowing us down. It is time that we encouraged the professionals to face up to the realities of change. Change is always difficult. It has been difficult for public sector workers across the board to come to terms with the European working time directive and changes to their jobs. It has certainly been difficult for my constituents, who have had to go to Paisley to access consultant-led maternity services. Patients understand the impact of change, but I am not sure that the professionals understand it. It will not be easy to reform the way in which the NHS works and consultants cannot have it all their own way. We must be able to develop the skills and experience of the whole NHS work force if we are to avoid the fate to which the Tories would consign us—if they had their way, more services would be privatised. I much prefer the chopstick approach to the Tory meat cleaver.

10:33

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): It is strange, but I sometimes see Duncan McNeil with a meat cleaver in his hand.

I want to consider the Tory legacy of the internal market and NHS trusts. The internal market led to the privatisation of catering and cleaning services, which had an impact on the delivery of food and cleanliness. There has been an increase in hospital-acquired infections—

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I will give way, but I want to get going first.

In the Borders general hospital, where services have been maintained in house, there is an esprit de corps—team spirit—and services are of a high standard.

The Tories also introduced NHS trusts. Mr McLetchie launches his great campaign to reduce bureaucracy, but his party brought in all those administrators and pen pushers who do not deliver front-line services. Now Mr McLetchie applauds the removal of such people. That is just political opportunism—I suspect that Mrs Thatcher's breath is still on the back of many Tory necks.

The Tories offer us a future with foundation hospitals. We know what the BMA thinks of those. Its briefing paper says:

"The BMA has real concerns about the consequences of the introduction of Foundation Hospitals in England and would not support their introduction in Scotland."

The Tories obviously know better than the BMA.

Mary Scanlon: About a year ago, an Audit Scotland report confirmed that the lowest rates of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus are to be found in hospitals where the cleaning is done by private firms and that the highest rates are to be found in hospitals that have in-house cleaning firms.

Christine Grahame: That is not always the case, as we are now discovering. It is certainly not the case in relation to catering services—Mike Pringle recently brought that issue to the Parliament's attention.

There is no doubt that patient passports will lead to the skewing of local service delivery—which is already skewed enough. It is hypocritical of the Conservatives to propose patient passports at the same time as they campaign to keep hospitals open in Scotland, because patient passports would lead to the closure of local general hospitals.

The Labour record over the past seven years is terrible, too. The health gap between the rich and

the poor is worse in Scotland than it is in England. A man who is unfortunate enough to live in Glasgow can expect to die some 10 years younger than the average Scot. Strangely enough, Labour has been in power all over Glasgow for decades, but it has hardly delivered there.

We all agree that it is a good idea to put more money into the service. However, service delivery has not improved and we must consider why that is the case. During the parliamentary debate last December on the reform of public services, David McLetchie quoted from the Labour Party's 1997 election manifesto, which said:

"the level of public spending is no longer the best measure of the effectiveness of government".

That is true. The minister keeps telling us about the amount of money that he is spending, but he cannot always tell us where the money is going. I will not go into statistics, which have been dealt with elsewhere but, frankly, when the Health Committee asks the minister how he knows whether the £10 million, for example, that he puts into cancer care services is delivering any improvements, he is unable to tell us. We do not expect the minister to be able to tell us how every penny is spent, but when we are talking about millions of pounds we would like some guidance about where the money has gone.

Malcolm Chisholm: Christine Grahame is completely wrong, as I explained at the Health Committee meeting. We receive reports every six months that detail how all the extra cancer care money—£25 million per year—is spent by each regional cancer network. The spending is itemised every six months.

Christine Grahame: Although the minister might sometimes know how the money has been spent, he cannot tell us whether the spending has had results. There is no point in investing money if it is not going to change anything. The point is that the money might be better spent elsewhere.

When the minister was asked whether the National Health Service Reform (Scotland) Bill—which we supported—would cost money, he said that it would be cost neutral. He adhered to that position despite the fact that, in its report on the bill's financial memorandum, the Finance Committee said that the bill would not be cost neutral. Costs associated with the reforms are likely to arise against a background in which three health boards are in major financial crisis—one of those is Greater Glasgow NHS Board and I have just mentioned the record of health delivery in Glasgow—and another seven boards are on the cusp of crisis, as has been said. The costs of the reforms can be paid only by using the money that was meant for service delivery, because contracts and staff payments must, quite rightly, be met. The

minister must be straight with us when he does not know the answers or when he knows that things will cost money. Unfortunately, I do not think that he has been straight with us.

I have a suggestion about data, which I think would assist the minister and his team. When I conducted a search of parliamentary written questions and answers that contained the words "health" and "not held centrally", I got 337 hits, most of which related to the minister's brief. For example, one of my recent questions was:

"To ask the Scottish Executive ... which NHS boards automatically offer a second trimester anomaly scan within the recommended 18 to 22 weeks gestation period and, if this is not universally offered, what steps will be taken to ensure that it will be offered".

I received a reply two weeks later, which stated that the Executive is aware that such scans are not universal, but added:

"we do not hold the requested information centrally. This is a matter for NHS boards."—*[Official Report, Written Answers; 26 March 2004; S2W-6314.]*

The minister sets the targets on waiting times and other matters, so he should know that information and I do not understand why he does not demand that NHS boards make it available to him.

10:40

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): It was ironic last night to find the UK Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, setting out his red lines relative to the European constitution and his so-called salami approach—in particular, the need to protect Britain's interests and to ensure that we have a national veto on social policy. Surely that cannot be the same Labour Government that rushed headlong into signing up to the working time directive without any thought for its consequences for the health service and, particularly, its impact on the provision of services in rural areas. The directive brings enormous changes and, although no one would sensibly want our doctors, nurses and support staff to work incredibly long hours, the lack of flexibility and common sense in the consequent measures is a serious threat to the health service's ability to deliver in rural Scotland and is putting patients' lives at risk.

Mr McNeil: Does David Mundell support the reduction in the hours of junior doctors?

David Mundell: I support the reduction in the hours of junior doctors, but I do not support the rigidity and lack of flexibility that the working time directive brings to the health service, in relation to not only junior doctors but ambulance staff and everyone else who is involved in front-line services. In rural areas, a flexible approach is

required.

In a letter to doctors, the medical director of Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board recently conceded that the new out-of-hours service will be less convenient for patients. So it will be, with patients having to travel miles to the nearest medical practitioner and no answers to the key questions about how travel will be managed, how we will ensure that there is no undue pressure on the Scottish Ambulance Service—which is, as I said, another victim of the working time directive—and what training will be given to the drivers of the fleet of taxis that will be required in areas such as Dumfries and Galloway.

In 1997, we were told that there were only 48 hours to save the NHS. People who live in Langholm in Dumfriesshire now have to travel 48 miles to see a doctor during the night. The situation is worse in other areas, including parts of Galloway, from where people have to travel to Stranraer. It is completely unacceptable for the changes to go ahead without substantive consultation with communities throughout Scotland. The message is: take it or leave it. The measures have to be in place by October and there is no plan B. Parliament's debate on the issue on 25 February was marked by the fact that the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care did not answer any of the concerns raised.

The Scottish Executive has used smoke and mirrors to hide from the public the real impact of the changes. Despite Mr Rumbles's views on the outcome of the next Scottish Parliament election, I am sure that Labour and the Liberal Democrats will pay a heavy price in rural Scotland when the public wake up to what is happening to rural medical services. We need answers to the questions. When a patient has travelled 40 or 50 miles to a hospital to see a GP during the night, will the GP send them home? I think not, in these legally conscious days. The patient will be admitted, which will mean that admission wards in hospitals such as Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary will be clogged up overnight, with a knock-on effect on the plans for the following day. There are no answers to the questions, but they need to be answered.

It is clear that the funding allocations to the rural health boards will not be sufficient to meet the costs, especially because of the number of GPs who have not signed up to provide out-of-hours services. Those costs are growing all the time and the situation will be exacerbated by the changes arising from the consultant contract and the agenda for change. Despite the universal acknowledgment that significantly more is being spent in the NHS, people in rural Scotland—who, like everyone else, are paying more and more tax for a supposedly better service—are questioning

what is happening to the service. We were told that things would only get better but, for NHS patients in rural Scotland who want to see a doctor out of hours, things are most definitely going to get worse.

10:46

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I am always surprised when the Tories want to debate the NHS in Scotland. For years, they systematically wore the health service down through lack of investment and the destruction of staff morale. To take any lessons from them on running the NHS would be complete folly, as I am sure every non-Tory MSP agrees. Sadly, it seems that the current crop of Tories would like to carry on the work that Margaret Thatcher started in the dark old days of the Tory Government. It was interesting to hear David McLetchie say this morning that he is keen on the SNP amendment because it provides a diagnosis. It is a pity that his party could not diagnose the terminal effect that it was having on the NHS when it was in charge.

There has always been a split right down the middle between the Tories and the Labour Party on health. Michael Howard once described the NHS as a "Stalinist creation"—an idea that David McLetchie alluded to today—and the Tories have never embraced it. As I have said before, I can attest to that personally. In my 20 years of working in the NHS under the Tories, I saw at first hand the devastation that their policies caused. Staff morale was shattered, patients were admitted to substandard Victorian hospitals and the internal market led to a system in which profit was put before patients.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Janis Hughes: No. I am speaking from personal experience and, with all due respect, I do not think that the member can do that.

Alex Johnstone: I wondered whether Janis Hughes was working in the health service in 1978.

Janis Hughes: There is no answer to that, Presiding Officer.

For all the rhetoric about improving patient choice, the simple truth is that the Conservatives have never believed in a national health service that is free at the point of delivery. These days, Tory proposals aim to do something that even Margaret Thatcher would not have dared to do: to abolish the NHS and privatise health care in this country. We have heard a lot of sighs from David McLetchie this morning. Perhaps he does not like to remember how things were, but the sad truth is that what happened under the Tories is a fact of life with which we are trying to deal today.

David McLetchie: Will the member acknowledge that there were real increases in spending on the NHS in Scotland every year from 1979 to 1997? That is a matter of record. Seven of the eight new hospital developments that Labour boasted about in its manifesto at last year's election were started by the Tories. Until recently, the record number of nurses in Scotland was in 1995, when we had 53,000 nurses. That hardly represents a health service in decline.

Janis Hughes: The fact of the matter is that I worked in the NHS for 20 years while the Tories were in power and I know how bad it was. I am not standing here saying that everything is rosy, but I am saying that things are better than they were when the Tories were in power.

The Tories are not brave enough to declare openly what they aim to do. Instead, they are trying to introduce privatisation by stealth, with their part-subsidised patient passport. Under that scheme, the NHS would pay for 60 per cent of the cost of treatment, with the patient paying the remaining 40 per cent. The simple reality is that that would benefit no one except the tiny minority who can afford bills of thousands of pounds for health care. It seems that the Tory desire to create a market-driven, two-tier, failing NHS did not die with the end of compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Janis Hughes: I think that I have already heard enough, thanks.

The Tory motion is correct in one assertion—there has been a substantial increase in investment in the NHS during the past five years. That investment has allowed us to recruit more doctors and nurses, to build eight new hospitals in Scotland, to buy the old Health Care International hospital and to start to tackle unacceptably long waiting lists.

However, as I have said, I will not stand here and pretend that the NHS is in a perfect state—far from it. Labour members do not pretend that everything in the garden is rosy. Nevertheless, the situation is improving and it is much better than when the Tories were in power.

Like many other members, I am regularly contacted by constituents who are concerned about the excessive waits that they have to endure for operations. However, there can be no doubt that the Tory travesty of the two-tier patient passport is not the answer.

I do not disagree that the NHS needs to be reformed. Those reforms have already begun. The internal market has gone, more services are being delivered at primary care level and modern techniques mean that more procedures can be

carried out in day-surgery units. David McLetchie said that we should learn from the experience of others. I am pleased to say that we have taken no lessons from the Tories but are producing our own solutions to address the challenges of health provision.

We must ensure that, over the next few years, we continue to reform the NHS properly. Medicine is constantly evolving and it is important that the NHS evolves with it. We must create a system that responds to the new techniques and that gives staff the opportunity to work in modern, purpose-built facilities.

We must also get the system right for patients. I fully accept that we are not always successful in engaging with the public. Recent consultation exercises throughout Scotland have left many communities feeling that their views are not important. Change is necessary, but it is often painful. Health boards must provide better information and education in advance of consultation processes, so that the public better understand the need for that change.

The Conservatives would do well to remain silent on the NHS, as they do not have a leg to stand on. The Tory chairman, Liam Fox, has spoken of his desire to break the link between the NHS and health care. That is not what the people of Scotland want and it is yet another reminder of why the Tories should be kept as far away from office as they currently are.

10:52

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Four words leap out of the Tory motion: "fundamental reform is needed". However, that is absolutely the last thing that is needed. We are just about finished dealing with the aftermath of the last time that the Tories got their hands on the health service and the fundamental damage—sorry, reform—that they inflicted on it.

In their motion, the Tories contrast the substantial increase in funding with statistics that they say demonstrate that that funding has not improved services for patients. They choose to ignore the fact that a major part of the extra money has, rightly, gone to fund the necessary restructuring to meet the requirements of the working time directive. Why should junior doctors and nursing staff work extremely long hours, with the inevitable tiredness that that brings and the increased risk of mistakes—potentially dangerous or lethal mistakes—that tiredness can bring?

The statistics that the Conservatives highlight, which are all to do with hospital treatment, must be viewed in the context of a shift in focus from service provision in a hospital setting to service provision in a community setting when that is a

safe and sensible option. That is much more tailored to the patient's needs, providing the care that they need as close as possible to home and with as little inconvenience to the patient as possible. I am not a fan of statistics, as anything can be proved with figures, but facts are chieftains that winna ding. If the number of premature deaths from heart disease, strokes and all cancers has fallen and is continuing to fall, that is an indication of underlying effectiveness.

Change in the health service is constant and inevitable as expectations change, science advances and demography changes. The emphasis has shifted away from hospital care to community care. There have been changes to the way in which NHS staff are deployed, with much better use being made of professionals allied to medicine and nursing staff, more local nurse-led clinics, midwife-led maternity units and nurse prescribing. Those changes are delivering in many ways a better and more patient-friendly service. External factors have also driven change. For example, the falling birth rate has made it inevitable that maternity services have had to be revised. That has not been an easy exercise, but it has been a necessary one.

Mary Scanlon: Nora Radcliffe mentions the increased use of PAMs. What does she have to say about Grampian NHS Board reducing the number of chiropody appointments for elderly people and striking many elderly people off the list? That is hardly increased access to health services.

Nora Radcliffe: It is hardly increased access to health services, but the factors that have determined it have been well rehearsed and are to do with funding and the availability of staff.

Mary Scanlon: Where is the increase going?

Nora Radcliffe: A lot of it has gone to fund changes in staff structure and a lot of it is to do with health service funding allocation. Both Mary Scanlon and I know the arguments about the fairness of the funding formula, but that is not what I am talking about and I am not going to go into that issue at the moment.

Achieving the necessary revisions in the NHS requires honesty and objectivity from health boards, from the Scottish Executive and from politicians. We have to take responsibility for the responses that we make to the changes. We have to represent our constituents' interests fairly by ensuring that they get the services that they need, but also by recognising that those services might not necessarily be the ones that they have had in the past or the ones that they want. The NHS is a living, evolving entity that is changing all the time under a range of drivers, both internal and external.

As Duncan McNeil said, change can be hard to manage. A lot is wrong with the health service and a lot needs to be done, as members have said. Nevertheless, there is a lot that is right. The NHS is still true to the initial concept of health care for all, free at the point of delivery. That is the choice that I would make—not the choice that the Tories would offer, which is better health care for the better-off at the expense of the old, the poor, the chronically ill and those who live in rural areas. To that I say, "No thanks."

10:56

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I welcome this opportunity to debate health issues. As David McLetchie has said, it is a subject that touches everyone. Although I agree with that sentiment, I cannot agree with or support the Conservative motion, which promotes privatisation of the health service. It is a bit rich that a party that gave us the bureaucracy of the NHS trust is trying to tell us how to run our health service. That is one of the reasons why I cannot support the motion. Still, the Conservatives may have allies in new Labour. Janis Hughes mentioned what the Tories have done; however, the Tory motion may find favour with new Labour members, who also want to establish foundation hospitals—a Tory idea. It is a bit rich of new Labour members who support that idea to attack others for promoting their policies.

I want to concentrate on issues in Glasgow that have a direct effect on services throughout Scotland. Many members have mentioned the increase in funding for the NHS. Although I appreciate and acknowledge that, we must ask why Greater Glasgow NHS Board is closing hospitals, reducing the number of in-patient beds and shedding staff to save £58.8 million in order to prevent it from plunging into the red. It has been told to make those savings and we must ask questions about that. Although this is not his debate, I hope that the minister will address that point, whether in writing or otherwise.

An Executive spokesperson has reported that Glasgow received a lower than average increase in its health budget. The Executive has also stated that it is for the health board to deploy its resources as it sees fit. Well, the buck stops with the minister. It is his duty to investigate Greater Glasgow NHS Board and its handling of any moneys that it receives. I fully support the amendment in Shona Robison's name, as we need an investigation by Audit Scotland and the Executive.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Does the member agree that the minister must also say why, in September 2002, he gave specific commitments in relation to the retention of services at Stobhill hospital that he has been

clearly unwilling to back up with action? Does she agree that that is deplorable?

Ms White: Yes, I agree entirely. I was going to mention that later in my speech. I spoke to Jean Turner earlier, who will raise that issue if she is called to speak. We now know that Stobhill hospital is to close two years before it was due to close, according to the minister's announcement. Tommy Sheridan makes a valid point in that respect.

I would like to mention some of the other issues in Glasgow. There has been lots of publicity about the closure of the Queen Mother's hospital and lots of angry voices—MSPs' voices and the public's voices—have been heard. It is the jewel in the crown of maternity services, not just for Glasgow but for Scotland, and it should be emulated throughout the world. I find it hard to believe that, even after the letters that I have sent him and the petitions that have been submitted, the minister has still not given us an answer as to whether the Queen Mum's will be saved. Staff morale there is very low indeed. It is imperative that the minister gives us an answer as soon as possible, to stop the drip-drip effect on morale.

Let us consider what the cost savings might be if the Queen Mum's were to close. The estimated cost saving is £1.3 million. We are talking about Greater Glasgow NHS Board trying to save £58.8 million. Closure of in-patient beds at the homeopathic hospital—which is also a world leader and one of only two such hospitals in Britain—will lead to estimated cost savings of £300,000. That still does not make a big dent in the £58.8 million. The health board has said that 1,000 jobs will be shed through natural wastage. I am certain that nobody would lose any sleep if the health board people lost their jobs—I put it to the minister that that would be genuine natural wastage. However, we do not know whether any of the health board people are going to lose their jobs. Why should it be front-line workers who lose their jobs?

We have now heard the grand announcement from Greater Glasgow NHS Board that it is going to charge patients and staff car-parking charges at all hospitals. It has said that there will be a consultation, but every one of us has seen how Greater Glasgow NHS Board conducts its consultation processes. The board's press release states:

"It is planned to introduce the charges on a phased basis from April 1 2005."

So now we know how the consultation process works in Glasgow.

New Labour members are the current guardians of the health service in Scotland. They are supposed to be the Government of this country,

yet we see closures, staff losses and the drip-drip effect on staff morale. We are going to lose a lot of good staff who have come to do medical research but who feel as if they cannot move on because there is not enough money or a vision for the future of health services, not just in Glasgow but throughout Scotland. What we are really seeing is the centralisation of the health service. I ask the minister, or whoever is responsible, to look at the closures and stop any closures whatsoever until the expert group on NHS service change reports back to the Parliament. If that approach is not taken, it will be too late for the Queen Mum's and for other hospitals. Centralisation may be a fine word, but it is not good for the health service.

11:02

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I would like to ask ministers to acknowledge the problems in the NHS and, for once, to put some honesty and humility before their own pride and arrogance. If that was the starting point, we might just be able to make some progress.

During the passage of the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002, the Conservatives supported the principles of equity, fairness and choice. On the basis that a patient with cancer or heart disease receives free NHS care and treatment, a frail, elderly person should also receive the care necessary to their quality of life. In fact, it is the Scottish Executive that has now created a two-tier system, in which those who can afford fully to fund their care can enter a care home immediately, whether from hospital or from their own home, whereas those who are waiting for funding from the council enter the statistics of delayed discharge and bedblocking.

Those statistics are still up 20 per cent from 1999, with more than 2,000 people in hospital waiting for placement, mainly in care homes. Despite several millions being allocated for that purpose, councils still say that they do not have enough money. That is confirmed week after week by letters from Highland Council to people in the Highlands, who are told to wait for the next year's financial package to come through.

Surely it is also unfair to pay more for people who reside in council-run homes than for people who reside in homes run by the private and voluntary sector. The Church of Scotland has had to raid its social fund to subsidise homes, and the excellent Free Presbyterian Church home in Inverness is currently struggling to keep pace with the additional financial pressures.

The financial memorandum for the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Bill stated that the costs of registration and inspection would be £40 per bed for care homes, but the cost is already

£120 per bed and rising. That, alongside the considerable investment needed to keep up with the new regulations, which we all support, is putting enormous financial pressure on the private and voluntary care sector. Council homes are therefore financially safe and secure for the future, while the private and voluntary sectors—particularly the churches—continue to face more closures of day centres and homes. Again we see an example of a plan by the Executive to reduce choice and turn the care home sector into a public monopoly.

We can do much to stop elderly people ending up in hospitals and care homes after a fall, for example, when people lose their self-confidence and independence. We should put greater emphasis on preventive and more positive care for the elderly. When in government, Conservative ministers in the Scottish Office introduced a regulation that stated that every person over the age of 75 should be given an annual health check. I give credit to Susannah Stone, Jamie Stone's mother and a Tory stalwart, for her continued and consistent campaigning on that issue.

Members: Hear, hear.

Mary Scanlon: If all elderly patients had that annual health MOT, which was introduced by our own Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, problems could be assessed and diagnosed at an early stage to prevent further deterioration. Unfortunately, as ministers well know, that guideline is largely ignored.

I could not talk about care of the elderly without mentioning quality foot care. A third of chiropody patients have been removed from NHS care in the Highlands, and others have had their appointments cut. Investment in foot care brings enhanced mobility and independence, and ensures that elderly people can exercise through walking and are not isolated in their own homes. By the striking of chiropody patients off NHS lists, choice is reduced and patients are forced to go private, whether they are able to pay or not.

Mike Rumbles: Will Mary Scanlon accept an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: I shall take Mike Rumbles's intervention when I have finished this point.

For many, the choice will be no foot care, which will lead to higher long-term costs for the NHS and a lower quality of life for elderly people. Why has that come about? The ministers with responsibility for health constantly say that it is for local health boards to make those decisions, but when they brought forward the diabetes framework and made diabetic patients the priority for chiropody and podiatry they did not increase funding for chiropody services—the diabetic patients have effectively pushed the elderly patients off the list.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Please wind up now.

Mary Scanlon: I apologise to Mike Rumbles. I cannot take his intervention as I am in the last minute of my speech, but I know that he is very supportive of good chiropody care.

My final point is that entitlement to free dental treatment means nothing in the Highlands, where one cannot find an NHS dentist. Elderly patients in the Highlands have to pay the full cost of dental care.

As David McLetchie stated in his opening speech, principles of fairness and equality are becoming a thing of the past. I support the motion.

11:08

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): I have been listening to what everybody has said, and there is certainly a lot that I agree with. I am in great favour of the NHS. I believe that the privatisation of anything, and going to private hospitals, should be for those who can afford it and who want to have operations in their own time. I shall use the short time available to me today to speak for the patients, the public and the people who send complaints to all MSPs. The one thing that they want to see is all of us working together. They do not like party-political infighting, or using the NHS as the football, as they put it.

There are lots of things that we could do in the NHS that would make the patient journey a lot safer and easier. I know fine well that, if I had a heart attack where I stay, I would be taken to the coronary care unit in Stobhill, where I would receive the very best of attention. However, if the changes go ahead and the casualty unit at Stobhill is closed, that will have a knock-on effect. The domino effect will mean that there will be a lack of anaesthetists, which will result in early closure for the hospital. The problem is the lack of capacity. If Glasgow is to be able to cope with patients from outside the city, it must be able to look after its own.

As we all know, we have an aging population and we have many undiagnosed diabetics out there. As with many other diseases, the incidence of autism and multiple sclerosis is increasing. We should make provision for that. I do not know whether members can imagine what it is like to have hip pain, knee pain or whatever, but a patient who is in pain does not want to consider anyone else. That is not because of selfishness but because the patient wants to be able to receive attention.

Other members have mentioned statistics, so let me quote from the letter that Glasgow's orthopaedic surgeons sent to the minister, a copy

of which was sent to all Glasgow MSPs:

"We, the Orthopaedic Surgeons of North Glasgow, wish to appeal to you as the Minister of Health for Scotland regarding the failure of the official process of communication with the Greater Glasgow Health Board and the Trusts.

On numerous occasions we have unsuccessfully attempted to clarify grossly inaccurate data which has resulted in the Trusts/Health Board arriving at erroneous and invalid conclusions in terms of required future investment".

After describing how the surgeons will not be able to meet their deadlines, the letter states in its last sentence:

"We, therefore, believe the future provision of Orthopaedic Services to the North Glasgow population has been significantly compromised as a consequence of misrepresentation."

Nobody seems to listen either to the doctors or to the patients.

If somebody from a posh area has to wait 72 weeks for a first appointment and ordinary people are having to buy their hip operations without any recompense, we need to start looking for solutions. Malcolm Chisholm laughed at me when I told him that patients had to pay for parking at Edinburgh royal infirmary. He assured me that patients in Glasgow would not be charged. However, the closure of Stobhill will put a strain on other hospitals in Glasgow.

We should look to solutions. None of us in the chamber has a way forward because of the situation that we have allowed to develop. We have a working time directive, but we do not have enough people to cover the work. Patients in hospital do not see many qualified nurses or doctors because those seem to be scarce.

The way in which people are discharged could be changed quite easily. People come out of hospital because they are asked whether they want to go home, but they are not asked whether they have someone at home. We should check such things. When people leave hospital, they should be given a discharge letter along with their prescription. They should also know exactly when their next appointment is, because people are at their most vulnerable when they are a patient. That issue must be fixed, and it would not cost a lot of money to do so.

Treatment for chronic pain could be provided by spending only £250,000, given that Glasgow already has the necessary set-up, with trained doctors and a building. That would free up the appointments that are currently taken by patients who have to attend general practitioners' surgeries again and again. At the moment, if the GP is not competent to deal with a patient's chronic pain complaint, the patient must be sent to a specialist, who might still not be able to deal with it. A chronic

pain clinic would be ideal and would not cost a lot of money. That would free up capacity because those patients would not need to attend other clinics.

Palliative care is another example, as is triage. Gosh, we need to do something about triage. One of my constituents was sent by his doctor to an accident and emergency department in Glasgow. The patient was given a letter and the doctor had telephoned the accident and emergency department, so it is unforgivable that the patient was told to sit in the waiting room for one and a half hours. He received treatment only when he was about to expire. We have a lot to learn.

There may be more nurses in our health service, but many of them are inexperienced. For example, people can go straight into midwifery without doing their general training first. Inexperienced people are being expected to take on a great deal of responsibility. That will lower morale and people will leave. Already, experienced nurses want to work for Asda rather than stay in the health service. The changes in Glasgow will mean that we will lose more staff and lose the confidence of patients.

On the private finance initiative, when I was examining at Hairmyres hospital, one doctor asked me whether I liked the new hospital. It might look lovely, he said, but it costs £1.8 million a month in rent. Is that the right way to spend our money? It has not been proved that PFI is effective. The information and statistics division figures that I gave to the Health Committee confirm that, as many members have said today, we are not spending money in the most cost-effective way. If we were a business, we would want a change in management.

11:15

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I, for one, congratulate the Tories on having the brass neck to select health as their topic for debate. It seems a curious choice for the Tories during the campaign for elections to the European Parliament, but it is probably a bold one. As a member who has previously said that Opposition parties have a duty to provide alternative policies rather than just moan on, I ought perhaps to give Mr McLetchie some credit for at least attempting to justify his flagship proposal. The patient passport is probably one of the most unpopular policies that the Tories have dreamed up since Michael Howard introduced the poll tax. That is the view not only of members of this Parliament but of bodies such as the Royal College of Nurses, which overwhelmingly rejected the policy at its recent conference.

As others have pointed out, the patient passport

policy would involve the NHS subsidising private treatment to the tune of 60 per cent of what any treatment would cost under the NHS. However, if one compares the BUPA costs for common operations with the equivalent NHS costs—Mr McLetchie was right to say that there is a list of NHS costs—it becomes clear that, on average, the BUPA costs are twice those of the NHS. That means that patients would still need to be able to afford to pick up some 70 per cent of the cost of the private operation. I cannot understand how that would help people in deprived areas, who would be unlikely to be able to afford those costs.

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): It would bring down queues.

Dr Murray: It would not. That is an erroneous argument. Patient passports would simply remove funds from much-needed NHS operations in order to subsidise much more expensive private treatments for those who could afford to pay some of the costs. We must recognise that the operations would be performed by the same consultants. There is no mystery bank of consultants who could suddenly be parachuted in.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): Will the member give way?

Dr Murray: Not just now, thanks.

The Tory policy would not be an effective use of public money. It would certainly not contribute to equality of access in the way that Mr McLetchie suggested.

Among other polices, the Conservatives have also recently promoted local pay bargaining for health workers. Perhaps that should come as no surprise, given Mr McLetchie's derogatory comments about the poor productivity of such workers. In three very similar press releases this year, David Davidson has stated that, under the Tories,

"hospitals would have responsibility for their own staffing decisions"

and that hospitals would have

"the ability to set pay and conditions to suit local circumstances."

However, there are already discrepancies in the way that health boards grade equivalent jobs. I know that from the health board in my area, which grades some health workers lower than their counterparts in other boards. Mr Davidson's policy would exacerbate that problem by allowing health boards to pay health workers the minimum that they could get away with. Presumably, the savings that would be made from doing that would help to provide NHS subsidies for private treatment. That would produce not just a two-tier system but a multi-tier health system.

Another worrying aspect is the Tories' ill-disguised dislike of the NHS. In his press release of 15 March, Mr Davidson described the NHS as

"a state controlled monopoly—a nationalised health service".

Today, we have heard the NHS described as "Stalinist". Mr Davidson's colleague, Mr Monteith, has been similarly dismissive. In his press release of 25 February, he stated:

"Good health begins in the home."

Many of us would agree with that, but he went on:

"the overwhelming majority of Scots would rather get on with it themselves."

It does not sound to me as if the NHS is safe in the Tories' hands.

Perhaps the Tories in this Parliament should at least be given credit for understanding that health is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. That is more than their sole Scottish colleague at Westminster seems to understand. Mr Peter Duncan MP raised a petition about the lack of NHS dental provision in his constituency of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale. Many members of this Parliament share his concerns about that issue, which we have discussed fairly frequently. However, rather than pass the petition to his Scottish Parliament colleague Alex Fergusson for presentation to Scottish ministers, Mr Duncan trundled off to Westminster to present the petition to some health committee there.

David Mundell: Will the member give way?

Dr Murray: Perhaps Mr Mundell wants to swap places with Mr Duncan.

David Mundell: As Dr Murray well knows, many aspects of the regulation of dentistry are reserved to Westminster. Perhaps if she understood the difference between reserved and devolved powers, the 1,500 people to whom she referred in her *Holyrood* magazine article would not have sat on their backsides and not voted in last year's election.

Dr Murray: That convoluted argument does not take us any further forward. I cannot understand why the issue was raised at Westminster, which has no jurisdiction in the matters that were discussed in the petition.

I will finish with a statistic. Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board's allocation has increased by 63 per cent since 1997—those are the board's figures, not ours. Money is being invested. Like ministers, I recognise that reducing the long working hours of NHS staff is a significant challenge and that issues relating to the out-of-hours service must be addressed. However, they will be addressed by sensible policy. The alternative to what has been proposed was the

haemorrhaging of GPs from rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, the consequence of which might have been a system in which there were not enough NHS doctors in those places, just as there are not enough NHS dentists. Lists would have closed and people would have been unable to access NHS services. We had to tackle the problem of long working hours in the NHS. I am sure that sensible policy decisions will help us to overcome some of the challenges that we face as a consequence of the actions that have had to be taken.

11:21

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Over the past five years, I have noticed that in debates some members have a tendency to use exaggerated, excited and overheated comparisons—they have a tendency to hyperbole. This morning, the Tories did not disappoint us when they said that other parties' approach to the NHS was "Stalinist". It occurred to me, as a simple person, that the contrast between Stalin and the NHS is not difficult to grasp. Stalin carried out mass extermination and killed people, whereas the NHS is in the business of preventing death and saving people's lives.

Jean Turner made the point that making a political football of issues such as this turns the public off more than anything else. As someone who engages in the hurly-burly of political life, I think that it behoves us all to seek a positive solution. Just this week, a manager named Richard Carey helped one of my constituents by intervening to ensure that that patient, who has a brain tumour, no longer has to travel to Glasgow—a trip that he found extremely irksome and difficult because of his condition—but can receive pioneering treatment in Inverness. It is fashionable to knock health managers, but my extensive experience of dealing with them suggests that, in most cases, they go out of their way to make the NHS work in difficult circumstances.

My first substantial point relates to one of those difficult circumstances. How can health authorities run their budget when they do not know what that is—not only at the beginning of the year, but at the end of it? It has been the practice to give health authorities extra money at the end of the year. That money is not unwelcome—no one would throw it back in the face of the Minister for Health and Community Care, were he here. However, how can authorities plan and run their budget if they do not know what it is? The situation is absolutely extraordinary. I hope that the Health Committee's budget report to the Finance Committee will pick up that point.

I want to talk about the Belford hospital, as there is a cross-party consensus that the campaign to

safeguard, continue, maintain and improve the consultant-led acute services at the Belford must have the support of all. However, the local health authority does not have the jurisdiction, competence or power to deal with some of the issues that need to be addressed there. Those include new methods of training, a different approach to recruitment and retention, a more flexible interpretation of the working time directive—I have seen Lothian NHS Board's second submission to the Audit Committee, which opens the door to many positive ideas in that area—and the recognition of a new specialty, that of the rural general surgeon. If we do not recognise such a specialty, I fear for the future of hospitals in rural areas. Members such as Duncan McNeil have highlighted that issue in the past. We have a common interest in retaining such services in Oban, Fort William and elsewhere in rural Scotland.

I turn to the speeches by SSP members. In its amendment, the SSP proposes

"that the pharmaceutical companies should be brought into public ownership".

I correct a remark that I made earlier to Carolyn Leckie and take the opportunity to set the record straight. I said that it would take the budget of the next two decades to buy out just two of the leading companies, GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca, but I was wrong. Since then, I have calculated the figures. To buy out just those two companies would cost £115 billion. It would take only 14 years—there would be only 14 years when there would be no NHS whatever.

Carolyn Leckie: I will not call Fergus Ewing comrade, because he is no comrade of mine. I refer to pharmaceutical companies' profits. Last year's NHS prescription drugs bill was £733 million. In that year, the figure rose by more than 10 per cent—more than £70 million. If Fergus Ewing does not support the visionary policy of public ownership of pharmaceutical companies, what would he do about profiteering? I will tell him what he would do—he would reduce corporation tax to 13 per cent and give the companies even more profits.

Fergus Ewing: I declare an interest—I have a small holding in GlaxoSmithKline. However, I do not object to the SSP's proposal because of the fact that if Carolyn Leckie were the Minister for Finance and Public Services I would receive no compensation for my shares—

Carolyn Leckie: The member does not need it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Fergus Ewing: The answer to Carolyn Leckie's point is perfectly simple. The SNP is calling for an inquiry by Audit Scotland into all these issues.

Today's debate has illustrated why that inquiry—one aspect of which would be drugs procurement—is needed. Everyone recognises that drugs procurement is an important issue.

This debate has been characterised by arid exchanges of statistics. The weaponry has been percentages and the only casualties have been politicians. When the heat and smoke disperse from this poorly attended battlefield, we need to get down to serious, positive business. We need to examine the work of Matthew Dunnigan, who has provided us with a serious statistical analysis, and of the people who have attended meetings of the incipient cross-party group on the loss of consultant-led services, which I hope Jean Turner will convene when we meet again on 9 June. We must consider seriously the problems that have been identified today.

As Shona Robison said, the budget for the health service has risen massively. We acknowledge that fact and, I think, all members welcome it. There has been an increase of £800 million—the cost of two Holyrood buildings—in the period from 1998 to 2002-03. Where is the money going? Are we getting best value? Should we examine whether we can get better value and more patients treated for the money? If by amending the system to tackle some of the problems that we have heard about today we can treat more patients and help to care for more people who are ill, we will be doing our job. That is why the inquiry for which we are calling is essential.

11:28

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I start by highlighting the last two clauses of the motion in the name of David McLetchie. Given that time is limited, I will express my opposition to those briefly.

The last thing that the NHS in Scotland needs is more reorganisation—certainly not fundamental changes. I agree absolutely with Nora Radcliffe on that point. As a former employee of the NHS, I have spoken in previous debates about the progressive erosion of morale among NHS staff that successive so-called reforms have caused. In particular, because there is no declared end point to the reforms, no one knows where they are heading. For that reason, I oppose the changes that Mr McLetchie proposes.

I believe firmly that foundation hospitals and private health care are not the way forward for Scotland and that we should concentrate on rebuilding the NHS after the disaster of the Thatcherite distortions of its ethos and purpose. Although I support some recent changes such as getting rid of trusts, I ask the minister to make that

the last major organisational change for a long time.

I want to highlight a lasting effect of loss of morale on staffing. When I trained 30 years ago, becoming a nurse or doctor was about more than simply training for a profession; it became part of a person's identity. Now, being a nurse or doctor is a job like any other. People leave those jobs to seek new careers. Doctors in particular would often stay at work past retirement age; now, doctors in their 50s are talking about early retirement. I do not believe that the number of health professionals that we are training takes account of the fact that we get fewer working years out of each of them. Surely we need to think about the future and train more people.

With regard to the first clause of Mr McLetchie's motion, the point is that inflation in the NHS will inevitably be much higher than the general level of inflation, because new and more expensive technologies and treatments are continually being developed and people—not unreasonably—want to have access to them. As a result, it is a political decision as to whether we fund them for everyone. Inequality of access of health care is totally unacceptable.

Mr Monteith: I was interested in the member's comments about inflation in the NHS. Does she think that increases in public sector and NHS pay should necessarily be higher than the increases in pay being settled in the economy generally?

Eleanor Scott: As in other parts of the public sector, the level of pay has to catch up in some areas of the health service. After all, with the possible exception of doctors, people in the service have traditionally never been well paid. That said, I should point out that pay is not everything; being valued for their work can mean more to people than the amount of pay that they receive. Part of the problem is that the erosion of the influence of professionals in the health service during the Thatcher years led people, especially nurses and doctors, to feel devalued and become demotivated.

Mr McLetchie's motion states that the "centrally-run system" is not delivering. The problem is that although decisions that have financial implications for health boards are made centrally, funding does not always follow. For example, boards have been told that it is Government policy to offer breast screening to older women. I have no problem with that, but it comes at a cost. Furthermore, as Christine Grahame pointed out, it is now Government policy to offer pregnant women a second scan before 20 weeks. It is worrying that some health boards have not introduced that measure.

Oddly enough, as the debate is about health

issues, I wish to talk about health. The NHS delivers health care, not health. As well as meeting the objective of treating illness promptly and effectively—whoever or wherever the patients are—we must pursue the goal of health improvement. I am happy to see that the issue figures in the Executive's amendment.

It can be argued that the NHS will never fully be able to meet demand because, after all, people want the best possible treatment, not treatment that is simply good enough. Such a situation is in no way due to poor productivity, if such a concept can be applied to a national health service—and I stress the word "service". Improving the general standard of health is the only way in which we can improve matters and ensure that demand is reduced to the extent that everyone can at least receive treatment that is good enough promptly.

As I have said, the health service delivers health care, not health. Many other public bodies make decisions that have a major impact on health. For example, we have had parliamentary debates on obesity and children's lack of physical activity and the phrase "ticking time bomb" has been used accurately to describe the long-term health effects of the situation. However, we continue to plan and build communities in which there is no scope for children to be active or to play spontaneously and in which the danger from traffic means that they cannot walk to school. Although we know that Scotland has a high incidence of asthma and that a contributory factor is air pollution, we continue to build more roads and fail to tackle traffic congestion. Although we note the increase in stress-related illnesses, we should ask ourselves whether the lifestyle and ethos that we promote in a 21st century Scotland themselves lead to good mental health and a stress-free population. Although we bemoan the falling birth rate, there is good evidence that toxic chemicals in the environment are affecting the sperm count. Furthermore, although we are aware of the increase in type 2 diabetes cases and know that they will put a burden on the health service, we should realise that the condition is also strongly related to our lifestyle.

We will improve health and reduce demand on our overstretched NHS only if we mainstream health in all our decision making and if public bodies have to factor health into their decisions as they have to do with equal opportunities and human rights. I challenge the Executive to tell us how it will deal with this most cross cutting of all issues.

11:35

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): This morning, David McLetchie accused the Labour Party of doublespeak. However, we remember the

Tories' silence on this very issue in each of the manifestos that they produced during their 18 years in government. That was not doublespeak; the public judged it to be plain deceit.

We remember how the Tories cut 25,000 nurses and brought in 12,000 more managers—

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Helen Eadie: No, I have just started. Just hold your wheesht a minute.

The Tories have committed themselves to taking at least £1 billion out of the NHS to fund their proposals for a voucher subsidy for private health care. Under those plans, money would be taken from the NHS, which is for everyone, to allow the privileged few to jump the queue. Tim Yeo himself has admitted that the health voucher would incur a deadweight cost; in other words, NHS funding would be diverted to subsidise the privatisation of health care. That comes on top of the Tories' commitment to an immediate £18 billion cut in funding for public services, which would inevitably hit the Tories hard. That was a Freudian slip—I meant that it would hit the NHS hard, but I am sure that such a commitment will also hit the Tories hard.

The Tories must start telling the truth about what would be cut from the NHS to fund their health voucher proposals. For example, how many nurses would be lost? Which hospitals would be hit? What resources would be affected? They know that their vision of cuts, charges and privatisation in the NHS is not shared by NHS nurses. The more that nurses see of the Tories' plans, the more they realise that the NHS is not safe in Conservative hands.

It is clear that the Labour Party's evidenced progress in the NHS is at risk from the Conservative party's alternative track. The Tories' proposal for a patient passport would destroy the service. It is not only unfair but inefficient and, by forcing people to pay for their operation, would destroy the fundamental principle of the NHS of providing treatment that is free at the point of need and which is not based on one's ability to pay. Moreover, the measure would cost £1 billion without producing an extra operation or ensuring that an extra nurse or doctor was hired.

Instead of investing in and reforming the NHS, the Tories want to spend taxpayers' money on subsidising the rich few who already pay to go private to jump the queue at the expense of the rest of us. They are committed to making massive spending cuts in the NHS and making patients pay for their own health care. It is clear that they have given up on the values of the NHS.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Helen Eadie: Yes.

Mr Monteith: I thank her for doing so. I had held my wheesht for too long and needed to get in.

Is the member aware that the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that he will at least match NHS spending? That means that, with the continuation of the Barnett formula, funding for the NHS in Scotland will increase in line with increases in the Scottish block.

Helen Eadie: It will be very interesting to see how the sums add up when £18 billion-worth of cuts are made to public services.

Alex Johnstone: Those are the member's figures, not ours.

Helen Eadie: The statisticians in London have quoted those figures. It is a fact.

The Tories' so-called patient passport is no more than a one-way ticket to privatisation. It would destroy the NHS and force patients to buy private medical insurance to cover the costs of their own health service. I find their proposals unbelievable. During the Tory party's years in government, one of its ministers, Edwina Currie, even stated that she did not believe that services should be free. The Tories want to move Britain towards a health service in which the care that people receive depends on the health of their bank balance.

Although the Tories would set targets, such targets would include introducing a system of caring for profit, in which the highest bidder would perform operations and provide services; providing major tax concessions for private medical insurance; and selling off NHS hospitals to private health-for-profit companies—which would not be the not-for-profit companies that David McLetchie mentioned. They would also ensure that private management teams would be brought in to run NHS hospitals that could not be sold off; pay the private sector for the use of equipment by the NHS; subsidise the treatment of private patients in NHS hospitals; allow more private operators to run geriatric care for the NHS; allow private hospitals to use NHS staff and equipment free of charge; sell off NHS land and property; subsidise private patients through tax concessions; and even reward GPs for prescribing fewer or cheaper drugs and for sending people to hospital less often.

We need to remind ourselves of the Tories' record in government. They slashed the death grant, which was paid at that time to 600,000 households; they axed the maternity grant, which was claimed then by 500,000 mothers; they abolished help with heating for pensioners and the poor, which was available then to 2 million households; they slashed the state earnings-related pension scheme; they banned unions altogether at Government Communications Headquarters; and they privatised a range of

national assets, including the naval dockyards—even Ronald Reagan's America rejected a similar proposal there—and by doing so, left the people of Fife with the legacy of one of the highest unemployment rates in Scotland.

How bad is all that for people's health? I never want a return to the Tories being in power—no thanks—and I do not believe that the people of Scotland want the Tories in power again.

11:40

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Nowhere in Scotland has the Executive's failure been seen more vividly than it has in Glasgow and the surrounding areas and nowhere is the feeling of disillusionment greater than it is in Glasgow. The blunt truth is that although the Executive can fool some of the people some of the time by legitimately quoting the additional amounts that are being poured into the health service, more and more people are questioning why the service is not getting better and, indeed, is deteriorating in many respects. Some policy decisions may well cost lives; others lying in the minister's in-tray also have the potential to impinge radically on the survival chances of critically ill patients.

Let us look first at accident and emergency services and at what is being proposed for Glasgow. Nothing can be preserved in aspic and few would argue that Glasgow's accident and emergency provision at five locations is supportable. However, what cannot be accepted is that that number can be safely reduced to two. It is worth reminding members of precisely what is being proposed. Two hospitals, the Royal infirmary and the Southern general, are to provide Glasgow's accident and emergency service, which would result in patients, some of whom might be critically ill, having to be transferred considerable distances through urban traffic. Frankly, the Southern general solution is madness and has completely flown in the face of not only public opinion but considerable clinical opinion.

Carolyn Leckie: Can Bill Aitken explain the mechanism by which the Tories' patient passport scheme would ensure that the accident and emergency unit at Stobhill hospital would remain open?

Bill Aitken: The patient passport would not apply to accident and emergency services. If someone were run over by a bus, they would be taken to the closest hospital, so the patient passport would not be involved. I will press on.

Again, the Executive is in danger of making a tragically wrong decision with regard to the future of the Queen Mother's hospital. There are arguments against the retention of three maternity units and for a reduction in that number. However,

to suggest that the one that should close should be the one that is on the same site as a major paediatric hospital almost beggars belief.

Pauline McNeill: Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Aitken: No. I must move on.

Critically ill patients would have to be moved by ambulance to the Southern general instead of simply being transported along a corridor. What sort of convoluted thinking came up with that particular option? Again, public opinion has been ignored and, most important, the view of a considerable body of medical opinion has been disregarded. If the minister accepts the current proposals, the anger in Glasgow will be intense.

Furthermore, Glasgow homeopathic hospital, which has performed well over the years and provided patients with a real choice of alternative therapies, may well be closed to in-patients. The proposed saving appears to be minimal. However, the homeopathic hospital does not fall in with the conventional thinking that Big Brother in Edinburgh dictates. Cuts will no doubt have to be made, with a consequent loss to patient choice.

The overall position is the cause of greatest concern. The North Glasgow University Hospitals NHS Trust's figures demonstrate that with painful clarity. Comparing the figures for the first quarter of 2000 with those for the last quarter of 2003, we find that the number of out-patients who were seen went down by 18 per cent; the number of in-patient and day-case discharges went down by 3 per cent; the median wait for out-patients went up from 38 to 48 days; and the total number on the waiting list went up by 16 per cent.

The situation is even worse on the south side of the city. The number of in-patients who were seen is down by 18 per cent; the number of discharges is down by 4 per cent; the wait for out-patients is up from 62 to 81 days; the wait for in-patients has increased overall from 38 to 50 days; and the total number on waiting lists has increased by 36 per cent. All that has happened at a time when ministers could justifiably claim to have increased the resources in Glasgow by 34 per cent.

Of course, Glasgow is a city with appalling health problems. Lifestyles have an impact: Glasgow has 25,000 injecting drug abusers. However, the bizarre and almost Kafkaesque situation is that the only way in which one of those drug abusers can get immediate rehabilitation is by committing more and more crime and ending up being ordered to undergo rehabilitation by the drugs court. That that should be the case is, of course, nonsense.

Glasgow patients are surely entitled to a better service and Glasgow's taxpayers—who are paying

more and more tax under the Labour Government—must surely be entitled to ask why so much extra money is having so little positive effect. The answer is, of course, the Executive's hidebound thinking from the 1950s and 1960s and the view that anything innovative must be frowned on. Any modern thinking is regarded as heresy and as being against the orthodoxies by which so many in the Executive would have Scotland's people live.

Frankly, Labour has regarded the people of Glasgow as voting fodder for too long. I have news for Labour: people are waking up fast to the realities and they will not put up with such cynical disregard for much longer. The Executive must bite the bullet and recognise that the NHS generally cannot continue along the lines on which it is going, with more and more money funding less and less activity and with plummeting patient satisfaction.

As David McLetchie said, other countries have recognised that change and radical thinking are necessary. Even south of the border, a much more progressive route is being followed. Scotland must look elsewhere and follow likewise.

11:47

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): It is a strange day when even Bill Aitken is trying to portray himself as a cuddly Conservative and to evoke a warm glow of nostalgia—not for the Tory years perhaps, because memories are too fresh about what he and his colleagues did then. I was particularly interested in his comments about injecting drug users because I remember what happened to them during the Tory years. There have been significant improvements in the quality of treatment for such people since we came to power.

Alongside John Major's evocative vision of the past of ladies riding to church on bicycles, warm beer and cricket, David Mundell gave us a vision of Tannochbrae, with doctors in every village, who were on call day and night. One could almost hear the counthy wisdom of Janet providing reassurance. However, compared with the mythic past that the Conservatives render so warmly, the reality is that the nature of the treatment that people were offered 20 or 30 years ago was fundamentally different from what people need and expect now.

The preferences of people in rural and urban communities for GP services and, indeed, acute services on their doorstep must be set against the changing nature of the health service, which has been transformed by the application of medical and scientific research, the growth of specialism and the development of new treatments. The rate

of change, especially in the treatments that are now available to patients, is the biggest challenge that we face. However, the Conservatives and the other Opposition parties have said almost nothing about that.

I say to Bill Aitken and his colleagues that some of the statistics that they have read out are virtually meaningless unless they take into account what is being delivered and the nature of the treatments that are available. If we want a modern health service—I believe that we do—that makes effective use of the skills of NHS staff and provides the best outcomes for patients, we need a more honest debate about the real choices that must be made, which is not assisted by people simply arguing for the retention of every existing service or facility. We must talk about what can be delivered, how it can best be delivered and how we can manage it more effectively.

I agree with one thing that Bill Aitken said, which is that what has happened in Glasgow over the past 20 years is unsatisfactory. Glasgow has five unmodernised acute hospitals, when it should have a modernised service like that which exists in places such as Newcastle and Leeds. We need to have an honest debate about how we move from where we are now to where I believe that we want to be. That will not be facilitated by a dishonest debate but, unfortunately, too often health debates have been dishonest.

What I welcome about the Conservatives' approach to the debate is that they offer an alternative, albeit one that has been consistently rejected in Scotland. The vision that was put forward by David McLetchie hinges on the idea of choice, but the reality is that that choice would be available for only some people. There would be a subsidised choice for some, which would inevitably be associated with reduced access and worse services for others. People in Glasgow understand that very well. The vision that the Conservatives are putting forward would not mean better facilities for the people of Shettleston, Springburn or Maryhill: it would mean a return to disorganised services and more poorly funded services for people in those areas.

Who would be subsidised? Let us consider the arithmetic of the Conservative proposals. For those who can afford to pay, the Conservatives propose a voucher that covers 60 per cent of the NHS cost for a series of elective surgical treatments. People would get a voucher for £600 for cataract removal, which in the NHS costs £1,000, but BUPA's price for the operation is £2,400 so the patient would be left with a bill for £1,800 and £600 would have disappeared from the NHS. That is the arithmetic of the proposal. For hip replacement, the 60 per cent voucher would be worth £2,640.

David McLetchie: Will the member give way?

Des McNulty: Let me finish the arithmetic.

The NHS cost of a hip replacement operation is £4,400, but BUPA's price is £8,000, so the bill for the patient would be £5,000. People would be paying considerable amounts to jump the queue. The Tories have not told us about that and they refuse to tell us about it. The Tories' proposal would transfer resources to profit-making organisations or to supposed not-for-profit organisations such as BUPA, which in reality would feather somebody's nest. The Tories would do that on the back of our investment in training for doctors and nurses, equipment and buildings—all things that we have bought and paid for. The Tories want that investment to be used for profit; I believe that that is unacceptable.

There has to be an honest debate. We must open out the issues about how we modernise the health service and how we produce better management, improved efficiency and better outcomes for patients. That argument is not served by putting forward false choices—especially when the Tories' watchword is choice. That is fundamentally dishonest. The Tories' approach has been rejected time and again and I believe that it will continue to be rejected in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I give my regrets to two members who had hoped to take part in the open debate, but I now have to go to closing speeches.

11:53

Carolyn Leckie: It is worth repeating that, unfortunately, only Jean Turner and I have referred to PFI in the debate, yet that is the biggest pressure on capacity in the NHS, although there are other pressures. I do not apologise for hammering home the point, because the subject has been absent from the debate when it should have been the headline topic.

Professor Alyson Pollock has shown that bed numbers at the new Edinburgh royal infirmary have been reduced by 24 per cent, but the projected increase in the number of day-care admissions, which was meant to offset that reduction, has not been achieved. A 21 per cent increase in the number of in-patient and day-care admissions to all acute specialties was projected, but in fact the increase reached only 0.3 per cent. The number of in-patient admissions to surgical specialties was projected to rise by 8 per cent but in fact fell by 13 per cent due to severe capacity constraints. The maternity unit lost 19 beds when the old ERI closed and the unit moved to the new PFI hospital, yet if planned downgradings and closures of maternity units go ahead, the ERI will

be responsible for even more mothers who are experiencing difficult births.

Fourteen patients from the ERI were sent 140 miles away to a private hospital in Darlington for hip operations because of bed shortages and Lothian NHS Board's need to meet national waiting time targets. Bed shortages at the ERI have also led to operations being cancelled and patients from the Lothians being sent to the Borders and to the national hospital in Clydebank.

A ward for the elderly that has 22 beds was not opened for seven months in an attempt to save money to pay for the PFI deal. As a result, bedblocking by elderly patients increased, operations had to be cancelled and patients had to be sent to other hospitals for treatment.

Surgeons at the ERI are being paid £2,400 a day to carry out operations at the weekend in an attempt to cut waiting times. That is a direct result of capacity constraints.

The ERI has its patients' meals transported 400 miles from Wales. The firm involved in supplying the meals is owned by Sodexho and was exposed in a Channel 4 "Dispatches" documentary as being guilty of 120 hygiene lapses in a week. It is not surprising that Sodexho tried to have the documentary suppressed.

Lothian NHS Board is currently running a £95 million deficit. What more cuts to hospital and community services will be required to allow the board to pay off its debt to the PFI company?

Balfour Beatty, which I said earlier was singing and dancing, announced profits of 18 per cent from its PFI projects, compared with the profits of 3 to 4 per cent that it would have got from its traditional engineering projects. The public have paid for the increased profits. When anyone asks where the money has gone, let us look at the PFI consortia as the first culprits at the top of the list.

I will come back to the pharmaceutical companies, because Fergus Ewing let the cat out of the bag. I would like to know how much he and perhaps others have pocketed as the NHS drugs bill has rocketed. I will fill members in on the issue. The NHS is currently suing seven large drug companies—perhaps including one of those in which Fergus Ewing has an interest—for £30 million, which is the amount that the NHS alleges that it has lost because of companies' fixing the price of amoxicillin, which is one of Britain's most common antibiotics. That claim follows another for £28 million against six drug companies for fixing the price of warfarin.

Are the profits that are available for the pharmaceutical companies and the PFI consortia not brilliant? Is it not interesting that those topics have not been debated in the Parliament today by

anybody other than the SSP and have been mentioned only by Jean Turner? Those are the topics on which none of the members wants to tread, because the truth is that whether they are a Tory in the Conservative party, a Tory in the Labour Party, or a Tory in the SNP, they want to perpetuate the status quo and increase the private profits and opportunities for all those companies. They want to reduce corporation tax to 13 per cent and they have offered nothing to address the parasitic profiteering of those companies. Members have ignored it all—shame on them, because the debate was an opportunity to grapple with the real issues.

Why are members silent on PFI? I could not believe that Fergus Ewing, as a member of the Finance Committee, did not mention PFI.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member give way?

Carolyn Leckie: I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

The SSP does not apologise for being the party of public ownership, as Fergus Ewing acknowledged this morning. We are a party of vision that undoubtedly stands out from the other parties in the Parliament. [*Laughter.*] Members may laugh; that is fine—I can take laughter. We are a party of vision and we make no apology for our ambitions to have a socialist Scotland that puts public need before corporate greed.

11:59

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The debate has centred around the fundamental question of what extra output the NHS in Scotland is providing to patients in return for the substantial increase in funding from the taxpayer. That is a legitimate question to ask, and one that I regularly hear being asked by constituents and the people who work in the NHS. Where has the money been spent? What are we getting in return for it? Where are the improvements in the service? Those people support the injection of extra investment into the NHS but, in return, they expect extra operations, shorter waiting times, better treatment, greater output, more capacity in the system and safer procedures. I do not think that anyone would demur from those expectations.

It is unfortunate that the reality at the moment is somewhat different. According to evidence that has been presented to the Audit Committee, the bulk of the extra money is being spent on rising prescribing costs and the pay modernisation costs that relate to GP contracts, junior doctors' hours, consultant contracts, the agenda for change and the European working time directive. A side issue, which I would have dealt with more fully if I had had more time, is the fact that those contracts and agreements are driving the centralisation of the

health service, which is opposed, by and large, by the majority of patients in urban and rural Scotland.

It is clear from the evidence to the Audit Committee that the Scottish Executive Health Department seems to have no firm idea of how much the contracts will cost when they are eventually implemented—a fact that was highlighted by the Auditor General in his report, “Overview of the National Health Service in Scotland 2002-03”. The committee heard about an example of that when it took evidence from NHS Lothian, which in 2003-04 set aside £2.9 million—an 8 per cent increase—for consultants’ contracts. By the time that discussions on the contracts had concluded, the figure had risen to £8 million. A health warning will remain attached to that figure until the job sizing has been done and a work programme for the consultants has been worked out. As the Auditor General made clear, the problem with junior doctors’ hours is the same—we do not have any fixed costs for the total increase that will result from the agreement.

Even more worrying was the admission by Professor Barbour of NHS Lothian that, in spite of the record increase in spending, activity levels in the NHS are declining. The Wanless report backs that up. Today, numerous references have been made to the concern that activity in our health service is declining, in spite of record investment.

According to the evidence that the Audit Committee has received, although the Scottish Executive is investing record sums of money in the NHS, the bulk of that money is being swallowed up by pay modernisation costs, of which the most significant is probably the 30 per cent increase in pay to consultants, and increased prescribing costs. At the same time, activity levels appear to be declining.

It is interesting that the SNP amendment calls on the Auditor General to carry out an in-depth study of the NHS. The Auditor General is about to publish an in-depth examination—a performance audit—of the NHS and, for the past seven weeks, the Audit Committee has been taking evidence in an effort to drill down to find out where the money is going. The SNP should perhaps be made more aware of what is going on.

Shona Robison: During our informal discussions with Audit Scotland, we have talked to it about its investigation of the NHS. At the end of that process, Audit Scotland is likely to recommend that a far more in-depth study be conducted, to investigate all the concerns about the NHS. That is why we are calling for such an inquiry. Does the member acknowledge that that is what is required, as opposed to the current overview?

George Lyon: Given that the bulk of the money is being spent on the new pay agreements, which are only just being implemented, I do not understand how the Auditor General could conduct an in-depth review. We need time to find out what the results of that implementation will be.

As the minister outlined, progress has been made in a large number of areas, including quality and safety. We must acknowledge that; that is the balance in the argument. However, the evidence that the Audit Committee has taken is surely a cause for deep concern among all members of the Parliament who believe in the NHS. As Professor Barbour said in his evidence, it is clear that the real challenge is to translate the new contracts into improved productivity and better patient care. That is the agenda and it is important that it is delivered on.

I want ministers to explain how they will ensure that the pay modernisation agenda delivers greater productivity, flexibility and output for patients in Scotland; that is fundamental if the expectations of the general public in Scotland of a better NHS are to be met. I am sure that that agenda is supported by all the parties except one. Failure to support those aims will play right into the Tory party’s agenda. Liam Fox has made it clear that the Tory strategy is first to destroy and undermine the credibility of the NHS, then to privatise.

The Tories argue that choice, delivered through their passport system, is the key to health heaven. For the well-off few who currently go private, the Tory proposals are the passport to heaven; for the rest of Scots, the passport is to hell. The flaw in the proposals is that the sums do not add up. Oliver Letwin would cap the NHS budget in line with the current Labour spending plans at Westminster and no extra money would be found to fund passports. The subsidy for private patients would be drained out of the current NHS budget, leading to cuts in service, longer waiting times and a second-class health system for the majority of Scots. As Peter Riddell said in *The Times* recently, the Tories’ proposals simply do not add up and they know it. I urge members to reject the Tory motion.

12:06

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Too much of today’s debate has been a flight from reality, but at least it is on the record that the representatives of the Fourth International are for public confiscation rather than public ownership. There is more in the SSP amendment, which demands that contracting from private providers be stopped. So we will have NHS brickies, NHS equipment designers and builders and NHS farms on which to grow food.

[*Interruption.*] I am so glad that I was awake when I was listening to the Trots sitting behind me.

However, numbers are not something that the Trots are terribly good at. They would spend 157 years' worth of the Scottish health service's drugs expenditure to nationalise two companies alone. Is that a return on investment that anyone in the chamber would be comfortable with? No, of course it is not.

Let us return to principles. The 1942 Beveridge report, which was entitled "The Way to Freedom from Want", stated that the aim was to abolish want, squalor, ignorance, idleness and disease. I believe that the greatest of those aims was to achieve freedom from disease. Beveridge wrote:

"Proposals for the future ... should use to the full experience gathered in the past, not restricted by consideration of sectional interests."

He also wrote:

"The state should offer security for service and contribution"

but not

"stifle incentive, opportunity and responsibility."

A Gallup poll from 1943 shows that an overwhelming majority of the public endorsed a proposal to include everyone in a comprehensive scheme of medical services. That remains as true today as it was 61 years ago.

Vested interests that run against the grain of public opinion have to be confronted today as they were before the NHS started on 5 July 1948—not 1947, I point out to Mike Rumbles. On 19 February 1948, a BMA press release showed that 40,814 medical practitioners disapproved of the National Health Service Act 1946 and that a mere 4,900 of them—or just over 10 per cent—approved. The figure in Scotland was slightly higher at 12 per cent in favour. The objectors were largely, but not totally, faced down before the health service started.

The question is, what should the NHS credo be today? I make three suggestions. First, access to health care should be based solely on need. Secondly, there must be respect for the public service ideal and the contribution that public service makes to wider society. The third ideal should be value for money.

I will test the Tory plans against those ideals. The Tories want preferential access for those who can afford to pay; the passport needs to be topped up, so its operation would be denied to those who could not afford to top it up. The result would be a move away from access by health need towards access based on greed.

Respect for the public service ideal is not in great supply on the Tory benches. The Tories

must accept that the private sector does not have a monopoly on succeeding and that failure is not the sole prerogative of the public service. For example, Capita Group plc and a number of its public service contracts can be considered. There is a history of failure and hardly a success in a contract in which it has been involved. One benefit of PFI—the only benefit that I have found so far—is that it shows that private companies can and do fail when they try to deliver public services.

On value for money, a number of members have referred to expensive operations. NHS surgeons moonlight at weekends and in the evenings—

David McLetchie: Will the member give way?

Stewart Stevenson: No—I do not have enough time.

Often, NHS hospitals charge more for operations simply to provide people who have money with early access to a system in which access should be provided on the basis of health, not on anything else.

The Tory motion refers to international examples. The most recent edition of *The Economist* examines the French health service, which is largely privately provided and largely publicly funded. The service is excellent, but it is not delivering value for money and is probably heading for bankruptcy very soon. David McLetchie should read page 40 of *The Economist*—he will see what I mean.

Almost every member supports choice for all, rather than merely for the few. I have a challenge for the Tories, whose motion mentions supporting and developing the private sector. Which hospital in Glasgow would they close in order to develop the private sector to replace what is provided by the public sector in Glasgow?

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I do not have enough time. I am sorry.

We should not let Labour escape. In 1969, the Socialist Medical Association provided a report to Richard Crossman, who was a secretary of state, which focused on the long hours and poor pay of junior hospital doctors. That was many years ago and the argument has hardly moved an inch. Hospital services and young doctors are overworked and underpaid.

The health service is a great ideal. By all means, the service needs to be revisited and refurbished, but the ideals continue as they did before. I am happy to support the amendment in my colleague's name.

12:13

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): We have discussed important and complicated issues, and have again seen the rise of Mr McLetchie as the master of the understatement. He said that the NHS that was inherited from the Tories was far from perfect. We can all sign up to that. In 1997, the people of Scotland signed up to that by refusing to return any Tory MPs.

Perhaps it is tempting for Opposition parties to reach quick conclusions that are based on selected numbers, but it is wrong for them to do so. A more objective analysis is the key to understanding the issues. Without such analysis, policies and priorities will not deliver the outcomes that we and the people of Scotland want. The wrong policies will, as has happened previously—Mr McLetchie gleefully acknowledged that—end up damaging the very service that we are trying to develop and support. Our aim is to develop policies and approaches in close consultation with patients and the NHS, and then to support the NHS in delivering them. Linking policy making and delivery is central to the way in which the Executive does business.

That approach is very different from the repackaged Tory dogma of undermining and selling off our precious NHS. This morning, the for-sale sign has again been held high. The price tag is covered up, but the sign says, “To the lowest bidder”. The Tories want to keep that quiet. When Tories cry over the NHS, the people of Scotland know that they cry crocodile tears. The Tories scramble for an angle to continue their 18 years of contempt and they have decided that the approach should be to blame dedicated professionals in the NHS. They have learned nothing. That approach is as scandalous today as it was during those terrible 18 years.

The Executive is clear that clinical quality and safety are vital for everyone who is interested in health care, including patients and staff. Patients who face surgery or who have recently undergone emergency care will tell members their priorities. It is simply wrong to think that quality can be left to look after itself. Policy must reflect the central importance of quality and safety. That means care in the NHS, not passported out to whoever wants to pick it up. Of course the Executive itself cannot deliver quality and safety in health care, but what we can do, and are doing, is to support the national health service in advancing the quality and safety agenda—in other words, to support delivery. That is why we are clear that NHS boards should comply with measures on doctors’ working hours and why we are supporting and strengthening NHS Quality Improvement Scotland.

To progress that delivery, NHS Quality

Improvement Scotland is supporting NHS boards in achieving clinical standards through peer review and sharing good practice. Those standards cover cancer care, heart disease, mental health and a growing list of other health-care activities. They also address issues that are close to every NHS patient, such as food and nutrition, hospital cleaning standards and infection control. Maintaining and improving quality is relevant to everyone and the NHS is responding positively.

We have taken a clear policy lead on redesigning services and bringing care nearer to the patient. The Executive has supported managed clinical networks through pump-priming funding. We introduced the National Health Service Reform (Scotland) Bill to establish community health partnerships and we have given nurses a bigger role in prescribing drugs for patients to facilitate and encourage treatment in the community and at home.

What does that mean in practice? In Fife, nurses have been trained to undertake out-patient endoscopic examinations and to take over appropriate cases from consultants. In turn, the number of complex cases that consultants can treat has increased by 70 per cent. As a result, overall waiting times for endoscopies in Fife are down from 16 weeks to about eight weeks. Further training for nurses is planned. That is good for patients and for the NHS.

Treatment for deep vein thrombosis typically requires a five-day stay in hospital but, in Ayrshire, new drugs, new ways of working and new training for nurses mean that nurses can set up and monitor treatment and that patients can be cared for largely at home. Average hospital stays are down to a few hours. That is good for patients and the NHS and provides a good example of how the figures that the Conservatives have quoted this morning are a complete distortion of what is happening in our modern health service in Scotland.

We have introduced condition-specific waiting-time targets when they are justified clinically. In line with the Executive’s targets, the NHS has made especially good progress in reducing maximum waits for heart surgery and revascularisation.

We are leading a critical health improvement agenda that will improve the health and success of every Scot. That agenda will improve life journeys and create a genuine health service, rather than what people too often call a sick service. In the debate, politicians have called for honesty, yet they refuse to acknowledge that less need to present is a success. We in Scotland need to aim to have a population that are more aware of their life choices and of their ability to turn off the tap of ill health that leads to the health service. That will

allow the health service to focus on creating the conditions that will be necessary for generations to come.

Our policies are modernising the health service and revolutionising the way in which that service is delivered. Day in, day out, people are benefiting from that. The days are gone when every treatment had to be provided in an acute hospital. Thousands more procedures are now carried out in the primary care sector, and thousands more treatments can be carried out by the whole practice team rather than just by the GPs. Those teams offer support and services to patients.

Those are the changes that are making a difference to the health service, and those are the changes that the Conservatives simply cannot acknowledge. To do so would defeat their arguments and expose the way in which they wish to undermine the service. Almost every word that has been spoken by the Tories has been about undermining confidence in our most precious national asset. People in Scotland have seen through that before and they will see through it again.

12:20

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): We have just heard Tom McCabe talking about undermining confidence in the health service, but the two people who are most guilty of doing that are the two people on the Executive front bench.

Today we have seen clear blue water between the radical thinking of the Conservatives, who put the patient first and at the centre, and the thinking of socialists all round the chamber—including among the Liberal Democrats to my left—who put the system and the unions first. People in Europe are staggered that we have such debates. They are used to a mixed economy in health, with delivery from the voluntary sector, the independent sector and the state sector. Those sectors work hand in hand. That was supposed to be the ethos of the health service when the original National Health Service Act was passed in 1946 and the service began in 1948. However, we do not see it in action. Why is it so bad to offer patients choice here when patients have choice all over Europe and in America? Patients are even getting choice down in England. The NHS should be a national service, not a nationalised service with the system at the centre.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Davidson: Not yet.

We want to talk about access to care and we want to talk about hospital closures—as many

Labour back benchers regularly do. We want to talk about the problems of centralisation. Who drove that agenda? The Scottish Executive—Labour backed by the Liberal Democrats.

One or two quite good comments have been made about the shortage of capacity in the health service. Labour has been in power for seven years, going on eight, and I do not see the party grasping the nettle on that issue. Labour has come along today to say, “Can we have a wee bit more time? Honest, it’s getting better.” That is not what the Scottish public think.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention now?

Mr Davidson: Not yet.

From the Labour ranks of three or four, we have heard a defensive response, which was about fear. The Executive has not delivered the results that it claims for taxpayers’ money. It has introduced lots of initiatives and there has been lots of fine print and detail. Tom McCabe read his speech pretty well—the detail was all there, but there was no answer to any of the questions that we have asked. I suspect that Labour and the Liberal Democrats are ashamed and frightened that they have been found out.

Stewart Stevenson: Can the member confirm that some 20 per cent of the poorest people in the States have no meaningful access to health care? Is he able to confirm that nearly 10 per cent of people in the States are more than 100 miles from their nearest source of primary health care?

Mr Davidson: I am happy to discuss examples of best practice, but we have certainly not seen such examples from the Executive today.

Mr Chisholm gave a rather limp response at the beginning of the debate when he talked about programmes and then quoted statistics. All the statistics that we have used today came from the Scottish Executive. Tom McCabe has said that we are telling lies, but we are using the minister’s statistics. We had about 10 minutes of Mr Chisholm quoting statistics and saying that this was up, that was up; that this was better and that was better. However, he did not say what he was comparing his figures with. He did not give the figures for one date and then for another, and explain the difference. When we fail to make a proper comparison, we are called nasty; when the Executive makes a proper comparison, it will be interesting.

Malcolm Chisholm: The point is that we are talking about new activity. The figures are being counted for the first time. I was making a simple point on an issue that the Conservative motion missed.

Mr Davidson: In that case, the Executive does not really know where it is at.

Most of what George Lyon said in his winding-up speech was sensible and reasonable. He asked, correctly, where all the money had gone. Has it gone on new initiatives and contracts that are uncoded? We know that Grampian NHS Board is approximately £4 million to £5 million short of being able to deliver out-of-hours medical cover. That is just one health board—God knows what will happen with regard to the consultants' contracts. Changes to junior doctors' hours were known about seven or eight years ago, yet the Executive has done nothing to address that issue in the past five years.

George Lyon: Having asked where the money had gone, I used the evidence that had been presented to the Audit Committee to say where it had gone. The question that Mr Davidson must answer is: where will the money come from to fund the passports? Oliver Letwin has said that he would cap spending in the same way as the Labour chancellor has done, which means that the money must come out of the current budget. That means that there will be cuts in service. Where will those cuts be made?

Mr Davidson: Mr Lyon was clearly not listening. If a treatment can be provided for 40 per cent of the cost that the NHS would otherwise have to pay, freeing up bed space and leaving hospital staff available to carry out other work, that is a benefit to the NHS and to those who come from deprived communities.

In the health service, we have a monolithic monster that is managed by the minister, not by those on the front line. When the ministers talk about us putting down the staff, they are really saying, "It's not our fault, guv, it's those folk out there. We've given them the money." However, all that the Executive has done is to give the staff loads of interference, initiatives to do, boxes to tick and so on. That is not patient care. Why will the Executive not trust the medical staff and the good managers in the health service to design their services locally? Why can we not get away from national pay bargaining when some areas simply cannot attract the key staff?

Malcolm Chisholm: Once again, David Davidson is saying the exact opposite of the truth. It is obvious that he is distorting what I said about staff. I praised staff for what they are doing.

We want to give more decision-making powers to front-line staff. Part of my answer to Christine Grahame should have been that the £25 million that she complained I did not have control of is controlled by the front-line cancer clinicians. They decide their priorities. That is the approach that we support.

Mr Davidson: Will that approach be applied across the health service, rather than only to the cancer services? That is the important point.

I thank the SNP for its support for our position in the first part of our amendment. I am glad that we agree that we do not have productivity in the NHS. However, once again, the SNP has offered no solutions. SNP members seem to live in a policy-free zone. During the passage of the National Health Service Reform (Scotland) Bill, the SNP's minor amendments amounted to a statement that it would swallow whatever the Labour Party wanted to dish out without coming up with any policies. Will there be a day when the SNP will come up with some policies? The people of Scotland are beginning to worry that it has none to offer.

We heard about the SSP's new policy of legalised state theft. If that is the prime part of Tommy Sheridan's future Scotland, I say, "Wow!"

Tommy Sheridan: We learned about that from Mrs Thatcher's theft of rail, gas—

Mr Davidson: Mr Sheridan should be careful—the NHS cannot afford a new throat for him.

Mr Rumbles talked about the Liberal Democrats' support for the private sector. He would support the private sector, as his wife delivers private chiropody care. That is perfectly good, of course. Private chiropody care is a good model.

Mike Rumbles: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it appropriate for one member to bring into the debate the activities of the spouse of another member?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I cannot honestly say that there is anything in the Parliament's standing orders about that. However, I would not have thought that such a matter would be a reasonable point to make in a fair debate.

Mr Davidson, you can criticise Mr Rumbles, but not his wife.

Mr Davidson: I am happy to criticise Mr Rumbles, but I was not criticising his wife. I acknowledge the fact that she provides a good service in the community.

Mike Rumbles: Apologise.

Mr Davidson: I do not wish to bring Mr Rumbles's wife into any political discussion. If she feels offended by my mention of her, I apologise to her.

Mr Rumbles talks about not using NHS money to subsidise folk who can well afford to pay for their treatment. In that case, why is the Liberal Democrats' policy on free eye and dental checks, which has been accepted by the Labour Party,

being implemented when the professionals concerned are quite simply not interested in it?

Helen Eadie and Christine Grahame, among other members, eventually started to wobble around the issue of value for money in the health service. The fact of the matter is that many of the inefficiencies in the health service are delivered because of the Executive's policy in that respect.

David Mundell raised important issues on out-of-hours treatment; the battling boilermaker, Duncan McNeil, came up with some good points about the European working time directive; and Pauline McNeill talked about costs and overtime. Did the minister consider those areas when implementation of the directive was rushed through?

In today's debate, the Labour Party has quite simply run: it has brought out people to yell and scream. I thank Elaine Murray for being so kind as to highlight our policies clearly, but we do that quite consistently. We are not ashamed to put the patient at the centre or to give patients choice. A constituent of mine had to be treated privately at a time when she had no insurance or money but needed to have a mammogram. She had been told that the wait in her local health board area would be two months. My constituent and her husband put their money together to go privately. Why should people like that not get the benefit of the patient passport?

I support the Conservative motion.

Point of Order

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on a potential ministerial statement. The front page of *The Scotsman* this morning contains an article about the future funding of Scottish Opera. The article states:

"However, until Mr McConnell explains his role in the affair, there will remain unanswered questions, particularly as the issue is likely to be raised in the Scottish Parliament later this week."

Has the Executive made an approach for a statement to be made on Scottish Opera?

I am concerned that there might have been a breach of paragraph 2.3 of the Scottish ministerial code, which states:

"the privacy of options expressed and advice offered within the Executive should be maintained".

The issue is of particular relevance in view of a letter that was sent this week to members of staff at Scottish Opera by the company's chief executive. An article in yesterday's edition of *The Scotsman* states:

"Mr Barron said the article, in the Sunday Herald, covered 'developments which were only made known to myself and the board on Friday'. He continued: 'The article was the result of a direct leak from the Executive in which clearly the First Minister has been involved.'"

Given that the First Minister is responsible for the enforcement of the ministerial code, and that he himself would be at the centre of any investigation, who would undertake any investigation into the question whether a breach had occurred?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I am not sure that any of that constitutes a point of order. On the basis of the request for information, however, I can confirm that no such request to make a statement has been made. On the matter of the ministerial code, it has been ruled frequently in the past that the code is a matter not for the Presiding Officers, but for the First Minister. I am not in a position to add to that today. I believe that there might be an opportunity for the issue to be raised in question time tomorrow. At the moment, that is the only indication that we have that the issue is likely to be on the agenda this week.

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

Marine Environment

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1327, in the name of Allan Wilson, on the sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, and three amendments to the motion.

14:30

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): This is the second time in a comparatively short period that we have discussed the marine environment—recently we discussed Scotland's beaches, and before that we discussed Scotland's bathing water quality—and I hope that the complaints from the nationalist benches that such matters are not important enough to be discussed will not be repeated. I am sure that they agree that while repetition is the essence of learning—and I hold out hope for my nationalist colleagues—these are not repetitive debates. They address complementary parts of a bigger and vital issue, which is how we sustainably manage our marine environment for generations to come, so that future generations who follow us in this chamber—or in whatever chamber it happens to be—get the benefit of our decisions on the future sustenance of our marine environment.

The previous debates gave us an opportunity to celebrate specific successes and to take some pride in them, as they are benefits in which everyone in Scotland can take pride. They also gave us time to confirm that there is no room for complacency about "The Day After Tomorrow", to coin a phrase—I see that Alasdair Morgan got it—and that continued, prolonged and co-ordinated effort on specific and more general fronts is needed to maintain those successes. The debates have shown that the various strands of activity in and around our seas are intertwined, but that we need to separate strands and occasionally consider them in isolation.

Today's debate allows us to take a timely wider view, coming as it does just ahead of world environment day on 5 June, which this year has a seas and oceans theme. It gives us the opportunity to think about how better co-ordination of activity and overall management of our marine and coastal environment might best be achieved for the longer-term benefit of nature and our people.

I remind members—Roseanna Cunningham and Rob Gibson in particular—that during the debate on bathing waters in December I promised to bring the Executive's proposals on the development of a strategic framework for the marine environment to the chamber for debate at the first opportunity. Members will know that I am a man of my word. The Executive's consultation paper on that strategic framework was launched by the First Minister on 19 April and, as promised, I have brought members a debate within a month. *[Applause.]*

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): It is Santa Claus.

Allan Wilson: It is a bit early for Christmas, but I acknowledge the sentiment.

The motion emphasises the importance of our marine environment on a number of fronts—ecological, economic and social. More than 70 per cent of the earth's surface is covered by oceans and seas, which are a major reserve of biodiversity and natural resources. In Scotland alone, the territorial waters over which this Parliament presides cover a greater area than our territorial landmass. That is something to contemplate.

Our seas and coastal areas provide food, energy and mineral resources, routes and harbours for shipping and tourism opportunities, all of which are vital for our economic and social needs. However, our seas and coastal areas are also unique and vital habitats in their own right—they support a diverse and abundant range of marine species. It is our responsibility to manage social and economic activity in a way that protects, conserves and enhances the wider marine environment.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister referred to our ability to manage. Will he advise me whether he has studied the parts of articles 12 and 13 of the draft European constitution that relate to marine resources and environmental issues and considered what effect the new constitution will have on the Scottish Parliament's and his ability to manage?

Allan Wilson: We will come on to debate how we might best manage our marine resources. One of the propositions that we put to the people in the most recent Scottish Parliament elections, which is contained in the partnership agreement, is that we might do that by means of establishing a coastal or marine national park. That lies within our provenance—Scottish parliamentarians may or may not decide to establish such a park. I believe that a park would make a real and lasting difference to marine and coastal conservation from which future generations would benefit. I do not want to be dragged down the cul-de-sac that Phil

Gallie wishes me to go down, but we must use the powers that the Parliament has to best effect for the benefit of future generations.

Phil Gallie: Will the minister take a supplementary question on that point?

Allan Wilson: No, I will just move on.

Members: Very wise.

Allan Wilson: To give a more vivid picture of the value of our marine environment, I point out that Scotland's marine and coastal waters support more than 40,000 marine species, including some of international significance such as basking sharks and leather-back turtles. Our seas support 14,000 fishing-related jobs—which is an issue that concerns all members—as well as providing 60 per cent of the total United Kingdom landings and 90 per cent of the UK's total marine aquaculture production. Our seas provide £57 million of revenue from and 2,500 jobs in marine wildlife tourism. There are 5.5 million passenger movements and 90 million tonnes of freight movements through Scottish ports. I will hear no siren voices about the importance of the issue to our wider economy. Our seas also contribute to the £21 billion of UK offshore oil and gas production and have the potential to support 6,000 to 8,000 jobs in marine renewable energy by 2015.

For members who have not read it, I commend Scottish Natural Heritage's recently published report, "The Seas Around Scotland", which is part of the natural heritage trends series. The report is an ideal summary of the current state of the natural resources around our shores—it also has a very natively put-together cover, which comes free of charge.

Important though the statistics are in setting the scale of the value of our seas, they also make it clear that the potential for human impacts on the marine environment is huge. We have debated the environmental impacts of the fishing industry many times; only two weeks ago we debated the impact of litter; and last year we returned many times to the question of shipping-related pollution following the grounding of the *Jambo* near the mouth of Loch Broom last June. Those are important matters, but we need time for sober reflection to take stock of what we have been doing, to seek to minimise the potential for negative impacts on the marine environment and to consider the future.

With that in mind, we published the consultation paper that I mentioned, which the First Minister launched in April. The paper makes progress on our partnership agreement commitment to consult on the best strategy for protecting and enhancing Scotland's coastline, including the options of establishing a national marine coastline park and marine national parks. The main thrust of the consultation paper is to propose a clear strategic

vision for Scotland's marine environment; to explain how the Executive's current range of marine-related activities interrelate; to explain the overall policy objectives that those activities serve in supporting that vision; to consider whether changes are needed to the specific legislation that deals with the consent regimes for developments in coastal and marine areas; and to seek views on what might be the appropriate mechanism for the future good governance and sustainable management of our marine environment.

The paper is not prescriptive. I know that some members in the chamber bemoan the amount of consultation that is undertaken, but I, for one, do not, because I want to hear a wide variety of views from both inside and outside the chamber. I want to hear about the effectiveness of the current range of marine-related legislation, the potential for marine spatial planning, the form that a strategic framework might take and how often it should be reviewed.

There is much more that I wish to go into, but which I do not have time to cover in my opening speech. I hope that the debate will flesh out some of the issues. We have always had plenty ideas, and consulting on a marine strategic framework brings all that innovation together. It will mean that the results and outcomes of current initiatives are drawn together properly and acted upon in a coherent way.

I hope that all those involved in current activities, in particular those at the local and voluntary levels, such as the various coastal partnerships and those involved in voluntary work in our coastal communities, will be reassured that developing a strategic framework is a means of acknowledging, maintaining and building on their efforts, not a threat to what they are doing and will continue to do. I regard it as being a key feature of any marine strategy that everybody is able to engage fully in its development and implementation.

We want to go further than—dare I say it—preaching to the converted. We want to involve everybody in our coastal communities and everybody who values the vital natural and national resources that our coastal waters and seas contain. We want to send the message that the strategy involves them, they should have an opinion on it and, if they do, they should express it to us.

I am grateful to a number of the environmental non-governmental organisations, particularly WWF Scotland, RSPB Scotland and the Marine Conservation Society, which have helped in developing and distributing a leaflet that we have produced on Scotland's seas and in distributing our strategy. That kind of partnership working helps to formulate the involvement that I am talking about and fosters more detailed work, such

as the work that will arise from the consultation when it unfolds later in the year.

I know that some members will be tempted to press me to give a commitment to introduce a consolidated marine act—for which the Scottish National Party amendment calls—and to create a Scottish minister for the sea. On the former, I am sure that members will have lined up arguments both for and against such an act, to which I will listen carefully. I also want to hear the views of people outside the Parliament, who have only recently been given the opportunity to have their say. I have to keep an open mind on that, which is why I cannot accept the SNP or Conservative amendments.

On the latter point about the post of minister for the sea, I say modestly that the post already exists and there is no vacancy. The marine environment is a key element of my portfolio and I am proud to have it. I hope that we in the Executive exercise our functions in that respect in a way that will conserve and preserve our marine environment for future generations.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the considerable ecological, economic and social importance of Scotland's marine environment; notes that the seas and oceans are the theme of this year's United Nations World Environment Day on 5 June; acknowledges the range of initiatives already taken by the Scottish Executive to protect and enhance all of Scotland's coastline and marine waters, including the Partnership Agreement commitment to consult on the options of establishing a national coastline park and marine national parks; endorses the Executive's continued input to the United Kingdom marine stewardship report process, to the development of a European marine strategy and to OSPAR; welcomes the strong lead being taken by the Executive to set out a clearer vision and more coherent strategic framework for Scotland's marine environment in its recent consultation paper, and supports the Executive's objectives of improving the co-ordination of activity to support, and developing a mechanism for, the future good governance and sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Is the point of order germane to the debate or can we take it later? Is it so urgent that it must be taken now?

Margo MacDonald: It is an emergency.

The Presiding Officer: Please state briefly the case for its urgency before you come to its substance.

Margo MacDonald: It concerns the trip around the new Holyrood Parliament building tomorrow that has been arranged for the press. It has come to my notice only in the past quarter of an hour that a bona fide person commissioned to report on it for the leading professional magazine *Building*

Design has been banned from taking part by the Parliament's press office.

The Presiding Officer: Right. You gave me notice of that just as I came into the chamber. I will get back to the debate just now and have inquiries made of the press office. I hope to get back to you before 5 o'clock.

14:44

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I welcome the debate. We have been asking for it through the Environment and Rural Development Committee and in the Parliament, and it is good to finally get it.

I reassure the minister that I, for one, got his reference to "The Day After Tomorrow". For the uninformed in the Parliament, it is the latest Hollywood blockbuster, which is based on climate change and will be coming to a cinema near you in the very near future. No, I am not on any retainer for the producers either. It is interesting that climate change and similar issues are forming the basis for such films.

Most of us live near the coast—for anyone in Scotland, it is almost impossible not to. Thousands of us, including fishermen, make our livings from the sea, millions of us travel on ferries every year, and millions of tonnes of waterborne freight passed through Scottish ports in 2001. It might surprise members to know that Perth has a busy harbour, which handled 218,000 tonnes of foreign and domestic freight traffic last year alone. There will be many similar small harbours right round Scotland's coast. Therefore, there is a delicate balance to be struck between the importance of economic activity in and around our waters and environmental imperatives. The oil and gas industry is undoubtedly a major and extremely important contributor to the Scottish economy, but, like everything else, it has its environmental costs.

Oil and gas are not, of course, the only sources of energy in our seas; there is a massive marine renewable energy resource waiting to be tapped, which brings with it the potential for 24,000 new jobs related to marine energy and wave power. However, because Scotland is fast losing offshore fabrication capability, we may lose out on those benefits unless rapid Government action is taken to fast-track offshore wind development and to encourage the offshore industry to diversify into that field.

The issue is not only a failure to provide any support for offshore wind power to justify investment. It is just as important that the Executive ensures that the roll-out concerns for offshore renewable energy be examined so that we do not end up in the boorach that we have with onshore wind power at the moment, with

communities up in arms, developers putting in applications for every possible hilltop and everybody feeling that they have no strategic guidance to direct what is happening onshore. Let us not have that happen offshore. We have a chance to plan well in advance.

Scotland's marine environment will continue to be economically important only if it is managed sustainably. Scotland's seas and estuaries contribute most of the total estimated £17 billion that the environment contributes to the Scottish economy: a staggering £14.3 billion. Eco-tourism is an important and growing sector of the Scottish economy, not least because of the money that it brings into some of the more remote and economically disadvantaged parts of our country. The fact that marine wildlife tourism contributes more than 2,500 jobs and £57 million of revenue to the Highlands and Islands alone tells its own story.

Scottish waters support hugely diverse marine species, many of which need protection, and 33 of the United Kingdom's 65 possible marine special areas of conservation are Scottish. The Darwin mounds were discovered only in the summer of 1998—it is astonishing to realise that—and they were almost immediately acknowledged to be under threat of destruction. Of course, it is understandable that, as we had been working the seas in complete ignorance of the mounds, no protection was in place. Thankfully, on 22 March this year, fisheries ministers in Brussels finally agreed to give the Darwin mounds permanent protection, which was the final fulfilment of a promise that was made as far back as 2001. That is a really useful development, but it is a salutary thought to consider what else in our waters has an equally precarious future and of what else's existence we remain ignorant. It is always useful to remember that.

The Executive has launched a consultation on the possible establishment of a national coastline park and marine national parks and I welcome that. As most legislation for the protection of sites and species is designed for use on land, there is still no legal basis for designating and managing areas of nationally important marine habitat and species, so a national coastline park and marine national parks could be an answer to that problem.

I have no difficulty with supporting the opening portion of the Executive's motion, which

“recognises the considerable ecological, economic and social importance of Scotland's marine environment”,

but, as the minister might expect, we begin to differ when it comes to the actions that are required to rectify the problem.

Allan Wilson: Speaking as one of the fisheries ministers who were present at the March council,

when we enshrined the protection of the Darwin mounds, I wonder whether there is a contradiction in Roseanna Cunningham's stated position—in not wishing marine conservation to be a European Union competence, yet welcoming the fact that European fisheries ministers got together in March, within the context of the European Union, and decided to designate the Darwin mounds as an area for special protection.

Roseanna Cunningham: I do not think that the Scottish National Party has ever been against international co-operation. Welcoming a single decision does not necessarily mean welcoming the entire basis for the decision-making process behind it for ever and anon. Not all the individual decisions will be welcome.

I am far from convinced that enough is being done by the Executive, even within the powers that are available to the Scottish Parliament, or indeed that the Scottish Parliament has all the powers that it needs to meet all the laudable aims that are set out in the Executive's motion. Of course, environmental issues are no respecters of borders or boundaries. Scotland is part of the Atlantic arc—Europe's western seaboard—which sweeps from the Hebrides to Andalucía, and we must continue to work with communities, for example in the west of Ireland and those that border the Bay of Biscay and the Gulf of Cádiz.

The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic—the OSPAR convention—is an international treaty charged with preventing and eliminating pollution of the marine environment in the north-east Atlantic. As my amendment makes clear, we must continue to be involved in it. However, to speak about the United Kingdom Government, marine stewardship and OSPAR in the same breath, as the Executive motion does, beggars belief.

All contracting parties to the OSPAR convention must

“take all possible steps to prevent and eliminate pollution”.

Despite the UK being a signatory, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd continues to be allowed to discharge 8 million litres of radioactive waste a day into the Irish sea, which is supposed to be covered by the convention. The Sintra agreement, which was drawn up by the OSPAR commission in 1998, has committed to eliminate discharges of hazardous and radioactive pollutants by 2020, but I believe that the UK Government should stop that discharge now, so that it will meet the Sintra agreement obligations.

Scotland's seas are governed—I use the term “governed” in the loosest possible sense—by a mishmash of international, European, UK and Scots law. There is no strategic overview and, at present, no way of achieving a strategic overview,

much less a planning framework to co-ordinate the work of the many bodies that have responsibility for aspects of marine management.

More fundamentally, there is almost no mechanism to encourage any sense of ownership or responsibility or to enable local management. At least 13 UK bodies have some marine responsibilities. Some of those extend out to 3 nautical miles; some to the 6-nautical-mile limit of Scottish waters; some to the 12-nautical-mile boundary of UK territorial waters; and some to the 200-nautical-mile continental shelf. Their competencies often overlap or compete. At least 85 acts of Parliament relate to marine and coastal activities. The minister, quite rightly, drew our attention to the publication from Scottish Natural Heritage; equally, I draw attention to the WWF Scotland publication, "The Tangle of the Clyde", which shows just how complicated the situation is. Frankly, it is a dog's breakfast.

If, as the Executive claims, it wants a more coherent, strategic framework, with improved co-ordination of activity, it seems that a starting point would be a piece of comprehensive legislation to deliver integrated management and proper spatial planning. More to the point, if the Executive is serious about working towards good governance of Scotland's marine environment in the future and improved co-ordination of activity, then the Executive parties should support my amendment and my call to have those matters that affect the marine environment that are currently reserved to Westminster devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

If we want good governance, we need to unfangle the tangled legislation that is currently in place. For example, how can Scotland possibly develop a workable mechanism for the sustainable management of our marine environment if oil tankers can travel willy-nilly through some of Scotland's most sensitive sea areas while navigation issues are reserved and so beyond the remit of this Parliament? How effective can marine national parks be if half of the foreshore and almost all the sea bed, to a distance of 12 miles, are owned by the Crown Estate? Highland Council recognises the ridiculous contradiction of that position and is campaigning for a review. MSPs should support Highland Council in its campaign. SNP MSPs certainly will. Will the minister?

I move amendment S2M-1327.1, to leave out from "acknowledges" to end and insert:

"supports continued involvement by the Scottish Executive in the development of a European marine strategy and in OSPAR; notes that the regulation and management of Scotland's coast and seas is fragmented with no coherent regulatory or planning framework and that, despite Scotland's unique variety of marine wildlife, there is no legal basis for designating and managing areas for nationally important marine habitats and species; believes that there is a need for legislation to deliver integrated

management of all aspects of Scotland's marine environment; welcomes the consultation on the establishment of a national coastline park and marine national park, and, in recognising the importance of improving the co-ordination of activity to support, and develop a mechanism for, the future good governance and sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, calls for control of all matters impacting on the marine environment that are currently reserved, including the Crown Estate Commission's ownership of the seabed, to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament."

14:54

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Scotland's marine environment supports a huge number of diverse species and habitats and a huge wealth of economic activities, including oil and renewable energy developments, shipping, tourism and recreation, aquaculture and, most especially, fishing, which my colleague Ted Brocklebank will address later in the debate.

More than 77 acts govern activities relating to the marine and coastal environment in Scotland. Many people cite such a situation as outdated and fragmented and would like the creation of a single marine act to encompass all the challenges that face the marine environment. The Conservative party supports a sustainable development policy that is aimed at empowering the individual, increasing choice and creating incentives to be environmentally responsible, while reducing the power of bureaucracies. Current environmental legislation tends to work in the opposite way, empowering Governments and quangos, which often brings people and the environment unwillingly into conflict. The Conservatives understand the call for a single marine act and we tentatively support such a move, as long as it is approached in a balanced way and is not exploited by those who wish to impose their centralised solutions on the Scottish people. However, I will strongly resist any moves to remove the sea bed from Crown Estate management.

The environmental lobby claims that the current management of the marine environment is out of date and fragmented. While the structures and legislation may be fragmented, I do not necessarily agree that the legislation is out of date; rather, it has evolved organically over time, according to need, so it is likely to be largely fit for purpose. Therefore, I disagree with calls for radical reform and fundamental changes to our marine laws, policies and governance, as they are probably unnecessary. If there is to be a single marine act, all that is required is a process of consolidation, to ensure that the legislation is simplified and easily understood.

The green lobby would like an integrated approach, in which environmental, social and economic objectives are linked. However, an integrated approach might mean that we lose the

ability to prioritise when difficult decisions arise, as they will when groups come into conflict on access to the marine environment. That relates particularly to the oil industry, which, it is argued, is largely unsustainable and difficult to fit into a sustainable management policy. I fear that there may even be a hidden agenda among some groups. They must ask themselves what role they see themselves having in the structure and process. I suggest that environmental groups may take their place alongside other sectoral interests whose role I seek to protect. They may see themselves taking an overarching position, dealing directly with an arms-length supervisory and regulatory body and pushing for environmental considerations to be given greater priority than economic or social ones.

I strongly disagree with calls for a lead body to be put in charge of planning maritime affairs in Scotland. I do not want a kind of SNH of the sea, increasing Government bureaucracy. Another quango is not the answer. The functions that require to be controlled or regulated at a Scotland-wide level should remain directly in the hands of Government, under the supervision of the minister who is accountable to Parliament. What else is the Executive for?

That which can be devolved should be devolved, and the current roles that are performed by local government, the Crown Estate, fisheries management groups and many others should be retained. The reserved powers regarding oil and gas should remain with the United Kingdom Government at Westminster, so that it can develop policies on a national level. Truly to improve the sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, we first need to regain control of our fishing waters by withdrawing from the common fisheries policy. Ted Brocklebank will deal with that in greater detail.

Allan Wilson: Is that withdrawal from the common fisheries policy to be unilateral, as favoured by Mr Brocklebank, or negotiated, as favoured by Mr Howard?

Alex Johnstone: It will be negotiated on a unilateral basis.

I move on to deal with the motion and the amendments that are before us. The Executive motion contains a great deal that is worthy of support and the Conservatives will agree to it if it is unamended by the end of the voting process. However, our amendment would omit the second part of the Executive motion, which we dismiss as the usual self-congratulatory material that the Executive puts forward. It is not the Conservatives' job to congratulate the Executive; the Executive does quite enough of that for itself.

There is much common sense in the Scottish National Party amendment, but unfortunately the SNP has gone down its usual road of suggesting that further changes to the devolved settlement should be made. It is unlikely that the SNP will find Conservative support for such a move.

Robin Harper has lodged an extremely sensible and worthwhile amendment, which the Conservatives would have found it easy to support but for our concerns about the deadline of 2006 that the amendment sets. Such a deadline might introduce a sense of urgency that might deliver a marine national park, but there is a grave danger that the park would be created without adequate and proper consultation and consideration. The Conservatives are not averse to the idea of a marine national park—we retain an open mind on the subject—but we will resist the temptation to support an amendment that puts a deadline on progress on the matter.

The Conservatives take the view that the process that is being undertaken is worthy of welcome. The establishment of a marine strategic framework is desirable. We would also support the formal consolidation of existing marine legislation, to tidy up and simplify the law, should that process be undertaken. However, I have expressed the Conservatives' grave concerns about such a process and I hope that the Executive will regard my contribution as the first indication that the Conservatives would defend those concerns during the course of that process.

I move amendment S2M-1327.2, to leave out from "endorses" to end and insert:

" , but believes that the consolidation of marine legislation is only desirable if it can be achieved while protecting economic and social stakeholders, particularly in the fishing, aquaculture, energy and tourism sectors."

15:02

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I thank the Conservatives for going as far as they have gone in giving credence to our amendment. However, I have the same concerns about the Conservative amendment as I do about the Executive's presentation of the issues in the chapter "The value of Scotland's marine environment" from the consultation document "Developing a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment". In that chapter, food, ports and shipping, energy and tourism are considered before wildlife and habitats. However, if there are no fish, there will be no fishing; if the ecology is not preserved, there will be no marine tourism; and if proper attention is not given to the sea bed, there will be no development of energy resources off our coasts, because we will not have done the proper science to allow such development to take place. We must get it right; ecology must come first.

I welcome the debate and the Executive's consultation document, despite the concerns that I have expressed. I welcome the fact that, as the minister said, Barcelona has been chosen as the main host for this year's world environment day and I note that the theme for the day will be "Wanted! Seas and Oceans—Dead or Alive?" The question is, of course, rhetorical; we would prefer the seas and oceans to be alive.

There is much to support in the Executive motion. Our amendment would clarify the motion and take it a little further—or a lot further, according to the Conservatives. I remind the Conservatives that the first national park was set up within two years of the passing of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. There is no reason to suggest that we could not do the same thing for our seas.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member acknowledge that, although a national park was set up within two years of the 2000 act, work to establish national parks had been going on for generations? We would be establishing a marine national park from scratch, which might take more than two years.

Robin Harper: A marine park would hardly be created from scratch. As we have observed, more than 13 different organisations are concerned with the preservation of our marine environment in one way or another, plus all the NGOs. A lot of research has been done and a lot is known, so setting up a marine park would not take that long.

The marine environment is fantastically intricate and complex and it transcends political and administrative boundaries. That is why we need an ecosystem approach. I draw members' attention to the definition of that approach in the consultation's glossary, which mentions

"integrated management ... based on knowledge ... to achieve sustainable use ... and maintenance of ecosystem integrity."

A sound knowledge base is vital, which means that, in addition to other forms of investment, we need to invest in science. We must recognise that management needs to be adaptive—local monitoring and learning are key aspects of knowing about and adapting to ecosystem dynamics. I emphasise that people should be considered as part of the marine ecosystem, too, and not just as externalities. I would like to hear more about the Executive's ideas for local management committees in that respect.

The need for stakeholder participation seems obvious, but it is less clear who the stakeholders are. That is an important starting point. Similarly, local communities barely get a mention in the framework document. In the Executive's vision of sustainable marine management, local

communities are mentioned only in the context of aquaculture. Mention is made of the need to balance

"the needs of local communities with potential implications to the marine environment",

as if the two are necessarily at odds. They do not need to be.

My colleagues and I have called repeatedly for a single, integrated act on the marine environment, to overarch the current plethora of legislation that Roseanna Cunningham mentioned. The consultation on a strategic framework is welcome up to a point, but I humbly suggest that the great shortcoming of a strategic framework, as distinct from a strategy, is that it will lack targets and goals—there will be no mechanism for delivery or compulsion. The Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 is a model piece of legislation in that respect. Indeed, it is particularly relevant, as a marine act could carry on the good work of the 2003 act, which hits the buffers three miles from the shore.

National parks can be good for fisheries as well as for tourism and biodiversity and they offer another means of introducing no-take zones such as those around New Zealand and in many other parts of the world. Such zones have proved to be beneficial to fisheries, so fishermen are extremely keen on them. We should seek to learn from the experiences of other national parks at home and abroad. Will the minister consider issuing a direction to the Scottish sustainable marine environment initiative to explore those options?

Another area in which we should apply lessons that have been learned elsewhere is the development of marine renewable energy. The potential of offshore wind, wave and tidal energy is truly enormous. Let us get it right first time and establish early on a genuinely participative stakeholder process—such as the one in Copenhagen, where the city owns half the wind farm—and a strategy to which all are signed up. Let us not repeat the piecemeal, developer-led approach that we have seen with onshore wind, which is a "boorach" in Roseanna Cunningham's terms and a "guddle" in mine.

We need to review the role of the Crown Estate, which brings me to aquaculture. I referred earlier to the shortcomings of having a strategic framework as distinct from a strategy. We need to consider the long-term impact of aquaculture on the coastal environment and I register my concern about the recent allocation of European Union money—about £1.5 million from financial instrument for fisheries guidance funds—to promote the healthy image of farmed salmon. I greatly hope that the money will be spent on validation rather than on assertion. I note that the

health concerns initially arose largely as a consequence of the effect of pollution on feedstock.

The Greens welcome the debate and the consultation and we endorse and support the call for the Parliament to recognise the ecological, economic and social importance of Scotland's marine environment.

I move amendment S2M-1327.3, to leave out from "in its recent" to end and insert:

"starting with its recent consultation paper; notes the need for encouragement and support to community initiatives seeking sustainable local management of marine resources; supports the Executive's objectives of improving the co-ordination of activity to support, and develop a strategy for, the future good governance and sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, and calls on the Executive to, as a first step, establish a marine national park by the end of 2006."

15:09

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): The degree of consensus in the motion and the three amendments is striking. We all accept the importance of the marine environment for ecological, economic and social reasons. We all recognise that there is a plethora of bodies, laws and regulations that are concerned with the marine environment and we all agree that they somehow have to be brought together within a coherent framework.

The ecological importance of the marine environment is incontrovertible. Around 8,000 species of marine wildlife live in Scottish waters. We have the most northerly population of bottlenosed dolphins and a third of the world's grey seal population. We have a sixth of all seabirds that breed in Europe and 33 of the 65 possible marine special areas of conservation are in Scottish waters.

The economic importance of the marine environment to Scotland is also incontrovertible. As Allan Wilson said, 60 per cent of UK fish landings are landed in Scotland, with a value of around £328 million. Shellfish fisheries in the Clyde alone are worth £15.5 million and our aquaculture industry is worth £700 million—50 per cent by value of Scottish food exports. Furthermore, 6,500 jobs are directly or indirectly involved in aquaculture, more than 4,500 of which are in areas with fragile local economies where there is little alternative employment. The industry also provides affordable, nutritious food—a fact that should not be overlooked.

Our commercial ports and shipping make an important contribution to the economy and our ports are important to the leisure market. We see tour ships delivering high-value tourism to deepwater ports in Orkney and at Peterhead,

which otherwise would never see that kind of high-spending tourist. Shipping also takes freight off the roads—a fact that we tend to forget and an idea that could be developed much further. Following the success of the Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry, why are we not looking to create more North sea crossings, especially to the Baltic states, which are now in the EU? In the middle ages, trade across the North sea with the Baltic countries made loads of millionaires in Aberdeen. It would be nice to have a few more from that source.

Our debate the week before last highlighted how much we value beaches and coasts for recreation. I am not talking about an esoteric value; our beaches and coasts have a high monetary value. Coastal tourism is estimated to put £375 million into the economy, with whale watching alone contributing £11.8 million.

I have not yet touched on energy, including oil and gas extraction and the development of renewable energy from offshore wind, wave and tidal resources.

Phil Gallie: Nora Radcliffe will have noted the minister's failure to address the points that I raised on the draft European constitution. Given the well-informed and valid points that she has just made, is she aware of the effects that articles III-130 and III-137 of the draft constitution could have on all the management issues that she is claiming the Scottish Parliament should take account of?

Nora Radcliffe: I ask Phil Gallie to expand on what those numbers mean. I do not deal in numbers. Can he tell me what he is getting at?

Phil Gallie: Article III-130 refers to qualitative management of water resources. Article III-137 refers to transport links and sea passages and the European Union's ability to control which carriers operate where.

Nora Radcliffe: The transport starts in Scotland but it ends up somewhere else. We have to work within the EU, using the influence and levers that we have, to get agreement on those things. I do not see how we could do that in isolation. It would be ridiculous to do that.

Phil Gallie: We have done it another way for years, by managing the resources ourselves.

Nora Radcliffe: Well, we have managed them within the EU for many years and we have received lots of other benefits from the EU. All the things that I have mentioned emphasise the range of pressures on the marine environment and the importance of managing their impact.

The second strand that we are all agreed on is the plethora of bodies and regulations. In "The Tangle of the Clyde", which Roseanna Cunningham mentioned, the schematic illustration of governmental marine responsibilities looks like

a chandelier. Underneath that are the various areas of jurisdiction, which Roseanna Cunningham also mentioned: the foreshore, with high-water and low-water marks; UK territorial waters to 3, 6 and 12 miles; and UK fisheries limits to 200 miles. A few pages further on, we see a list of the legislation that impacts on the Clyde estuary alone—it is in tiny print because there is so much of it. The number of acts of Parliament that apply to coastal areas is a staggering 85.

Such complexity must be a barrier to understanding and implementation as well as to the sensible and effective management of an important resource that is being exploited by a wide range of sometimes competing interests. That is why there is consensus on the urgent need for a clear vision and a coherent strategic framework. The Scottish Executive consultation paper starts the process of developing such a framework and is published in the context of ongoing initiatives at various levels, some of which are mentioned in the motion. They include OSPAR, the European marine strategy and the UK marine stewardship process.

In Scotland, the Scottish coastal forum has done a huge amount to promote, foster and encourage integrated coastal zone management. Its spring 2004 report is an impressive catalogue of fora and initiatives that are already in place, working well, demonstrating best practice and giving us a lot to build on. However, although there are good foundations, I believe that it behoves us to do the groundwork properly as we proceed. I know that legislation is in place that would enable us to create a marine national park, but I would like a lot more work to be done to establish exactly what we have in our coastal waters before we decide where we want a marine national park and why. There are a lot of gaps in our knowledge and I would prefer us to direct our efforts to filling in some of those gaps than to rush to create a trophy national park in a matter of months. If it were not for that proposal, I would have taken on board the Green amendment, the other part of which I think is eminently acceptable.

The partnership agreement commits us to consult on a national coastline park. I welcome that, although I am slightly sceptical about how a single coastline national park would work. I think that it might be too diffuse. My gut feeling is that a single coastline strategy would be more appropriate, with more concentrated action in those areas that are identified as suitable for national park status. Consultation will open up the discussion, thrash out the issues and inform subsequent discussion.

In conclusion, there is agreement that there is an important job to do and we have started on the process of accomplishing it. I welcome that.

15:17

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): This debate marks another step forward in thinking about how we can modernise the legal framework and the promotion of a long-term sustainable Scotland. We should look at our marine environment not as a resource to plunder, but as a potential resource that is capable of sustaining a rich and varied natural environment and of enabling economic development and supporting local jobs across Scotland. Sometimes those interests will be in conflict, but the whole point of the debate should be about how we manage them in the long term, for local communities and for the wider national interest.

I could not believe Alex Johnstone's opposition to an integrated approach. The whole point of the debate about sustainable development is to flush out the arguments. Sometimes there are trade-offs and sometimes we have to say no to people, but we must at least flush out the arguments and have a proper debate about them. We must consider issues such as tourism and nature interpretation, fishing and aquaculture, transport demand, renewable energy and projects around our towns and cities—which nobody has really talked about today—in relation to ports or coastal developments, which are essential for our economy. We need a framework in order to consider those issues.

The challenge is to get the right framework in which to hold that kind of debate, to get the right economic development in the right place at the right scale, and then to monitor the carrying capacity of our marine environment so that we can assess the cumulative impact of change. Robin Harper was absolutely right to say that we cannot have development without considering long-term environmental protection in the seas and oceans. It would be irresponsible to look at the two things separately.

We are at a starting point in trying to deal with the longer-term challenges of climate change. We must consider what areas of Scotland we want to preserve for all time, what areas of land we will build expensive coastal defences to defend over time, what areas we think should be allowed to go back to the sea and what areas we should manage to allow them to become salt marshes again. Those questions raise many community and society issues, but we do not have a governance structure that allows us to hold such debates and to consider the costs involved.

Some members have mentioned renewable energy, which represents a huge opportunity for us. However, the issue is not about setting out a framework for how things will happen in 10 years' time. Proposals are coming forward now, so the debate on how we can grasp the opportunities

needs to take place now. We must have in place a strategic environmental assessment that ensures that such developments are long term, viable and good for the country.

There are challenges and opportunities, but our problem is that we have a raft of pieces of legislation from different eras. Over time, the legislation has been amended, so that it now contains many different processes. We will never be able to reduce complex decisions to a simple process, but we should be able to simplify the way in which we deal with these issues. The Executive's consultation will let us have that debate. It will allow us to consider what the right framework is and how we should consolidate the legislation on our marine areas to take the debate forward.

The consultation paper identifies the many problems that we face—pollution, the loss of biodiversity, coastal erosion, the impact of unregulated tourism—and the many reasons why we should concentrate our minds now on framing new legislation and creating a new national framework.

We must recognise the good work that is taking place. It would be wrong if we used today's debate just to moan about the imperfect legal framework that we start off with. A lot of good work is happening in our coastal communities, in developments such as the coastal partnerships and in fishing and aquaculture management, which I know Alasdair Morrison will mention in the context of the Western Isles. A lot of good work is being done, but we need a coherent, overarching framework.

The briefings that I suspect every member received show just how much good work is going on and explain the on-going debate. In particular, I draw members' attention to the joint paper from the Royal Town Planning Institute and RSPB Scotland on spatial planning. We need to consider in detail some of the issues concerning the boundaries between planning on land and planning at sea. We need to ensure that we get that right. We have also been given a lot of evidence about the good work that the coastal partnerships are doing.

Before deciding how to vote today, I read through all the amendments. I agree with the sentiment behind the Green amendment. I also agree with Robin Harper on the need for local community management and integrated management of our fisheries. However, I honestly cannot support giving ourselves a deadline of one and a half years to achieve the target of establishing a marine national park.

Back when the Parliament was first established, we debated whether one bill should cover both

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms proposed national parks. Even though a national park for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs had been debated for a decade or so, we decided to give attention to both proposed national parks, despite the fact that they involved distinctive groups of local stakeholders and different arguments. We should do the same with marine national parks. Instead of having a one-size-fits-all solution, we need to think about the issue a bit more carefully.

The more Roseanna Cunningham explained the SNP's position, the more she tied herself in knots. There is a fundamental contradiction in the SNP's argument. Having one border will never fix all the problems in our marine areas. We need to deal with the issues at European, United Kingdom, Scottish and local authority level.

Roseanna Cunningham: We would remove the UK from the equation.

Sarah Boyack: Exactly. I just do not understand the obsession with removing the English from the equation.

Roseanna Cunningham: I said that we would remove the UK from the equation.

Sarah Boyack: Why should we not involve the Welsh, Northern Irish and the English as part of the UK? There is a big argument in favour of the need for UK involvement. I do not sign up with the nationalists on that. Disappointingly, the Tories, too, displayed a lack of understanding of what is meant by good governance and sustainable management.

The point of today's debate is to bring people together so that they are not excluded and have a meaningful involvement in how we shape Scotland's future around our coasts and seas. The Executive's consultation paper gives us a chance to do that. The motion is concrete and members should support it.

15:23

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To explore the details of today's debate, it helps to have a particular sea view in mind when thinking about how an integrated marine policy should work. Few MSPs represent an area that has no coastline, so most of us should find it quite easy to do that.

I was able to survey the waters of the Pentland firth from Dunnet head last Monday, when the Caithness walking festival offered me an ideal site from which to reflect on that sea area, which sustains a large bird population of fulmars, guillemots and puffins, along with whales, dolphins and lots of other sea life. The firth narrows from eight miles at the west end to two seaworthy miles

at the east end, where three ferries ply across from Caithness to Orkney.

I watched a large bulk carrier, which ploughed east towards the narrow channel into the North sea, like so many do and so many more could if the Scapa Flow international container hub is set up. In March 1999, an accident took place in those stormy narrow seas involving the chemical-carrying ship Multitank Ascania. That incident showed how congestion can lead to ecological disaster. The well-trained crew and emergency services dealt with the crisis, but not before an exclusion zone of 5km had been set up around the anchored, burning ship, which was full of vinyl acetate, and 600 local residents had been evacuated. It takes a very long time to sort out the environmental effects of marine disasters, which occur all along our coasts and right down to Spain. It also takes a long time to settle human affairs in such areas. A taxi driver told me yesterday that a cousin of his has just received compensation from the Braer disaster in Shetland. An overarching approach to marine affairs is required, so that such matters are better integrated.

I return to my view from Dunnet head. Across in Orkney, the marine energy test centre seeks to harness the tides and the waves. The white-fish landings at Scrabster are strong at the moment and lobster pot buoys are dotted along the sea close inshore. How are all those interests to be regulated and integrated, especially given that not far to the west lies the Dounreay nuclear decommissioning site, from which radioactive particles have historically washed on to beaches such as Sandside and been swept through the Pentland firth by the strong currents, deep into North sea crevices?

Further west again are the maerl beds, which, at the Darwin mounds, the EU has begun to protect. However, those are not the only beds to have been dredged out. I am glad that at Lamlash, on Arran, a local attempt is being made to protect the undersea maerl beds from destruction. If we are to give people powers to offer such protection, we need to have an overarching view of how it should be done.

As many other members have noted, there is a plethora of laws and regulatory authorities. About 80 laws govern the cleanliness of our seas and beaches, navigation and fishing, but there is no strategic plan like the onshore plans for local authorities that are regularly updated to show their development and conservation aims. There must be offshore plans that link with those, because onshore activity can have devastating effects on nearby sea areas. It is essential that offshore planning is integrated with land use.

In the far north-west of Sutherland, the threat—however unlikely it is to be realised—that a

superquarry will be set up at Loch Eriboll is blighting the development of the loch for shellfish cultivation. Would-be shellfishers must sign a waiver noting the possibility that a superquarry will have an effect on the quality of the waters and that pier facilities may be required. Something must be done to resolve that situation, as the blight remains.

Meanwhile, the Crown Estate commissioners scoop up a steady income from developments beyond the high-water mark. Like the Royal Navy press gangs of the past, the CEC takes a toll on our resources, without locally elected people having any overall controls that would allow them to plan for and monitor the land and adjacent sea area. Offshore wind farms and tidal machines will also grease the palms of the CEC if we do not cut out those pirates who extort £80,000 a year from the Cromarty Firth Port Authority, for example, thereby weakening its development potential.

Ports and harbours need funding to tackle accelerated low-water corrosion, which the Executive does not yet recognise as a huge national problem. These are coastal matters that relate to both land and sea. It should be noted that the nearby Cape Wrath area suffers from Ministry of Defence and NATO bombing and shelling exercises throughout the year—even into the tourist season, in early July—which can result in an increased number of dolphin and whale deaths, and much else besides. MOD rights of passage, the use of submarines and offshore exercises need to be included in the spatial planning of our sea areas and lochs.

The examples that I have given show that the consultation that is under way must go much further. Good governance and sustainable management require a national framework. We probably need a demonstration marine national park to show what can be done. Local decision-making powers are essential, but those can be created only if there are national powers of integration over all uses of the sea—as is evident from the area around Dunnet head.

15:29

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): In speaking in this debate, I must say that my primary concern is the same as everyone else's: the future of the marine environment around the Scottish coastline. We have without question one of Europe's richest and most diverse coastlines, which has been created by a combination of tectonic plate movement and Atlantic wave erosion. The British coastline is certainly one of the most magnificent in Europe, and Scotland's coast is perhaps the best. It contains richness in every sense to sustain Scottish people, with natural resources that range

from oil and other forms of energy to fishing and conservation areas.

Our North sea oil industry has been a boon to the British economy for the past 30 years and our fishing industry has sustained communities all around our coastline for generations—Ted Brocklebank will say more about that in a moment. Our energy-harvesting capability in the marine environment can only grow and the potential for conservation and tourism is being recognised only now. Indeed, there are many Scottish marine assets. However, we must address the fact that they are neither widely appreciated nor adequately managed.

First, we need to note and catalogue those hugely diverse assets. We need to find out whether they are in decline, as our fish and oil stocks are, or whether their future prospects are improving, as is the case with energy harvesting and marine ecotourism. Having evaluated those assets, we must then begin to plan how we can best maintain and indeed exploit them, preferably in a sustainable way. We must consider consolidating the legislation to provide clarity for all users of the marine environment. Moreover, we must learn from worldwide experience and think about creating a marine national park. The obvious focal point of any such park would be the Darwin mounds and the cold water corals, which until recently have been under threat from damaging fishing techniques.

We must also develop the potential for tourism that a marine national park would create. Indeed, now that we have land-based national parks we should perhaps think about extending the concept into the marine environment. To do that, we must consider whether we should designate areas of our marine environment for different purposes.

I ask members to picture in their mind's eye a map of Scotland. In the North sea, we have fishing, oil and tourism. In the Moray firth, we have dolphins, oil, fishing and tourism. In the Pentland firth and the Minches, we should be planning to harvest tidal energy while maintaining our fishing industry. To the north and west, we should also seek to maintain that industry while considering conservation measures and thinking about how we can move tourists into those fragile mainland areas to allow them to discover those unrivalled environments. Aquaculture is vital to those areas and the sooner that we can achieve integrated coastal zone management in them the better.

We need to protect the environment and the shipping lanes in the north-west. In the firth of Clyde and the Solway, in addition to sustaining our traditional fishing activities, there is the potential to grow tourism activities such as sailing. Offshore wind farming, which is effectively already in place in the Solway firth, must be contained and not

allowed to proliferate at random. For those reasons, we must start to manage our assets better.

We need to reduce pollution, and instead of extracting what we can get from our seas we need to examine and manage for the future our current assets. However, as Alex Johnstone has pointed out, that should not be done in a heavy-handed or bureaucratic way.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):

The member said that we have to start managing our offshore wind farms better. Given that the only such farm has not yet been developed, how precisely does he plan to do that?

John Scott: The member will appreciate that the bill for the wind farm in question has been passed, although he is right to point out that the wind farm has not yet been developed. However, I do not want the north-west of Scotland covered in offshore wind farms. Perhaps he does.

Alasdair Morgan: But how does the member plan to manage offshore wind farms better?

John Scott: As I have said, I believe that a sympathetic and sensible planning regime must be established. That regime should be lightly regulated but, as Sarah Boyack pointed out, it should acknowledge where we are while taking a view on where we want to be. Our Scottish marine environment is still largely in good shape; however, given the ever-increasing pressure on it and its natural resources, it would be only prudent to consider intelligently its future use. Previous generations have been sustained by our seas and their contents. To preserve that capability for future generations, we must now plan and protect what we have.

15:34

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):

As I am the MSP for the Western Isles, members will not be surprised to learn that a great deal of my constituency work load consists of issues that relate to the marine environment. Many of my constituents depend on that environment for their livelihood. Many islanders and visitors also enjoy, for leisure, the sea and the sea lochs that are such a dominant feature of life and work in the Hebrides. The protection of that pristine environment must remain a priority for the Executive. Ensuring the continued viability of the marine environment around and in the Western Isles will require decisive action and continued focus. The Executive has committed itself to legislation on inshore fisheries, and it is consulting on the specifics of that legislation. I will touch on that matter later.

I want to highlight the need for protection from large, oil-laden tankers that currently travel up and down through the Minches. A tanker foundering in the relatively calm and shallow waters of the Minch would be disastrous for the islands in my constituency and for communities on the west coast. The Executive and the UK Government must continue to liaise and work closely together to put in place proper pilotage systems for the Minches. The current voluntary arrangement—which is all well and good—in which tankers, prior to entering the Minches, report to the Stornoway coastguard is certainly an improvement on that of previous years. However, we must formalise the arrangement further so that all ships that are laden with potentially ruinous cargoes are properly escorted or piloted through the Minch.

As the minister will know, aquaculture is one of the mainstays of the Western Isles economy. There is no need for me to repeat the statistics that Nora Radcliffe recited earlier on the significant sums of money that are generated by that industry and the significant numbers of people who are involved in it. The strategic framework for aquaculture is already helping to support the industry in ways that will ensure that it becomes sustainable, diverse and competitive. I thank the minister for his efforts over recent weeks in relation to safeguards and the European Commission.

The industry appreciates that Government support is not unconditional. Every fish farmer and mussel farmer I meet readily accepts that they must continue to change and adjust to address the environmental and social challenges that they face. They do so willingly and they already work sensibly in partnership with the Executive and its agencies. Nevertheless, they are, sadly, under constant siege by shadowy forces that tell and print as fact what are simply barefaced lies about the reality and working practices of fish farming. In recent months, we have seen the more irresponsible members in the chamber align themselves with those forces, who would empty our islands and communities of all the people and families who rely on aquaculture.

I urge the minister to examine closely the excellent collaborative work that the industry and all the relevant agencies in the Western Isles are undertaking on the relocation and size of fish farms and how the needs of the environment and the industry can best be addressed. I firmly believe that the work undertaken by the recently established Western Isles fish farming task force could be the best way forward for the industry in Scotland. I hope that the minister's officials are keeping up to date with that significant progress.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the Executive give help to fish farmers who have to relocate their fish farms?

Mr Morrison: I hope that Jamie McGrigor will discover for himself the excellent collaborative work that is happening in the Western Isles between companies and all the agencies that have a locus in fish farming. That work is about reducing the costs, whether of environmental impacts or of moving to larger fish farms. The minister's officials are involved in that work and I am sure that the minister will be happy to share the relevant information with Mr McGrigor.

I now turn to inshore fisheries. The Executive must also continue to support that area. We need legislation to protect the conservation-minded inshore fishermen of the Western Isles. We have already seen the benefits of adapting and changing the law in relation to inshore fisheries, with the making of a Scottish statutory instrument to protect scallop-fishing grounds from large boats with large dredges. Of course, I cannot mention scallops in the context of the Western Isles without mentioning the Green Party's rampant hypocrisy on the scallops issue. I do not question the sincerity of the Green Party in relation to the environment, but its crass stupidity on the scallops issue exposed its lack of understanding. *[Interruption.]* I hear animated voices from the nationalists' seats. It is significant that the nationalists are sitting with the Green Party today, as that was exactly their position when they sold out west coast fishermen six months ago, while we acted to protect the environment, fishermen and processors.

Rob Gibson: Is it the case—as was predicted—that because of the new regulation several owners of large scallop boats have downscaled their boats and bought more of them to fish scallops, so that there are now more boats fishing—and overfishing—for scallops than there were before?

Mr Morrison: Once again, that is absolute nonsense. As recently as last Thursday I visited a factory in Grimsay, on North Uist. The owner of the factory, who also owns fishing boats, is delighted with that regulation because it has stabilised the number of scallops that are landed, the price has increased and the jobs at sea and on land have been protected by the Executive and by the members of the committee that approved that regulation.

Before I wish the minister well in his efforts to protect the marine environment and deliver what is clearly written in the partnership agreement, I make a plea to him. Indeed, I urge these words of caution on him: please do not sterilise the marine environment, which so many people use for leisure and economic activity. Protect it, but do not sterilise it. As I said, I fully endorse the approach that the minister has outlined. Let us protect the marine environment, but let us make the right choices so that the communities who have lived

with and around that environment on a sustainable basis for centuries can continue to do so for many more years.

15:41

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): If I had seen Alasdair Morrison earlier, I could have saved myself from having to write my speech, because what he said is almost a carbon copy of it.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and I give my full support to the Executive motion. We must do all that we can to protect and preserve our marine environment. However, as Mr Morrison said, as we protect our marine environment we place too many restrictions on onshore developments, which are being delayed or restricted due to the lack of appropriate pollution-control equipment to protect the marine environment. Scottish Water, which has a responsibility to provide that infrastructure, claims that the costs of providing it in remote, rural coastal areas are prohibitive. That may be so but, as a consequence, planning permission for private and commercial developments is regularly delayed. We must consider that issue when we protect the marine environment.

On the west coast, much economic benefit results from tourists, who are attracted by our clean and untouched marine environment. I welcome the stance that has been taken by the Scottish Executive to promote that vision for marine tourism. However, I believe that it has missed one crucial point with regard to the protection of our marine environment on the west coast—the continuing threat that is posed to the Minch by industrial traffic and other hazardous cargoes.

We must remember that the many consultations and strategies that we have established for marine national parks could be lost overnight. If an oil tanker or some other ship carrying hazardous cargoes goes down in the Minch, those consultations and strategies will all have been in vain—that would be sad. Many ships with hazardous cargoes pass by Scotland's coastline every day. It is estimated that a fifth of all UK crude-oil traffic passes through the Minch and many people, not only in my constituency but in communities up and down the coast, from Durness to the Mull of Kintyre and from Barra head to the Butt of Lewis, want to see something done about that.

We have already had two very close shaves in the Minch in the past two years. There was the well-publicised grounding of the nuclear submarine HMS Trafalgar, which hit a lump of rock off the north end of Skye despite the fact that that

vessel had all the navigation aids imaginable. There was also the unfortunate incident involving the cargo ship Jambo, which hit a rock, spilling her cargo of zinc sulphide into the Minch, when it was seven miles off course, off the Summer Isles in Loch Broom.

The Minch is particularly vulnerable to pollution because it is very sheltered and the water flow is very poor. Even a minor incident could have a long-lasting impact. It could take years for an oil slick or other hazardous leak to be dispersed.

In the many answers that I have received to parliamentary questions on the issue, the Executive has always replied by saying that shipping is governed by the International Maritime Organisation and that the Executive is working with the UK Government to ensure that shipping in places such as the Minches and elsewhere is regulated as effectively and safely as possible. I have seen little evidence of any improvement in safety in shipping through the Minch since I left the merchant navy—although it is perhaps a safer place since I came ashore.

My preference is to have a tanker-traffic route west of the Hebrides. There is an established route on the charts west of the Hebrides that could take such shipping, but I understand from Mr Morrison and others that there might be opposition to that suggestion from some quarters. As a compromise, I would like all ships with hazardous cargoes that travel through the Minch to be required to carry transponders so that they can be identified and located instantly. In addition, I support the Highland Council's proposal to insist that all such vessels be required to carry a pilot, whether their passage is northwards or southwards.

As we have heard, the west coast has a first-class marine environment, which the Scottish Executive is right to protect. I commend the Executive's proposals but ask it to take that one extra step to address the hazardous cargoes that pass through the Minch.

15:46

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Today's debate, which marks the beginning of an important journey for Scotland, should have begun a decade ago. I say that not to criticise the Executive, but to congratulate it; it has at last started us down the road to securing the future of the seas that surround Scotland for the generations that will follow us. The journey will not be easy; tough decisions will have to be made and you can bet your boots that someone will be prepared to put the boot in and criticise us if we are thought to be having an impact on their unsustainable practices. If that criticism does not

arise, whatever strategy is deployed, whatever policy is put in place and whatever action plan is implemented, today's debate on securing the future of the seas will, in effect, be a waste of time, because the debate should be controversial, provocative and far reaching. I say that because the future health of Scotland's marine environment will say everything about who we are and how much we care for the planet on which we live. The seas that surround us are of incalculable worth economically, socially and spiritually.

What do we really know about the value of the seas? If we are honest with ourselves, the answer is, "Not very much"; we certainly know a great deal less than we should. The truth is that we live in dreadful ignorance of what could be Scotland's number 1 ecological and economic asset. Our knowledge of the treasures of the sea, its complex ecosystem and how it works is at about the same level as was our knowledge of terrestrial forests at the end of the 19th century. That is why it was so important for the minister to set up the marine subgroup and to establish it within the framework of the sustainable marine environment initiative. The group has begun the job of filling the huge knowledge gap that exists—it is undertaking a project that is aimed at examining the nature, scale and potential of the social, economic and environmental resources in Scottish waters. That work must continue.

The journey along the road to creating a sustainable marine environment for Scotland's territorial waters must be undertaken here, as no one else can do that for us. However, we cannot achieve our goals unless action is also taken on a wider, international front. That is why the work that the European Union initiated on integrated coastal zone management between 1996 and 1999 was so important. It helped to provide technical information about sustainable coastal zone management and started to stimulate a debate about how best to manage coastal zones, which led to the laying down of a requirement for member states to develop and produce national strategies by 2006. In his closing speech, I would like the minister to tell us how close we are to meeting that target.

The challenges that face us with regard to the health of our seas are significant, but they are not insurmountable. The issues go beyond the basics that are laid out by the Executive in its strategic framework document. I would have liked that document to contain much more about challenging the industrial practices that result in dilute acids and organochloride compounds being discharged into the sea; learning from the environmental nightmare of polychlorinated biphenyls; ensuring that we get early control of the synthetic chemicals that mimic natural hormones; acting faster in the control of the highly toxic red-list substances that

do not degrade in water and which accumulate in living organisms; and getting real about dealing with the release of radioactivity into the environment.

John Scott: I am interested to know where organochlorides are discharged into the sea.

Bruce Crawford: Organochlorides come from many chemical processes that go on around the land that we live in, and they are discharged into the sea on many occasions. The website of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs gives a full explanation. The situation is well recognised by the Government, but we have not seen much about it in the framework document.

If the Executive is going to get serious about improving the seas, it should stand shoulder to shoulder with the Irish Government and tell Westminster where to get off when it comes to the environmental tragedy and disgrace that is Sellafield. It should also state unequivocally that it will allow no more Dounreays in Scotland, demonstrating that by saying no to new nuclear power stations.

The marine environment is a large and complex system that involves many overlapping and conflicting interests. We have already heard that a plethora of Government departments—at least 13—and 85 acts of Parliament cover issues to do with the seas. Scottish Environment LINK says that radical reform is needed, that the marine environment is neither integrated nor co-ordinated and that the piecemeal development of marine regulations is to blame. The result is a complex management structure—that is shorthand for an absolute flaming mess. We have to manage an incoherent framework that is not cohesive and which does not deal effectively with what we should be dealing with. If we wanted to create a disaster, what we have at the moment would be the recipe for delivering it. Let us change it.

15:51

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Of course the Conservatives support a sustainable marine development policy and understand the call for a single marine act. Others have discussed marine oil developments, aquaculture, marine renewable technologies and how our ecosystems should interrelate. In the short time that is available to me today, I will make one or two brief points about the management of our inshore fisheries, including shellfish fisheries.

My views on the urgent need to withdraw from the common fisheries policy are well known. The CFP has failed at every level: it has failed to conserve fish stocks; and it has failed to preserve the jobs of our fishermen and processors. Today,

we are talking about that derogated area, which is under our national control. On a future occasion, I hope to go into more detail on how countries that are not party to the CFP, such as the Faroes, operate their overall fisheries more effectively than we do, but today I will confine myself to a few remarks on how they run their inshore fisheries.

Only vessels up to 9 tonnes are allowed within 6 miles of the Faroese coastline. No trawling is allowed within 12 miles of the shore. All vessels more than 24m long have compulsory satellite tracking, so that the Faroese know exactly what is going on in their grounds. Having dedicated zones for very small vessels, for medium sized vessels and for larger vessels not only helps the biodiversity of the local fishery, but means that there is a level at which young fishermen can break in to the industry, even if they have little capital. By encouraging diverse catching methods, including longlining, pair trawling and the midwater trawl, the Faroese ensure the sustainability of all stocks, coastal and otherwise.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I welcome Ted Brocklebank's comments on the Faroese, from whom Scotland has a lot to learn. Can he explain to the chamber and to the country why his party has suddenly taken an interest in the future of our fishing communities after 20-odd years? For 18 of those years, his party was in Government. Why does Michael Howard make fleeting visits to Scotland to say that fishing is his number 1 priority, when not once out of 130 questions to the Prime Minister at question time in the Commons has he mentioned fishing?

Mr Brocklebank: That intervention was not worth while and was not worthy of Richard Lochhead, given that SNP members are such jumping-on-to-the-bandwagon people when it comes to saying that they want out of the CFP. He should get his own house in order before he talks about ours.

As I said, having dedicated zones for small vessels helps young men to break into the industry. The Faroese operate a days-at-sea regime with the compulsory landing of all catches. That means no discards, no black fish and clear evidence of what has been caught. Since adopting that system in 1996, the Faroese have topped every north Atlantic fishery league, including those for economic improvement, fishermen's annual earnings and sustainable biomass levels.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the member give way?

Mr Brocklebank: No, I want to get on.

Ross Finnie has accused CFP sceptics of being afraid to confront the scientists, but far from being afraid to face them, the Faroese take account of all the scientific evidence and then decide how

they will manage their fishing industry. They have discarded international scientific advice in six of the past seven years in favour of their own local science. In the only year in which the Faroese followed the advice of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, the spawning mass declined, but in each of the years in which they set aside that advice, the spawning mass went up.

Mr Ruskell: Does Ted Brocklebank think that we should also learn from the Faroese whaling policy?

Mr Brocklebank: I believe that countries should organise their own fishery systems. If that policy is right and appropriate for the Faroese, the matter should be left up to them. I will say more about how we should manage our local fishery.

The Faroes now has the highest spawning biomass of any north Atlantic country—Greenland comes second, Iceland is third and Norway is fourth. None of those countries is a party to the CFP. The UK comes in at number 8. The body that calculates the biomass is ICES, which is the very body that recommends the cuts. It is little wonder that Jørgen Niclasen, the former Faroese fisheries minister, has said:

"Stocks appear to have gone down in the North Atlantic in direct relation to the countries where the number of fishery scientists has gone up".

It would be foolhardy to ignore the scientists, but we must change the questions that we ask them. That is true just as much for the inshore waters as it is for the deeper waters.

Much can be learned from Shetland, which has some experience of local fishery management through the Shetland Islands regulated fishery regime. Since that regime came into force, the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation has implemented a number of regulations to prevent over-exploitation of stocks within a 6-mile limit. The management plan is underpinned by local data collection and stock assessment that is carried out by Shetland's North Atlantic Fisheries College, which I recently had the privilege of visiting. There is much to commend the idea that has been jointly proposed by the local council and industry members of a Shetland inshore fisheries management area that is based on the shellfish example but which stretches out to a 12-mile limit. That could well be the model for future inshore zonal management around the Scottish coast. The people who know most about sustaining inshore fisheries are the local stakeholders, which includes the environmental interests.

I firmly believe that genuine local management schemes of that kind, not the talking shops that are envisaged in the European Commission's so-called regional advisory committees, offer the most potential to help to regulate fisheries and

thus to bridge the damaging divide that has developed between fishermen, scientists and managers. Post-CFP, that is what the Conservative party will introduce.

15:57

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I will concentrate mainly on the marine framework consultation, which covers many of the issues that have been raised today. As Robin Harper mentioned, under our North sea conference commitment, we are due to implement this year the ecosystem approach to marine management, which will require marine ecosystems to be the starting point of deliberations. However, it is unfortunate that the consultation document puts wildlife and biodiversity last in its section on marine values, after food, energy, ports and shipping and tourism, which suggests that the Scottish Executive's thinking about the sea needs to be turned on its head. As Robin Harper pointed out, the choice is not between the environment or development: if something is environmentally damaging, it is unsustainable, which means that it cannot continue and is ultimately doomed, economically and in every other way. However, I welcome the statement in the consultation that the proposed strategic environmental assessment bill will extend to Scottish territorial waters.

The Green party has stated that we want marine national parks. I do not accept members' comments that the target of two years for the introduction of the first such park will mean that it is a rushed job. Local grass-roots groups are well on the way towards formulating what local people and users of the areas would like from marine national parks. I have met three such groups in my region. Like all local groups, they are strapped for cash and are not well funded, but they have done a great job in bringing together all sorts of users of the marine environment, including people who make a living from tourism and inshore fishing and recreational users. That is a good model of something that has started from the bottom up and that could be built on. I do not want somebody to come in from the top and squash that work—we should build on those initiatives, not brush them aside.

I am concerned about the proposed national coastline park. I am sorry to say that I missed that proposal in the partnership agreement, although I know that it was there because it says so in the consultation document. I am not sure who has been asking for such a park and why. In particular, are coastal communities and the rest of us in danger of getting a national coastline park instead of a marine national park? It sounds to me like a bit of a cop-out, rather than something that would

truly protect the whole marine environment. We cannot separate the coastline from its adjacent marine area. I would be interested to hear what the minister has in mind for the park, because I cannot quite visualise it and I have some concerns about it.

Some members have talked about what we put into the sea. The Greens have talked about zero waste in the context of municipal waste. I propose a zero-waste approach to sewage. We need to develop 21st century systems that treat our sewage properly and discharge clean water rather than raw sewage into our marine environment. I am thinking particularly of situations such as that in Campbeltown where there is a nice new treatment plant, which I believe works—George Lyon will know all about it—and a pumping station that does not work. Whenever the system is overwhelmed with surface water when there is heavy rain—which is not infrequent in Kintyre—raw sewage overflows and has to be pumped out into the harbour. Members who are familiar with Campbeltown Loch will know that it is like a lagoon as it has a narrow entrance. It is just awful to have raw sewage pumped out into such a tourist spot, where there are pontoons for tourist boats to tie up at. There are too many situations like that and I am sure that members know of others. Scottish Water is funded only to play catch-up and is running to stand still instead of keeping up with what is expected of sewage treatment in the 21st century.

Having mentioned Campbeltown, I will leap to something that Nora Radcliffe said about increasing the use of shipping as a mode of transport. The Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry, which is presently in abeyance, is a good means of getting in and out of Campbeltown, which is at the end of a long peninsula otherwise reached only by road. I would like the Executive to pledge a lot of support for that service.

There is a lot of concern about coastal development consent regimes and all the different regulations that apply to projects such as fish farms and energy developments. Rather than making specific piecemeal improvements, for which the consultation document calls, it would be much more useful to have an integrated review of all those regulations. A single marine act could be argued for in that case and I am glad that the minister has indicated that he is at least not entirely hostile to that.

I turn to one or two things that are not in the consultation document, a couple of which should be included and a couple of which are reserved matters but are still relevant to the debate. The first omission, which others have mentioned, is the Crown Estate. I do not see how we can have a consultation on the marine environment that does

not mention the Crown Estate. I have talked to representatives of the Crown Estate. It is a large landlord that has had a regulatory role in licensing fish farms and so on, but it does not really want to have that role and so is quite happy for that to be taken over. However, it still wants to be a landlord and still wants to collect the rent. As far as I can see—someone can correct me if I am wrong about this—its role seems to be entirely extractive. It is taking money out of fragile communities and not putting anything back. As Rob Gibson said, that really has to be tackled, because an unfair burden is being put on fragile communities.

Secondly, I see no mention of giving the Scottish Environment Protection Agency more powers to regulate marine pollution, including biological pollution such as algal blooms and sea lice. SEPA should have powers in that regard and the issue should be taken seriously. Perhaps the aquaculture people would be a bit unhappy about SEPA having more powers to regulate sea lice, but I think that they would probably agree with the need for that. I am possibly one of the shadowy people who criticise fish farms from time to time, although it is not often that I get described as shadowy. I do not deny the economic importance of aquaculture but, like everything else, it has to be carried out in an environmentally sustainable way.

16:04

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands)

(Lab): Many Scots make their living from the sea, whether in the oil industry, fishing, fish farming, leisure and tourism services or the operation of ferries. We are on the threshold of having many more opportunities to use the sea for economic development, just as we are becoming increasingly aware of how precious the marine environment is to us and how its excellence brings economic benefit to us in marketing our fish and shellfish and promoting our tourism. It is of paramount importance that we have a strategy in place that promotes sustainable development in an integrated way.

A fair amount of my time in the previous session of Parliament was taken up with investigating the relationship between aquaculture and the rest of the marine environment, as I was one of the reporters on the subject, along with Robin Harper, on the former Transport and the Environment Committee. When the committee entered the fray, it seemed that firm lines had been drawn in the sand between environmentalists, fish farmers and wild-fish interests. There were outrageous stories in the press and communities in the west Highlands were engaged in civil war. All that obscured the fact that there were large areas of mutual interest that could be explored. We do not

want to have to go over the same ground when it comes to developing offshore renewable energy or examining more critically present usage of the sea.

The ministerial working group that produced the strategic review of aquaculture brought together all stakeholders: fish farmers, wild-fish fisheries, NGOs, local enterprise companies and local authorities. It worked out forums and protocols that would minimise friction and bring us a sustainable aquaculture industry, which I believe we now have. The experience of that working group and in particular the related transfer of planning power over aquaculture from the Crown Estate commissioners to local authorities point the way to how to address the larger picture and engage communities and stakeholders in drawing up a strategic framework for the inshore marine environment. The transfer of aquaculture planning powers focused the minds of local authority planners on the need to plan for offshore development and embrace integrated coastal zone management. That is crucial in the development of our strategy on the marine environment as a whole.

Highland Council has piloted community input into marine development on the west coast of Skye and has drawn my attention to the way in which small communities in Norway decide how they wish the marine environment to be used, which is much the same as the way in which local plans on land are constructed with grass-roots community input and then worked up by the local authority. Over time, local authority planning departments will be able to build up capacity to cope with the marine environment in much more breadth and depth of detail than they do at the minute. Eleanor Scott also mentioned the way in which we should engage people at grass-roots level. In future, we will have to decide on where we should position aquaculture developments, offshore wind farms and wave and tidal energy projects, as well as how we manage our inshore fisheries and leisure facilities. The groundwork for that has already been done and a model has been supplied in the way in which we addressed aquaculture.

As other members have done, I ask the Executive what it considers the Crown Estate commissioners' role to be. In the consultation document, the Crown Estate is mentioned as a consultee, but no mention is made of its role in planning or of the rental that it charges for the use of the sea bed. Many people would welcome clarification from the minister on that.

Another aspect of the development of the marine environment and our coastal communities is the environmental and infrastructure pressure that it will place on our ports and harbours. That,

too, must be seriously addressed in any strategy. There are particular issues in the west Highlands—I mention in passing, as Eleanor Scott did, the problems of the waste-water outfall at Campbeltown. The consultation document also mentions the introduction of double-hulled oil tankers as an environmental safeguard. That is a good thing, of course, but the document does not deal with the financial impact that it has on local authorities. The piers at, for example, Bruichladdich on Islay or Portree on Skye need to be upgraded. Where will the money come from? The Minister for Transport tells me that freight facilities grants are not applicable.

I draw the Executive's attention to the pressure on Oban harbour as an example of my concerns of what could build up over the years. I am sure that the Executive is aware of the conflict between Caledonian MacBrayne and the fishermen over the proposals for a new linkspan to serve the communities of the Argyll islands. That is only one of the problems that Oban harbour has. It has to cope with lighthouse ships, an increasing number of CalMac ferries, fishing boats, well boats for the aquaculture industry, cruise liners, diving boats, small pleasure boats, sea-life cruises, local yachtsmen and increasing numbers of visiting yachtsmen, particularly from Europe, whom we want to attract to west coast waters. The harbour cannot cope with those pressures as it is, and serious investment is needed to provide berthing facilities to all who require them now and in the future, when we will no doubt add boats servicing offshore renewable energy projects to the list.

I realise that the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development cannot deal with those questions, but I would welcome a commitment from him that he will convey those concerns to the Minister for Transport, who is responsible for non-fishery ports. The business of addressing port development seems overly difficult and bureaucratic. I want the sustainable development of our ports and harbours to happen in conjunction with the sustainable development of our marine environment.

I hope that the Executive will give strong national guidelines on how we deal with the marine environment and with our harbours and ports and I hope that the details will be left to local authorities, in conjunction with communities, as long as they have up-to-date socioeconomic and scientific information on which to base their decisions.

16:10

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):

In his opening speech, the minister referred to the vastness of the sea and to some of the problems of litter and pollution that are caused by the fact

that far too many people treat the sea as a bottomless dump where, once everything is out of sight, it is out of mind. That attitude of treating the sea as an endless sink for all our wastes is often exhibited by individuals, but I fear that it is also exhibited by Government and Government organisations.

My friends Roseanna Cunningham and Bruce Crawford both referred to discharges from Sellafield, which is in effect a Government plant. Those discharges particularly affect shellfish, not just along the Cumbrian coast but right along the Solway and up the west coast of Scotland and they will continue to do so for many years to come, long after Sellafield is closed down.

I wish to address the attitude of the Ministry of Defence. I could not detect a mention of the MOD in the consultation document, but I think that it needs to be consulted, simply as a Government department. Over several decades, the MOD's attitude has been to treat the sea as a dump for everything that it has found a bit unpleasant. I will cite three examples relating to Dumfries and Galloway.

One example goes back to immediately after the second world war. I accept that that was a much less enlightened era on the part of everyone. Huge quantities of surplus munitions existed and it was felt that the best way to get rid of them was by taking them to a particularly deep trench of the Irish sea, called Beaufort's dyke. One of the problems, particularly on a Friday night or in a rough sea, was that the people who were taking the high explosives and phosphorous devices out to Beaufort's dyke, which is a fair way off the coast, did not really fancy going out there; they wanted to get back to the pub or to get away from the rough seas, so they just dumped the things as soon as they were out of sight of land. We are suffering the consequences of that now, as phosphorous devices have been washed up on the Ayrshire coast for many years and they will continue to be washed up there for many years to come.

That was many years ago, but it was symptomatic of a mindset that existed among certain people, including certain officials in the Ministry of Defence, which I think exists to this day: if we dump something in the sea, it does not really matter, particularly if it does not exhibit any visible pollution.

The second example that I want to deal with is much more recent. I refer to the Luce bay maritime bombing range in Wigtownshire. At the time of the Kosovo conflict, which was not all that long ago, it was decided that the Royal Air Force, which normally used and tested cluster bombs at low level, and whose pilots had been trained to do so, would no longer do so. Although war might still be

acceptable to some people, it is no longer acceptable to politicians to incur the losses among RAF personnel that often result from flying at low level. It was therefore decided to bomb from a high level. However, as cluster bombs are not designed for high-level bombing, the RAF had to test out whether the bombs would work effectively if dropped from that level.

Cluster bombs are old technology, despite the fact that we have been reading a lot about them in the press recently. The MOD had run out of test bombs, so it had to drop high explosive—the real thing—in Luce bay. That was fine and the high-explosive test bombs were dropped. Cluster bombs divide into about 70 bits, each of them highly explosive—that is their whole purpose. Once they were dropped and it was discovered that they worked fine, the question arose what to do with them after that. It is almost impossible to find them all. That is far too difficult to do, even if the bombs are stable. Therefore, the bombs that were found had to be covered over with concrete, and that concrete will have to be renewed every so often, until the end of time—or until the MOD forgets about them. In addition, a small fishing exclusion zone was placed around each bit of concrete.

That is a classic example of the MOD's total lack of concern for the marine environment or for those who gain their livelihood from it. We are now in an even worse situation, in that the MOD has closed the range and ended permanent employment there. Although the MOD has retained the right to fly in whenever it wants to drop something, the area has lost the few jobs that went with the range. We are left with all the disadvantages but none of the advantages that might have meant that some members of the local community would have been prepared to accept the range on an ongoing basis.

The third and last example of the MOD's cavalier attitude towards the marine environment is what happens at the firing range at Dundrennan, further east along the Solway coast, where the MOD test fires depleted uranium shells. Given the restrictions on my time, however, I will not be able to go into this example in quite the same detail. To date, 7,000 of those shells have been fired into the Solway, but the MOD has not managed to retrieve any of them. It sent a test rig out to search for the shells but managed to lose the test rig as well.

Depleted uranium shells have a half-life of 4.5 million years. We are told that we should be grateful for that because it means that they are not very radioactive. On the other hand, that means they will be slightly radioactive for 4.5 million years. That is not the kind of attitude that we should be requiring from our Government in this day and age. It beggars belief that 7,000 depleted

uranium shells can be dumped less than a mile offshore. If someone dumped 7,000 cans of past-their-sell-by-date baked beans in a lay-by, the council would be down on them like a ton of bricks, but it seems that it is okay to dump 7,000 DU shells.

If there is to be sustainable management of our marine environment, everybody has to sign up to that and be liable under its regulation. That requirement has to include the MOD, which has treated the sea as a repository for its junk for far too long.

16:16

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Nothing is more important than sustainable development. The debate takes me back to others that have been held on different aspects of sustainable development. A number of debates were held on national parks and the setting up of the first national park at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. I am well aware of the issues that have been raised in respect of the need to balance the socioeconomic and environmental considerations. I continue to go along with the sentiment that was expressed in the national park consultation document that, ultimately, the environmental considerations are the most important ones. Every member who has spoken in the debate seems to be in tune with that sentiment.

The partnership document includes a commitment to

“a national coastline park and marine national parks”,

but I agree with my colleague Sarah Boyack that Robin Harper was a little quick off the mark in his attempt to establish a marine national park within the timescale that he outlined in his amendment. We want a good job to be done; I think that, in the end, Robin Harper accepts that.

Robin Harper: We are not suggesting that the whole of Scotland should become a marine national park or that we should address the whole of our marine environment in one go. We are talking about one tiny wee national park that would serve as an example and from which we could learn. That is what we set out in our amendment.

Dr Jackson: Robin Harper will remember that, in her reply to his intervention, Sarah Boyack made the very good point that when we set up the Cairngorms national park and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, it was important that we first laid out the general principles from which we could move on to address individual parks. Following on from Sarah Boyack's argument, if the Green party is going to go down that route, I suggest that the timescale will be longer than that which Robin Harper wants us to accept.

I want quickly to address some of the many points that have been made in the debate and to introduce some new ones. There is no debate about the richness of Scotland's firths and coasts and inshore water and we have discussed its wildlife, biodiversity, breeding sea birds and so forth.

Many members commented on the diversity of uses of our marine environment. In particular, Alasdair Morgan spoke about his constituency concerns with regard to the Ministry of Defence. I accept that his concerns are real and have to be taken on board; as a former chemistry teacher, I am only too aware of the dangers of phosphorous compounds.

Rob Gibson made some good points too when he spoke about the various shipping disasters, including the Braer disaster. He also spoke about another disaster in which vinyl acetate was spilt. I think that it was Bruce Crawford who mentioned dilute acid spills. There are grave concerns about navigation.

Members have made other points about activities that are related to, for example, wave and wind energy. We need to consider such matters in a more integrated way, taking account of aquaculture and the other industries that use our waters. The main message that has come out of the debate is that an integrated approach is currently lacking. Of course, as the minister said, the point of the consultation is to bring together all those aspects so that we can take a much more integrated approach.

Sarah Boyack and the minister mentioned the seminar that RSPB Scotland and the Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland held yesterday—I am sure that some MSPs attended it—to launch their report “Making the Case for Marine Spatial Planning in Scotland”. The report, which is the result of independent research by David Tyldesley and Associates, makes good points about how marine planning should be developed, just as planning in relation to land has developed—although there will obviously be differences in how we tackle marine spatial planning because there are differences between the marine environment and the land environment. The report makes the point that the UK has already started to consider the matter as a result of the marine stewardship report, “Safeguarding our Seas—A Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Development of our Marine Environment”. In 2002 a Scottish coastal forum seminar took place, but we need to build on that and really get going.

The minister has indicated that he is supportive of marine spatial planning. Members have the briefing paper from Scottish Environment LINK, which recommends that marine spatial planning should be a statutory process and gives details of

that—I see that Robin Harper is nodding; he knows that that would be a productive approach. I could say quite a lot more, but I think that it is time to wind up. The briefing paper makes suggestions about how we should approach the matter. The essential point, which the SNP keeps missing, is that international, European, regional and local planning must come together to contribute to a marine spatial planning policy.

I am running out of time, so I finish by saying that I welcome the consultation document and the report from RSPB Scotland and the RTPi. I ask members to support the motion.

16:23

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The debate has been interesting and there has been a good deal of consensus, particularly on two issues. First, we agree that the marine environment is important—who can argue with that? Secondly, we agree that there is a problem that centres on the need to review the legislation and perhaps to consider creating a single marine act in the months or years ahead.

Several members, especially Roseanna Cunningham and Nora Radcliffe, have waved a copy of the excellent document produced by WWF Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, “The Tangle of the Clyde”. The document provides a good analysis of the problems of competition between narrow sectoral interests in the marine environment. If we are to unpick that tangle, we will need a vision and I hope that the consultation on a strategic framework for the marine environment will provide that vision. Vision is needed if we are to address economic, environmental and social objectives in an integrated way and an ecosystem approach must be at the heart of that.

Four things will help to unpick the tangle. First, we need a lead body on marine issues. I disagree with the Tories about that, as it is important that a lead body should exist to oversee activities in the marine environment. However, I agree with the Tories that such a body would have to report directly to a marine minister. Perhaps it is time for Sergeant Wilson to be upgraded to Admiral Wilson and to become our first minister of the seas.

The second thing that we need to unpick the tangle is a marine strategy. Perhaps the minister will address that point in his closing remarks. I am not sure of the difference between a strategic framework for the marine environment and a marine strategy. My understanding is that a strategy comes out of a framework and has targets, an implementation plan, timescales and a review mechanism. That is what we need in order to take the vision on, to deliver it and to ensure

accountability not only between the Executive and stakeholders, but between stakeholders.

The third thing that we need is spatial planning—we have heard a lot of discussion about that this afternoon and Sylvia Jackson talked about it a moment ago. There are many good reasons why we need spatial planning, and fin-fish aquaculture is a good example. We are in an environment in which narrow sectoral interests compete against one another. Although it may be okay for Alasdair Morrison to defend the narrow sectoral interests of the aquaculture industry, I hope that ministers will take a much more balanced view and will seek to balance the aquaculture industry with the salmon fishing industry, which is at least as important as the salmon farming industry in terms of jobs and the environment.

Another issue that relates to spatial planning is renewables. We have huge potential for offshore renewables—many members mentioned that in the debate, including Sarah Boyack, Roseanna Cunningham and the minister. At this point, I will pick on the Tories, because they assume that if wind farms go offshore, there will be no environmental impacts. However, offshore wind farms could have, and probably will have, environmental impacts. The key question is how we manage those impacts and the way to do that is with spatial planning. Sarah Boyack and others are right—we need to learn from what has happened with onshore wind farms and we need proper spatial planning for the development of renewables on the coastline of Scotland. Lastly on spatial planning, Rob Gibson and Alasdair Morgan spoke eloquently about the MOD's complete lack of accountability for its activities in Scotland, especially in the dumping of waste and used shells and in the bombing ranges. The MOD must be brought into a spatial planning regime.

The fourth thing that we need to unpick the tangle of the seas is local management. In whatever structure we have, we need to incorporate the people who base their livelihoods on the sea, whether that is in fishing, tourism or conservation. The work of the firth partnerships has been crucial in creating local management and discussion around our important marine environment.

How do we take the process forward? A marine national park is one way, because rather than fiddling about with legislation, we need to establish a culture of integrated working along our coastlines and in our marine environment between various bodies and stakeholders. That will take time to achieve, but we need to start now by getting people to work in an integrated way. If we establish a marine national park sooner rather than later, we will start to unpack those issues and

to explore and establish positive ways of working. Let us jump in and try it. The only debate seems to be about when the marine national park will happen, but given that it is included in the partnership agreement, we are talking about a difference of only four months. We are asking for a marine national park to be established by 2006 and the Executive is saying 2007. Surely we can get something going before the end of the session and we can then start to get back to the communities with which Eleanor Scott and many other MSPs are in contact, which are demanding a marine national park right here, right now.

Alongside that, we need to conduct a legislative review. I urge MSPs today to support our amendment. Let us take the first step on integrated working. Let us opt for a marine national park, and let us at least start the process.

16:29

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The debate has been revealing, with many excellent contributions. Indeed, we now have a new Tory position on the common fisheries policy, as explained by Alex Johnstone, which is unilateral negotiation. In most people's language, I think that that means, "We are leaving whether you like it or not." The Tories' policy on Europe is now revealed. It beggars belief that they can sustain their argument that they do not intend to leave the European Union.

I welcome the Scottish Executive's consultation on establishing either a national coastline park or locally managed marine parks, and on the strategic framework. The Liberal Democrats' view is that a single national coastline park is not the right way forward. Managing Scotland's entire coastline and marine waters from Edinburgh makes little sense and I do not see how that proposal could be supported. Locally managed marine parks, such as that which has been talked about for the waters off the coast of Argyll, have some merit, although I remain to be convinced that this is the next step that must be taken—as the Greens are insisting—by 2006. I am not against such parks in principle, but there are other issues that need to be tackled long before we introduce another organisation to manage our coastline waters. The marine environment is very important to my constituency for marine environmental tourism, fish farming and the fishing industry—all of which have a vital role in ensuring the economic success and prosperity of my constituents. The question is how we can balance the interests of those three or four groups. I will give a couple of examples of what needs to be tackled before we begin the bigger discussion about a new organisation such as a marine park.

First is the management of our inland coastal waters. One of the big disputes in the Clyde is between the static-gear fishermen and the trawlermen. There are huge problems and conflicts that need to be resolved and managed, and that is of major concern to both sides of the industry. Gear conflict is a significant problem in the Loch Fyne fishing waters, with accusations on both sides of towing of gear. Some court actions have now been taken, as the breakdown between the two sectors has led to the police becoming involved. It is clear that the conflict can be resolved only by local agreement. We cannot implement a national agreement and force it on the parties.

That is not to say that the Scottish Executive does not have a key role to play. If nothing else, it needs to haud the jaickets while the discussions are going on. The situation may also require further powers to be created so that, if a local agreement is reached, the Executive will have the powers to enforce it. I wonder whether the minister could update us on the progress that the Scottish inshore fisheries advisory group has made on the issue. That will be important in trying to resolve the conflict between the two sides of the industry.

The other major issue that needs to be tackled as quickly as possible is the regulation of the fish-farming industry. There is an urgent need to make progress on the relocation of fish farms away from the mouths of estuaries. New sites must be provided in deeper, faster-running waters to help to break the disease cycle and to allow proper fallowing regimes that will help to improve the environment below the cages. That agenda is vital in getting the balance right between the interests of environmental tourism, the wild fish interests—there is concern about the drop-off in salmon stocks—and the fish-farming industry, which recognises that it needs to move to a system of rotation around the cages to break the disease cycle, especially the lice problem.

I believe that that agenda is being frustrated by the number of bodies that currently regulate the sector—nine at the last count. There is a commitment in the partnership agreement to reduce the number of those bodies. I ask the minister to reveal, in summing up, what progress has been made towards meeting that objective. That is fundamental if we are to make progress on meeting the concerns of the environmental sector and the needs of the fish-farming industry. I suggest that we make a start by getting rid of the Crown Estate and giving control of the sea bed back to this Parliament. Perhaps the minister can comment on that in winding up.

Before embarking on the creation of another body to manage coastal areas and marine waters, whether from Edinburgh or through local

management, surely the first step must be to simplify what is already there. Then we will be in a position to take the next step towards developing marine national parks. I therefore ask the minister to update members on what progress he is making to deliver the commitments that are already agreed between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats and to simplify the management of our inshore waters and marine environment.

16:35

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): Recently, we had a debate on Scotland's bathing beaches, in which I highlighted the splendour of some of the Hebridean and north isles beaches that, sadly, the majority of our population never sets eyes on. Now, I have another chance to talk about the rest of our truly amazing coastline and the marine environment.

There is plenty of it. The coastline of Argyll alone, believe it or not, is longer than that of the whole of France. No wonder other European countries are jealous of what we possess, and they are equally jealous of the fishing grounds that lie off our shores. Our coastal seas, apart from supporting huge numbers of species of wildlife and exotic flora and fauna, have also been a mainstay of the existence and prosperity of generations of individuals and communities dating back thousands of years. I have often visited the shell middens that can be found in Hebridean sand dunes—huge piles of sea shells that are the remnants of man's fodder from earlier times—and I have visited fish markets from Stornoway to Peterhead, where evidence of our rich marine bounty lies in ice boxes at the start of the processing chain that gives so many people in Scotland their livelihoods and their nourishment.

I would like to think that, despite the ravages of common fisheries policy management, Scottish people have managed our seas reasonably sensibly and sustainably. Fishermen know that if they trawl the same line of mud too often it may decimate the future prawn stocks, and that if they take too much out of one shoal of fish they are liable to decimate fish stocks in the area for some time.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan)

(SNP): Will Jamie McGrigor take the opportunity to correct a statement that was made by his colleague Mr Brocklebank? If he casts his mind back to the debate in January 1972, he may recall that Donald Stewart of the SNP opposed fishing being part of our accession to the European Union. That, of course, was our historic opposition, long before Mr Brocklebank had even decided which party he was in, far less which policy he would have.

Mr McGrigor: I really do not see how that has anything to do with the speech that I am making.

Sustainability is about leaving enough for future generations, and that is what has been wrong with European management. It has been a question of far too many people fighting for the biggest slices of a cake that is limited in size. That kind of management has shown scant regard for the future and that is why it must now be changed. Local people with practical knowledge and a stake in the management of our coastal waters are much more likely to manage the marine environment well if they know that there is a future not only for young fish, but for their young fishermen and fish farmers.

As sustainability is, at present, the new black, I had better also use the other fashionable word: biodiversity. In layman's terms, of course, that means recognising what is around us and making the most of it while leaving something for the future. Environmentalists want that and fishermen want that, so why has a rift developed, with some conservationists distrusting some fishermen and vice versa? I am certain of one thing—that the fishing people who have lived and worked in our coastal regions for generations, and the harvests that they have taken from our coastal waters, have not destroyed the environment. In fact, scientists and environmentalists should take more note of the practical wisdom and experience of those already in situ.

Generally speaking, the damage to environments, shore based and marine, comes from concentrated industries and monocultures. I refer specifically to the land-based monoculture of thousands of acres of Sitka spruce. When it grows up in canopies, it is destructive, because it blocks off the light and food from everything below. Far better is a mixture of different kinds of trees in smaller plantations. In the marine world, we have witnessed the growth of fin-fish farming, which threatened to turn farmed salmon into the monoculture of the marine environment. However, I am glad to say that such fishing now seems to be diversifying into different sorts of fin-fish and shellfish aquaculture, as well as salmon.

The waters of Loch Fyne used to hold huge native oyster beds but, sadly, they no longer exist in any quantity. Nowadays, farmed oysters from Loch Fyne can be consumed in the famous Loch Fyne oyster bar, either in the restaurant or—as plotting Government ministers do—in the car park.

It is always much healthier to have variety, but in the marine world variety is truly the spice of life. Different modes of exploitation defend their own interests and, in so doing, protect species that depend on them.

Another exotic word that I believe in is subsidiarity, which should apply to the management of coastal waters. Subsidiarity is the principle that a central authority should have a subsidiary function and should perform only those tasks that cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. When we have withdrawn from the CFP, we will be wise to consider the Faroese system, which Ted Brocklebank mentioned, and how we might return the practical management of our fisheries to local levels.

People attack different methods of fishing. Some will claim that trawling for prawns takes too big a haul and that prawn creels are the answer, but the trawlerman will complain that creel boats fish 24 hours a day and are allowed to fish far too many creels. Fishermen will always use the best method that is available—the best legal method, I should say.

The best form of control is effort limitation that includes horsepower limits for vessels and takes the size of the vessel into the equation. The secretary of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, Hamish Morrison, recently told me that, if oil hits \$50 a barrel, many fishermen might stop bottom trawling and return to less energy-demanding methods of fishing that are less based on the power of the boat. Therefore, the future may change quicker than we think.

I am all for conserving our rich marine environment. It existed before the common fisheries policy and it can exist again. However, let us never forget the part that people have always played within the marine mosaic. What is the point of a fishery if it is not sustainable enough to produce a harvest?

16:42

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Allan Wilson made his customary attack on the SNP when he opened proceedings, but I will surprise him by saying that I very much welcome today's debate, which has been quite well attended by members from across the parties. It may be dark and Gothic here in the Hub, but the sun is shining outside and I am in a good mood, so I will not rise to the bait that he dangled in front of me. One thing that I will say is that we have waited five years for this debate.

The fact that over half of our MSPs represent areas that have a coastline is a valuable asset because it means that many members take an interest in our marine environment. Today's debate is a much better use of our time than the two debates on beaches that we have had in the past few months. We have finally been given the opportunity to debate an important subject.

It is fair that many members referred to their constituencies, given the number of people in Scotland who, down the centuries and today, have been and are dependent on our marine environment. As a member for North East Scotland, I represent a constituency that includes Aberdeen, which is Europe's oil and gas capital. We have working harbours in Aberdeen, Dundee, Montrose and elsewhere. Up until recently—I doubt that this is still the case—the Buchan fishing ports were the biggest white-fish ports in the whole of Europe. We also have many other fishing communities and former fishing communities on our coastline.

As several members mentioned, the marine environment is also being put to new uses, such as renewable energy and marine wildlife tourism, which is growing. That is why the marine environment will continue to be an important topic of debate. Other members highlighted the social value of the marine environment. As Scotland's national Parliament, we must remember that the marine environment has shaped Scotland's national identity to a great extent and has inspired much of our culture.

Finally, we need to remember the marine environment's wider environmental importance, which is perhaps the crux of today's debate. As several members reminded us, Scotland's seas contain over 8,000 species of wildlife. That represents 50 per cent of our country's biodiversity.

We should welcome the European legislation that has flowed from Brussels over the past 30 years. To a great extent, Europe has made successive Governments and the Scottish Parliament get their act together by providing leadership. As Alasdair Morgan pointed out, one of the impetuses behind that legislation has been to try to force society and the human race to change how we treat our seas and rivers. We must not use them as bins. In an eloquent speech, Alasdair Morgan highlighted the MOD's appalling track record on that.

Key to any successful strategy for managing the marine environment is the level at which decisions are taken. That was a strong theme throughout many of the speeches that we heard today. We must take the right decisions at local, national, European and global level. The local level is very important, because—as many members have said—we must resolve local conflicts. That can be achieved by bringing stakeholders together. The SNP welcomes some of the initiatives that have been taken in the first five years of the Parliament's existence, particularly those relating to fisheries and areas such as aquaculture. We also welcome the current consultation on inshore fisheries.

The Parliament has a very important national role to play. First, we must address the complexity of the 85 acts and 13 bodies that regulate our marine environment. The current set-up is far too complex and confusing, and it is not efficient. As a national Parliament, we must address that. A marine act may be one way of doing so.

Secondly, we must ensure that the Parliament has the powers that it needs to influence the marine environment. We must take appropriate powers from elsewhere in Europe and bring them to Scotland, so that we can take the appropriate decisions at this level. If those powers come to the Scottish Parliament, we can further devolve them to our local communities. Many members would support that.

The theme of the common fisheries policy has cropped up, of course. I believe that all members think that it is ludicrous that in a large Europe of 25 states, decisions about the future of our fishing communities—

Mr Brocklebank: Will the member give way?

Richard Lochhead: I will take a brief intervention.

Mr Brocklebank: I was interested to hear that the SNP's resident memory man, Stewart Stevenson, had to go back to the days of Donald Stewart to find someone who had proposed coming out of the CFP before the present mass conversion. Can Richard Lochhead explain to us why the SNP's Westminster leader, Alex Salmond, has withdrawn his private member's debate on fisheries, scheduled for this Friday? Why has he instead chosen to debate the European constitution? Surely such an obvious electoral ploy does not say much about the SNP's long-term commitment to the fishing industry.

Richard Lochhead: I inform the member that, all being well, the debate on fisheries will take place in the House of Commons on 16 July. Perhaps Conservative members in the House of Commons could sign the SNP motion to ensure that that happens—we would welcome the Tories' support.

The common fisheries policy is an important issue. Subsidiarity—ensuring that the right decisions are taken at the right level—is another theme that has been raised. A few months ago, the Scottish Executive ministers and Labour and Liberal members of the Parliament said that the previous reform of the common fisheries policy was satisfactory, but even they have changed their position. They are now talking about having powerful regional management and regional bodies that have teeth. That is a change in policy. No doubt, it has something to do with the elections to the European Parliament, which are only a couple of weeks away.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Richard Lochhead: I would love to take an intervention, but I cannot as I have only two minutes left.

Members from all parties recognise that the common fisheries policy is not working—that is why it must be scrapped.

I turn to the leaflet advertising the Government's consultation, which is entitled "Scotland's Seas: your chance to have your say" and indicates that the consultation process will run until July. Much of this debate has revolved around the themes that are outlined in the leaflet. The leaflet contains seven bullet points that indicate why the seas are important to Scotland. The first relates to biodiversity, the second to "fishing-related jobs" and the third to the fact that we land so much fish in Scotland. We do not have enough power over the last two areas, because decisions about European fishing policy are taken in London.

The fourth point states that our seas support

"£21 billion of UK offshore oil and gas production".

As we are all aware, decisions about that are also taken in London. The fifth point refers to the fact that there are

"5.5 million passenger and 90 million tonnes of freight movements through Scottish ports".

Ports legislation is also reserved to London, as are matters relating to the shipping that passes through Scottish waters.

The sixth point refers to the fact that 90 per cent of UK-farmed fish, with a value of £700 million, comes from Scotland, but the Crown Estate Commission is also reserved to London. The final point deals with tourism, for which this Parliament has responsibility.

Of the seven reasons that the seas are so important to Scotland, five relate to issues that are decided in the London Parliament, rather than in Scotland's Parliament. That is why the SNP takes trying to acquire powers for the Parliament so seriously—so that we can implement a proper strategy for protecting Scotland's marine environment. All that we require is leadership from the minister—for which we will continue to press—and for the Executive to join the SNP in seeking to acquire the necessary powers for the Parliament, so that we can make a real difference to protecting our marine environment.

16:49

Allan Wilson: Inevitably, this has been a wide-ranging debate. It is difficult for me to know where to begin and how to respond.

I am grateful that there has been no nationalist whingeing about why we are discussing this issue again. I should be grateful that SNP members have learned from their mistakes—we should welcome all conversions, and I welcome that of Richard Lochhead.

I welcome Jamie McGrigor's very recent conversion to obeying the law. I think that he can say goodbye to signing up as a deckhand on the SS Swinney as it sails off into the sunset to challenge the CFP. I also welcome his conversion to conserving biodiversity. At my request, the Scottish biodiversity forum has been developing proposals for a strategy on protecting biodiversity. The strategy and implementation plans will be launched on 25 May.

Contrary to Robin Harper's assertion, the Executive puts ecology first. In fact, we do so in the motion under debate. The only response that I would make is that ecology also involves people; it is not a one-way street.

To Mark Ruskell, I say that we take a balanced approach to aquaculture. The Greens—especially Robin Harper in his speech—have taken an imbalanced approach. FIFG support is for generic salmon market development. The Food Standards Agency, which is the acknowledged expert in the field, advises that levels of contaminants in farmed salmon are no threat to human health and that the report that Robin Harper mentioned has been widely discredited in the scientific community. As a result, I make no apologies for my defence of the aquaculture industry.

Robin Harper: Does the minister agree that the Green members' response was absolutely measured? We never used the word "toxic" and, contrary to certain accusations, I did not respond irresponsibly on the radio, on television or in the press. All we ask is that the Executive should make the science clear and ask the FSA to report to us. We are still waiting for those figures.

Allan Wilson: My criticism of the Greens was that they naively jumped into a vacuum in the absence of scientific evidence that supported their case. Indeed, I think that they were also duped by the people who put together the money to produce that widely discredited scientific report. I shall put it no more strongly than that, because I agree with everything else that the Greens' amendment sets out, apart from the imposition of a 2006 deadline.

It is unfortunate that George Lyon is no longer in the chamber, because I wanted to tell him that tomorrow we will publish a consultation paper on the strategic review of in-shore fisheries, which will be developed jointly between the Executive and the Scottish inshore fisheries advisory group. The paper will embody all the themes that have been referred to this afternoon, including sustainability,

stakeholder participation and proportionate regulation. We will examine the matter not just at EU level, but at an internal level, for example in the form of no-take zones. Lamlash in my constituency was mentioned in that respect. As part of our consideration, we intend jointly to examine the Clyde, which George Lyon's constituency and my constituency share.

It is unfortunate and disappointing that some members—principally on the Conservative benches—have missed the point of the debate and have chosen instead to trot out the usual mantra that withdrawal from the CFP offers a solution to everything and anything. As members know, I do not believe that, and it is a mistake to put it above all the benefits that being a member of the EU brings. I am always suspicious of those who claim that if we could only do things like some other country—usually a small one—everything would be okay. In this case, the small country is the Faroes.

That is Mr Brocklebank's cue.

Mr Brocklebank: Has the minister actually visited the Faroes to have a look at its industry? Not only that, has he visited the Shetland island of Whalsay, whose people have regularly invited him to come and have a look at the disaster that the CFP has created for them?

Allan Wilson: I have not been to the moon, but I know that it is not made of cheese. Mr Finnie and I are open-minded about practices on the Faroes. As Mr Brocklebank knows, the number 10 strategy unit visited the Faroes to examine those very practices; we are considering the unit's report in that context. Applying Faroese practices does not mean withdrawing from the CFP. To suggest otherwise is illogical and a non sequitur.

As Sylvia Jackson and other members said, there are balances to be struck between reserved and devolved matters. In that context, I mentioned the Jambo earlier. John Farquhar Munro and Alasdair Morrison expressed concerns about shipping traffic. The Executive continues to liaise with the UK Government in our efforts to ensure that shipping in the Minches and elsewhere around Scotland is regulated as effectively and safely as possible. On that point, I part company with Roseanna Cunningham and the SNP. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. There is far too much noise when the minister is speaking.

Allan Wilson: Roseanna Cunningham suggests that we take control of all marine-related matters that are currently reserved, but the SNP has not thought that through. If we did as the SNP suggests, we would, in effect, be seeking to unpick the devolution settlement in terms of the Government's wider responsibility to renegotiate

international agreements, which would not necessarily benefit us. For example, merchant shipping acts, which are reserved, provide the legal basis for the national contingency plan for marine pollution from shipping and offshore installations. Many members mentioned that, because it concerns them. Those shipping acts give effect to international conventions and national contingency plans, and provide for co-ordinated, effective, UK-wide responses to marine pollution emergencies.

As Sarah Boyack said, ignoring the English dimension—or taking the UK out of the picture, as Roseanna Cunningham said—would not provide an effective solution to co-ordinating effective action against marine pollution incidents in international waters.

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: No. I have only two minutes left.

Bruce Crawford said something that was half right—members will not hear me say that every week. We must consider our research. Clearly, climate change will have an important effect on sea levels and marine biodiversity. With our support, the UK is on course to meet its Kyoto target. Through the Scottish climate change programme, which we shall review later this year, we are contributing to the UK's Kyoto obligation and to a reduction in our domestic greenhouse gas and carbon dioxide emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland have fallen by 3 per cent since the base year. That achievement is set against a 23 per cent growth in the Scottish economy since 1990 and it compares favourably with that of other EU member states. We can be justifiably proud of that.

I thank all members for their contributions to the debate. I have tried to deal with as many of the points that were raised as I could in the available time. If I have not got through them all, I will try to get back to members about them.

I will finish with a question that is topical and, to a certain extent, rhetorical. What about the day after tomorrow? We should all be working for a Scottish marine environment that is clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse and which, through sustainable management, will continue to support the interests of nature and of people. I have heard nothing in the debate that would gainsay that. I look forward to Parliament's subsequent endorsement of that vision, so that the day after tomorrow will be one that future generations, too, can enjoy.

Point of Order

Margo MacDonald: Further to—

The Presiding Officer: No. You have finished, Mrs MacDonald—you have had your cut.

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I have considered the point of order that Mrs MacDonald raised earlier this afternoon. I have made inquiries and I understand that tomorrow's visit to Holyrood was organised over the past month by the builders, Bovis Lend Lease, and the architects, RMJM, and that it was merely facilitated by the Parliament's media office. I am also informed that *Building Design* magazine did not respond by the closing date of 7 May and that Mr Wilson did not contact the Parliament until shortly before Mrs MacDonald's point of order this afternoon.

I do not believe that Mrs MacDonald has made a point of order, nor do I believe it to be appropriate to name individuals in the way that she has done. The right course of action in future is to approach my private office, where the door is always open to members.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer. I draw your attention to the motion on the consultative steering group's key principles, which was moved by Mr Henry McLeish. It stated that

"the spirit of the CSG key principles"

should be incorporated into the understanding and standing orders of this Parliament. The principles are sharing power, accountability, accessibility and equal opportunities.

The person who was asked to report for the leading building magazine in this country is an accredited journalist by any other name, in that he has written serious articles for serious journals. He was denied and censured—

The Presiding Officer: You have made your point—conclude quickly, please.

Margo MacDonald: He was denied and censured by architects employed by this Parliament. Who is the master in this house: the architect or the Parliament?

The Presiding Officer: Sit down, please.

Accredited journalists would usually contact the people who are facilitating tours earlier than 1.30 this afternoon—Mr Wilson had a month so to do. I have given the grounds for my decision and I say to Mrs MacDonald that I believe that such matters are far better handled discreetly through my private office, where matters can be discussed, rather than raised suddenly and obliquely in the chamber.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-1332, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I think that members will find that helpful and that that will be an adequacy of time.

Motion agreed to.

17:01

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Patricia Ferguson): A number of members have indicated a wish to speak on the motion on the Civil Partnership Bill, which is to be taken on Thursday 3 June. To that end, it is my intention to try to safeguard an hour for the debate on that issue. I will, if necessary, come back to Parliament with a revised business motion if it proves that that is the right course of action.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 2 June 2004

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish National Party Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 3 June 2004

9.30 am Executive Debate on the Economy of the Highlands and Islands

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.00 pm Question Time—
Environment and Rural
Development;
Health and Community Care;
General Questions

3.00 pm Stage 1 Debate on the Tenements (Scotland) Bill

followed by Motion on the Civil Partnership Bill - UK Legislation

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 9 June 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

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Patricia Ferguson to move motions S2M-1333 and S2M-1334, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2004 Amendment Order 2004 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Health Professions (Operating Department Practitioners and Miscellaneous Amendments) Order 2004 be approved.—
[Patricia Ferguson.]

The Presiding Officer: The question on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business.

I remind members that, in relation to this morning's debate on health issues, if the amendment in the name of Malcolm Chisholm is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Shona Robison and Carolyn Leckie will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-1326.4, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1326, in the name of David McLetchie, on health issues, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 71, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendments in the names of Shona Robison and Carolyn Leckie fall.

The next question is, that motion S2M-1326, in the name of David McLetchie, on health issues, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)

Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
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 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
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 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 69, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament commends staff across the NHS for the quality improvements achieved over the last five years, the new forms of activity such as nurse-led clinics and the progress being made towards a six-month maximum wait for in-patient treatment by the end of 2005; notes that progress has been made at the same time as the working hours of medical and other staff have been brought into line with accepted norms; commends recent initiatives to tackle long out-patient waiting times, and supports further reform of NHSScotland through the development of community health partnerships and managed clinical networks, an increasing emphasis on involving patients and learning from their experiences and a sustained drive on health improvement and the prevention of ill-health in partnership with other agencies.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-1327.1, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1327, in the name of Allan Wilson, on the sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 79, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-1327.2, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1327, in the name of Allan Wilson, on the sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 75, Abstentions 24.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-1327.3, in the name of Robin Harper, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1327, in the name of Allan Wilson, on the sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)

Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 79, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-1327, in the name of Allan Wilson, on the sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)

McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 81, Against 2, Abstentions 34.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises the considerable ecological, economic and social importance of Scotland's marine environment; notes that the seas and oceans are the theme of this year's United Nations World Environment Day on 5 June; acknowledges the range of initiatives already taken by the Scottish Executive to protect and enhance all of Scotland's coastline and marine waters, including the Partnership Agreement commitment to consult on the options of establishing a national coastline park and marine national parks; endorses the Executive's continued input to the United Kingdom marine stewardship report process, to the development of a European marine strategy and to OSPAR; welcomes the strong lead being taken by the Executive to set out a clearer vision and more coherent strategic framework for Scotland's marine environment in its recent consultation paper, and supports the Executive's objectives of improving the co-ordination of activity to support, and developing a mechanism for, the future good governance and sustainable management of Scotland's marine environment.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-1333, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2004 Amendment Order 2004 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-1334, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Health Professions (Operating Department Practitioners and Miscellaneous Amendments) Order 2004 be approved.

Livestock Improvement Scheme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-877, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, on the livestock improvement scheme. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the considerable success over the last few years of the Livestock Improvement Scheme and, in particular, the Bull Hire Scheme in providing quality bulls to crofters at reasonable prices; notes with concern changes to the scheme that will require crofters to pay in advance for bull hire and wintering costs; fears that these changes will deter crofters from obtaining high quality bulls with quality assurance and thus run against the committed aims of both the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and the Crofters Commission of increasing the quality of the Scottish beef herd, and believes that the Scottish Executive should improve the efficiency of the current scheme rather than introducing upfront payments for bull hire that would put a severe financial strain on scheme members.

17:12

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome those representatives of crofting communities who are sitting in the public gallery.

The whole matter was first brought to my attention by the Scottish Crofting Foundation at a meeting of the cross-party group on crofting and by the fury expressed to me by crofters all over Scotland that they are being asked to pay in advance for the hire of bulls under the livestock improvement scheme. I took that on board and wrote to the Executive, but events moved quickly and the unthinkable suggestion of the abolishment of the scheme has now emerged.

Yesterday, I talked to the Blackface Sheep Breeders Association, which informed me that neither it nor the North Country Cheviot Sheep Society, which represent the majority of the breeds of sheep used in the tup scheme, had been consulted on the effects of the withdrawal of the scheme. They are incredulous and wonder what the Executive is up to. The tup scheme is particularly valuable in aiding the national scrapie eradication scheme. The department tups are well researched and well sourced from safe sources. If the abolishment goes ahead, it will have serious implications for crofting communities.

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Allan Wilson, announced that the Executive intends to replace the bull hire scheme with a new grant scheme, close the ram purchase scheme and close the Shetland ram scheme. However, to soften the blow, he has said that he will explore the possibility of providing training in

ram selection and purchase. It appears that the Executive's answer to the problems facing Scotland's crofters is to send them back to school. I find that extraordinarily patronising. Does the Executive really think that the practical crofters cannot recognise the finer points of a blackface ram or a shorthorn bull? They deal with them on a daily basis.

The benefits of the livestock scheme are many: high-quality bulls that sire the quality calves that the market requires are available to those who would not otherwise be able to afford them; crofters are not left with the costs and difficulties of having to winter bulls; bulls enter the breeding season in peak condition; replacement animals are always available; the crofter can choose between breeds every two years; and the scheme ensures that crofters do not run the risk of a bull siring from his own progeny. The scheme unites crofting townships and encourages community working and co-operation, which have always been important to the socioeconomic well-being of towns such as Stornoway and Lerwick.

The scheme does not benefit crofters alone. Many of the female calves of well-bred bulls in crofting communities go on to supplement the breeding herds of farmers in other parts of Scotland, thus ensuring quality from a clean, disease-free source, which is important nowadays. Cattle enhance the rural habitat and environment, both of which are strategic aims of the Executive's agriculture policy. Cattle are necessary for crofters to enter certain environmental schemes to maximise income under the less favoured areas scheme, which favours mixed-livestock units. The concern is that, if the livestock scheme is withdrawn, the quality of the bulls will deteriorate, which will lead to deterioration in the herd in general. Again, that would be contradictory to the Executive's stated aims. The bull is half the herd.

What are the alternatives to the scheme? Given that artificial insemination is impractical for beef herds and that there is a lack of bulls for hire privately, will crofters be expected to purchase their own bulls? That is an expensive business—good bulls can cost thousands of pounds—and although it may be all right for a farmer with a large herd of at least 40 beef cows, it makes no economic sense for a crofter with four or five cows. Add to that the expense of wintering and the cost of transport, which may be from Perth to the Western Isles or Shetland, and one can see why the bull hire scheme is so important. The fear is that those and many other knock-on effects will lead to crofters abandoning cattle production, which would have a devastating impact on income to the area, the local economy, supporting services such as the auction marts, the quality of the environment and the sustainability of remaining cattle units.

The Scottish Agricultural College highlights the potential loss of cattle numbers if the scheme is withdrawn, which would be contradictory to the stated policy of the Crofters Commission. The Scottish Executive document "The Way Forward: Framework for Economic Development in Scotland" includes the objective of supporting the return of cattle to crofting areas and a subsequent increase in cattle numbers. I well remember listening to Minister Ross Finnie speaking at the Scottish Crofting Foundation conference on the Isle of Skye some years ago, when he gave a full commitment to crofting communities and stressed the need for improvement in quality and to gain added value from farm products. I am sorry that he is not here this evening, but I ask him why he is abolishing a scheme that achieves all those things for the relatively low cost of £0.25 million. Minister Wilson has said that the changes, including the replacement of the current bull hire scheme, the closure of the ram purchase scheme and the reworking of the crofting counties agricultural grant scheme are

"interim measures to modernise the schemes and ensure they comply with EU state aid regulations."

Ross Finnie also commented on the issue in Saturday's edition of *The Press and Journal*.

What is most concerning is that—if you will excuse the expression, Presiding Officer—crofters appear to be being given a load of old bull. My colleague Struan Stevenson MEP has discovered that last December the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department contacted the agriculture directorate-general in Brussels to ask whether the bull hire scheme breached state-aid rules. What on earth was SEERAD doing? Surely it must have known that the scheme existed prior to 1973, before Britain joined the European Union, and had never been notified to the Commission. That is in compliance with article 1(b) of regulation 659/1999 and is standard practice.

When Brussels informed SEERAD that it had no record of the bull hire scheme, SEERAD realised that the scheme had never been notified and told DG agriculture not to bother with further investigations, as an internal review in Scotland was under way. Who was consulted during that internal review of the livestock improvement scheme? Why did SEERAD have to inquire about a scheme that had never been notified, when it should have known perfectly well that state-aid rules were not relevant in this case? I hope that the Executive was not looking for a reason to dump the livestock improvement scheme and blame it on Brussels. Given that further questions have been raised about the state-aid rules in Parliament, I hope that the minister will clarify the position.

The bull hire scheme has been a great success, with cattle numbers in Lewis and Harris alone more than doubling from 400 to 800 in the past decade, which meets the Scottish Executive's recommendations. I urge the Scottish Executive to rethink its decision to end the livestock improvement scheme and to listen to the NFU Scotland, which has stated that such schemes are more relevant than ever today. I also urge the Executive to listen to the Scottish Crofting Foundation, which has said that the bull hire scheme is particularly highly valued, and to the environmental organisations.

Unkind rumours abound in the north that the Executive wants to sell for profit and development the department farms near Inverness where the bulls in question are normally kept. I cannot think that an Executive that has said that it is so supportive of Highland agriculture could possibly be thinking of doing such a thing, but I would like the minister to confirm that. The Executive made a commitment to increase the number and quality of Scotland's beef herds, but removal of the livestock improvement scheme will have the opposite effect. It is not an expensive scheme; it is great value for money to the people who use it. I ask the minister not to get rid of the department bulls or the department tups.

17:20

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): I welcome the debate and I am grateful to Jamie McGrigor for securing it. I also welcome the briefing from the Scottish Crofting Foundation, of which I declare that I am a member. I listened carefully to Jamie McGrigor's speech and I welcome the fact that he has now converted and fully appreciates the importance of communal working in crofting communities and the fact that such communities would fail without the collaborative community spirit that courses through so many of them. However, it is a pity that his party is a consistent opponent of land reform and of crofting communities and other communities securing land. I appreciate what he said about the retention, development or refocusing of the bull and tup scheme. However, how can he reconcile such fervour and sincerity about that scheme with his position on land reform? I am sure that that is a debate for another evening.

I am conscious that a number of members will want to contribute, but I want to raise a number of points that crofters in my constituency have made. Last year, 50 good-quality bulls were brought to the Western Isles. Over the years, such bulls have greatly improved the quality of the stock that is reared in the islands and, more important, sold outwith the islands. The reputation and quality of

the stock have improved year on year. Of course, that is a welcome change and crofters are now keeping more and more cattle, which is certainly good for the economy and the environment. The increase in cattle numbers in recent years is encouraging. The Lewis and Harris Cattle Producers Group, which I met on Monday morning, reliably informs me that it is usually crofters at the younger end of the age spectrum who keep cattle. I am sure that the Executive will appreciate that that is significant and will be keen to support them.

I stress that although I have been contacted by a great number of crofters and organisations, none has said that they fear change. What they fear is a situation in which inferior bulls or rams are sent to the Western Isles. If that were to happen, it would herald the end of quality cattle being bred there. I am sure that the minister will address those concerns when he sums up. I know that the crofters to whom I have spoken and those whom I have not met are only too willing to adapt, to work with any new initiatives that will maintain the standards that have been established in recent years and to help to build on recent successes.

I seek clarification on the following points. Will the minister assure me that the bull hire scheme, in whatever form it is eventually configured, will continue to be run for the benefit of crofters through community groups of crofters, ensuring that the responsibility and quality are shared by all? Will he assure me that, at the end of the process, we will still have first-class bulls being sent to the islands and other communities in the Highlands at affordable rates? Will he assure me that the process is not about downgrading the scheme or the quality of the bulls being sent, but about the refocusing and realignment of the scheme to ensure that we have continued improvements in our cattle stock?

I will end on a point that the Lewis and Harris Cattle Producers Group raised. I do not expect the minister to give me an answer to this tonight, but perhaps he could write to me in the next week or two on whether a heifer retention scheme could improve the quality of cattle. I am sure that he will answer the other points that I have raised when he sums up.

17:24

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I congratulate Jamie McGrigor on bringing this important issue to Parliament. It is proof that Parliament is able to debate issues that are important, albeit to a relatively small sector of society.

What we want to learn from the debate is that the Scottish Executive is able to respond to the

serious concerns that exist, some of which have been raised in the debate. I refer, for example, to a letter that I received from Mr MacKenzie of Dingwall & Highland Marts Ltd, who has been involved in the business for the past 40 years. He says that he believes that, during that period, the quality of stock has improved tenfold as a result of the scheme. He states:

“To withdraw this scheme would be turning the clock back to where inferior cross bred animals were being used for sires or no livestock would be kept at all.”

Mr MacKenzie knows the real fears—and there are fears; I must disagree with Alasdair Morrison on that—better than most, if not all, of us.

I refer also to John Kinnaird, another person whose experience we should respect. He states that the withdrawal of the current bull hire and ram schemes and the introduction of a replacement grant scheme is “a draconian step”. Mr Kinnaird is not a man given to hyperbole.

I have also noted that, in the Highland papers, many members of the Liberal Democrats have spoken out clearly against the scheme, and I hope that we will hear that criticism expressed tonight.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): They spoke out for the scheme.

Fergus Ewing: I have seen some comments to the effect that George Lyon and John Farquhar Munro are not enamoured of the Executive’s policy in that regard. If I am wrong, I am willing to be corrected, but I hope that there will be cross-party support for Mr McGrigor’s message, which I endorse.

I will raise two concerns in particular. One relates to the widely held beliefs that the farms at Beechwood and Knocknagael are to be sold off and that that is the motivation behind the policy. We have seen some active consideration of that proposal in papers that have come before us, and I ask the minister point blank whether he has received advice on that issue and whether he will make it public to everyone concerned. I have constituents on both farms and I have visited them. I have had concerns about the proposed eviction of a constituent of mine at Knocknagael, although my dealings on that were with Mr Finnie.

My second concern relates to the state-aid rules. I have read the correspondence that has passed between the NFU and a Mr Perrett on the matter, and it seems to me that the state-aid rules are being raised as a pretext on which to withdraw the bull hire scheme. It is surprising that only now, three decades after accession to the European Union and 100 years after the inception of the bull hire scheme, the Executive has discovered that the scheme somehow contravenes state aid.

I ask the minister—I see that I now have his attention, for which I am always grateful—to engage in debate with the NFU. The NFU argues that there is no contravention of state aid and that the 50 per cent rule is not breached. It also argues that, in the computations that Mr Perrett sets out in his e-mail, he has inflated the costs of the existing scheme. He has brought out figures that state that the subsidy element is nearly two thirds. The NFU states that, in other comparisons—for example, the nitrate-vulnerable zones scheme—no account has been taken of administrative costs.

Will the minister engage with the NFU and, because of the widespread concerns, will he withdraw the plans to replace the current scheme until there has been a full and thoroughgoing consultation with all the people involved, almost all of whom will have experience and knowledge to bring to bear on the topic, which is vital for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A considerable number of members wish to speak in the debate and I am of a mind to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate by around 15 minutes. If a member wishes to move that, I would be happy to put the question.

Motion moved,

That, under rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by 15 minutes.—[*Rob Gibson.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:30

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I declare an interest at the outset: I am one of the poor crofters from the less favoured areas who constantly makes use of the bull hire scheme.

I thank Jamie McGrigor for securing this important debate. It is opportune that we are holding it this evening, because tonight we are holding a meeting of the Parliament's cross-party group on crofting. The group meets at 6 o'clock and I invite any interested members to come along and listen to its debate, at which they will be able to hear at first hand the concerns of crofters, who are most directly affected by the proposal.

The proposal that is being made is controversial. Among other things, it suggests drastic changes in the support mechanism for the bull and ram hire scheme, which has, as we have heard, encouraged and supported crofters in their efforts to improve the quality of their stock over many decades. As a consequence, it has enhanced the market value of the animals that are produced. Unless the existing scheme is retained and supported, I can see that the health and quality of

sheep and cattle in the crofting townships will fall to a critical level.

SEERAD is now suggesting that it wants to replace the scheme with one that it considers to be more appropriate and which it suggests will offer more value for money. That might be the perception from Pentland House—or perhaps from Castle Wynd, Inverness—but it is certainly not the considered view of crofters and townships throughout the Highlands and Islands, whose view has been expressed to me pretty strongly. Those crofters have struggled to survive through the difficulties and restrictions that have been imposed not least by the operation of the less favoured areas scheme. They have had to live through the scourge that was BSE, which was followed by the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. They also have a constant problem with integrated administration and control system forms, British cattle movement service forms—IACS and BCMS forms—and a plethora of other forms that they have constantly to fill in. If they tick the wrong box, there can be tremendous penalties. Crofters feel that the current proposals will pull the proverbial rug from under their feet at a time when they are feeling at their most fragile and vulnerable.

Crofting communities are not aware of the details of the new proposals, so they would welcome consultation and debate prior to any major changes being implemented. The existing bull and ram hire scheme has provided an excellent and viable service to those communities over the years, so if the scheme could be improved—as SEERAD has suggested—let us consider that possibility in co-operation with crofting customers, who are the important individuals at the end of the line. That way, we can arrive collectively at an agreement that will have the overwhelming and enthusiastic support of those concerned and which can help to create a buoyant and vibrant future in all our crofting communities.

I suggest to the minister that, before any further legislation is implemented, due consideration be given to serious consultation of the crofting communities.

17:34

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I congratulate Jamie McGrigor on securing the debate and I hope very much that the minister will take on board the concerns that are being expressed this evening, especially those about the decision to withdraw the bull hire scheme. The minister should listen not just to the voices of members here this evening, but to those of the organisations that directly represent the people who will be most affected by the Executive's decision. The Lewis and Harris Cattle Producers

Group claims that the bull hire scheme is “vitally important to crofting”, and that it delivers significant benefits to the crofting community.

If we talk to people from crofting communities, we are told that the number of cattle in a community and whether the number is growing or declining can be used as a measure of the strength of the community. It is a matter of real concern that anything might be being done that would further disadvantage communities that can be seen to be disadvantaged in the first place. As has been stated earlier in the debate, Lewis and Harris have seen an increase in the numbers of cattle as well as in the numbers of people who keep cattle. That is a good news story in which the bull hire scheme has played a significant role.

I find the tenor of the debate to be extraordinary. Mrs McNeill, the chairman of the Scottish Crofting Foundation made a good point in *The Press and Journal*:

“The bull hire scheme is particularly highly valued, not only by crofting communities, but also by environmental organisations who value the important role of cattle extensive high nature value systems”.

We are engaging in another debate at the moment about whether the national beef envelope can be applied in a way that will directly affect the sorts of communities that we are discussing this evening; however, this debate seems to be about removing one of the ways of supporting those very communities.

As my colleague Fergus Ewing said, the NFU Scotland has described the removal of the ram schemes and the replacement of the bull hire scheme as a “draconian step”. There are real concerns that the accounting practices that are employed have led to the concerns about the scheme’s compliance with state aid regulations. Again, Fergus Ewing went into that issue in greater detail.

When Ena McNeill expressed her concern about the withdrawal of the scheme, she referred to the empty rhetoric of the Executive, when it talked about wanting to support remote and fragile crofting areas and to keep livestock in the north and west. That is the sort of rhetoric that we heard throughout the debate on reform of the common agricultural policy. Ena McNeill’s statement is one with which all members in the chamber would agree. In essence, she is saying that the Scottish Crofting Foundation wants to know whether the Executive means what it says.

I believe that plenty of figures are available to suggest that the bull hire scheme is cheaper and more efficient, both for its users and providers. I urge the minister to listen to the people whose livelihoods and very way of life will be seriously and negatively affected by the proposed changes.

If the Executive claims to have the interests of crofting communities at heart it should, as Ena McNeill said, show those communities that it means what it says.

17:37

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Like Fergus Ewing, I received a letter from Kenny MacKenzie of the Dingwall mart. Those of us who know Kenny MacKenzie would say that he is a man who is neither given to breaking into print—he is not easily pushed that way—nor is he a man for purple prose or hyperbole. When Kenny MacKenzie writes something, one reads and listens to what he says and thinks about it.

Although I will speak briefly, I want to make several points. I echo the point that cattle are good for the land; that is true. For members who have not yet read it, I recommend strongly Sir John Lister-Kaye’s publication “Ill Fares the Land” in which he sets out in very clear terms the difference to the land of grazing sheep and cattle on it. As Roseanna Cunningham said, the grazing of cattle is good for the environment, as it is for biodiversity and long-term sustainability.

In the scheme of things, we are not talking about a great deal of Scottish Executive money. When one considers the cost of doing up a stretch of the A9 in my constituency, for example, one is talking about £10 million. The same could be said for any bit of road improvement or an improvement to a railway line. In talking about the scheme, we are talking about small beer or small change and yet, as has been so rightly pointed out, the scheme underpins and impacts on crofters’ lives, particularly on the beef front. I know what I am talking about: I was brought up on a small farm on which there were shorthorn cattle.

It is with no great pleasure that I spell out a clear message to the minister and I do not undertake it lightly. I hope sincerely that the minister will consider the issue and move on it. There comes a time in the Parliament when an issue is debated that crosses all party divides; the subject of this evening’s debate is one such issue. It is fundamental to our precious way of life in the Highlands and we should unite on it. The issue poses the question: “Does the dog wag the tail or does the tail wag the dog?” There comes a time when the Parliament must speak with one voice.

Secondly and finally, it is perhaps apposite that “Yes Minister” has recently reappeared on our television screens. I have the greatest respect for Her Majesty’s civil service, but sometimes civil servants are keen to follow their own agenda and do not consult the sectors that they should consult or keep ministers informed as they should do. I

say this just once: when the matter has been done and dusted and, I trust, the right conclusion reached, I recommend that the deputy minister and Mr Finnie privately and discreetly examine the mechanisms in their department to establish how the hell—I hope that that will not be ruled out as unparliamentary language—the situation came about.

17:40

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I congratulate Jamie McGrigor on securing the debate and I am happy to add my voice to the concern and dismay that is felt in crofting circles at the proposed withdrawal of the livestock improvement scheme.

I give a flavour of some of the comments that are being made by quoting from the newsletter of the North West Cattle Producers Association, which is based in Assynt. An article in the newsletter says:

“For over 100 years crofters have been relying on the SEERAD controlled Bull Hire Scheme. For small producers buying a bull every two years is neither practical nor financially viable. A reliable hire scheme is what is wanted.

In the past 50 years the quality of crofting cattle has improved immensely as a direct result of access to Scheme bulls. This is a well known fact which those in charge of the Bull Hire Scheme find it incredibly hard to grasp.”

The article continues:

“It seems now that this confidence in what has been one of the basics of crofting was severely misplaced. The Bull Hire Scheme has been withdrawn and only vague promises put in its place.

Without bulls for hire cattle numbers and cattle quality will start to decline at a pace.”

I pick up on a point that Roseanna Cunningham made. There has been much talk during the past year about the need for clear strategic aims for agriculture, the opportunities that CAP reform will bring, the need to keep cattle on the ground for the good of the ground, the importance of grass-roots action and the need to encourage young people to get started in agriculture. However, what is strategic or sensible about consistently ignoring the needs and opinions of the crofting community?

Jamie Stone recently lodged a written question:

“To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish the review of the livestock improvement scheme and what plans it has for the continuation and improvement of the scheme”

Allan Wilson replied that

“the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme”—

Jamie Stone had not asked about that, but never mind—

“and the support for livestock improvement have been in place for a long time. We recognise that there are

opportunities to refocus crofting support to provide better value for money. That is why the Crofters Commission has consulted comprehensively on the future of these crofting support schemes.”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 5 April 2004; S2W-7131.]

Crofters do not think that they have been consulted comprehensively—or at all—on the matter.

Saturday's edition of *The Press and Journal* contained an exclusive interview with Ross Finnie, in which he talked about the bull hire and ram purchase schemes. The words that I quote are those of the journalist, rather than Ross Finnie, so I do not attribute them directly to the minister. The article says:

“The bull-hire scheme was ridiculed in a specially-commissioned report by the Scottish Agricultural College. It said the scheme did not represent good value for money in terms of genetic improvement. It also said the objectives appeared out of date.”

That report was commissioned by the Crofters Commission and I have with me the report's summary and conclusions. Under the heading, “Overall Conclusions”, paragraph 2.1.1 starts by saying:

“The Bull Supply Scheme does not at present represent good value for money in terms of genetic improvement of crofters cattle alone.”

It goes on:

“However, when wider benefits of the scheme are included—the maintenance of cow numbers, environmental benefits and local economic activity—we believe it has a positive impact from a national point of view.”

Paragraph 2.1.4 of the report says:

“In relation to the current Bull Supply Scheme, the best alternatives, as ranked against a wide range of criteria, are a grant scheme linked to a beef quality programme or devolving the scheme to the most fragile regions where the benefits of genetic improvement and the environmental and social losses of cattle reduction would be greatest.”

Has the Executive read the entire report? Has it considered devolving the scheme and targeting it at the most unfavoured areas?

In conclusion, I support the Scottish Crofting Foundation's call that whatever scheme replaces the livestock improvement scheme must be designed to support crofting co-operatives, crofter-run hire schemes and other local livestock-development ideas that will enable crofters to keep cattle on the land. That can be achieved only if crofters and livestock producers from the Highlands and Islands are at the heart of the process of designing the new scheme.

An outside consultant dreaming up an idea followed by a paper consultation just will not do. First and foremost, I ask the Executive to read the Scottish Agricultural College report again and to tell me whether it agrees with the conclusions. We

can then examine other ways to keep the scheme going.

17:45

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

Like everyone else, I declare an interest in a healthy, vibrant Highlands and Islands in which the traditional industries are given a fair chance to survive and thrive. That strategy is key to the area's long-term success and balanced future development. It is also fair to the people who have stuck at the traditional industries in tough times and maintained the attractiveness and evocativeness of the Highlands and Islands. Countries such as New Zealand point the way for us, in that they have transformed their economies and their competitiveness by focusing on their basic industries and taking care of the babies in the bath water.

I am keen to take part in the debate—and I congratulate Jamie McGrigor on securing it—because it is an opportunity to voice and ventilate the genuine concerns of many crofters about the Scottish Executive's proposal to close the ram scheme and scrap the bull hire scheme, replacing it with an as yet undefined grant scheme. Users of the bull hire scheme cannot see how a breeding scheme that is designed to improve the cattle gene pool in the Highlands and Islands can be successfully and uniformly devolved and delegated to individual crofters, many of whom have only a few animals. Surely it makes little economic sense for crofters who have small herds to go out and buy a bull, and surely that was why the subsidised bull hire scheme was introduced in the first place.

Given the popularity of the scheme and its undoubted effectiveness, it is hard to understand how downgrading a livestock quality improvement scheme conforms with common agricultural policy reform, which emphasises the need to improve farm product quality. However, that is not the only aspect of the proposal that causes concern. The secretiveness that surrounds the deliberations, and the resultant uncertainty, might undermine confidence and produce a scheme that does not meet the needs and aspirations of the crofting community.

The Executive's protestation that the subsidised bull hire scheme might infringe European Union rules on state aid further undermines confidence and is likely to make change happen for the wrong, and perhaps invalid, reasons. That is similar to the tactic that has frequently been used to threaten the Gourock to Dunoon car ferry service; limiting the frequency of the Caledonian MacBrayne service undermines confidence in it. However, the case of the bull hire scheme is worse, in that the Government has not even

specified the nature of the infringement or tendered a possible defence. In similar situations, other Governments, such as those in Ireland or France, would fight tooth and nail for their producers, especially when the case is there to be made.

On state aid, the treaty of Rome states:

"The following may be considered to be compatible with the common market:

(a) aid to promote the economic development of areas where the standard of living is abnormally low or where there is serious underemployment."

That is significant, given that under-employment in the Highlands and Islands is material and should be calculated as follows: the official unemployed, plus the reluctant retired, plus the economically inactive, who would work if a decent job was available, plus, let us say, the total of the past 15 years of net out-migration.

In conclusion, I am not saying that the scheme is perfect, because I have evidence that it has been managed down by making the deadline for inclusion easy to miss. However, without the scheme, or an equally effective and more accessible substitute, many adverse effects will ensue.

17:48

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):

I too thank Jamie McGrigor for the chance to put across the concerns of crofters in my constituency. There are two issues, and we should separate them out at the beginning. The first is that of the ram schemes, and I have to say that I am not persuaded that those schemes provide value for money for crofters, so I will not argue tonight that they should be retained. The second issue is that of the bull hire scheme, which is the most important issue for me. We have announced that it will cease, but what is it to be replaced with? There is a vacuum; no one seems to know what might replace it, so there is all sorts of speculation about what will happen. To me, that is the fundamental mistake that has been made.

I have read the SAC report, and I hope that everyone else has read it. It is not a damning indictment of the bull hire scheme—indeed, the crofters, the environmental organisations and the marketing organisations all sing the scheme's praises. However, the report is a critical endorsement of the scheme and raises a large number of issues that need to be tackled. It calls for the rationalisation of the three farms by selling Beechwood, first to release capital for investment at Knocknagael and Balrobert and secondly because of the severe health and safety issues raised by Beechwood's location close to the town centre.

The SAC report also calls for a review of the scheme's purpose. Is it about sustaining cow numbers in the crofting areas? Is it about the environmental benefits of keeping cows in the crofting areas? We need to think through exactly what the rationale is for continuing with the scheme, but that has still not been done.

We need to improve the genetics of the bull stud. It is clear from the evidence in the SAC report that the bulls leave much to be desired in terms of their EBVs—their estimated breeding values. That reflects the quality of the bulls that are being used in the scheme. The report also states that 27 per cent of bulls are not hired out because they are in poor condition. There is something fundamentally wrong if 27 per cent of the bulls—roughly 50 out of 150 bulls—are unfit for work. Someone is making a huge mistake and poor management is taking place if the bulls are not fit to get out the door in the spring. There is something seriously wrong and questions need to be asked.

The report also calls for a segmentation of the crofting areas to separate out the crofting townships from some of the bigger crofts that, to all intents and purposes, are now farms. However, it still maintains that the bull hire scheme is essential and calls for better value for money because of the rising deficit. Those are all legitimate criticisms of the operation of the current scheme, but they are not a reason to abandon the concept and move to a new scheme. That would be like throwing the baby out with the bath water.

I am sceptical about the grants scheme on its own. It could lead to a rapid decline in the quality of calves coming out of the crofting areas although the whole purpose of putting the bulls in those areas in the first place was to make sure that the quality of the calves that were presented for sale at the end of every summer improved year on year. To a large extent, the scheme has been successful in that objective, but more needs to be done to ensure success in the future. It might be appropriate for a grants scheme to be used for bigger crofts of 50-plus cows, but I would need to be persuaded of that argument. There is also a question about how it could be linked into the quality argument. I do not believe that the grants scheme will work for crofting townships. If they buy a bull, there will be the problem of who keeps it over the winter. They will need to house it over winter, otherwise every heifer in the area will be bulled, and winter feed is extremely expensive.

The announcement is ill timed, to say the least. The feasibility study on the replacement scheme has not even started. Last week I spoke to Peter Cook, who is going to be one of the people who will look into the new scheme. The work has not even begun. No thought has been given to the

rationale that will underpin any new scheme. The Executive appears to be a long way from making any final decisions, yet it is announcing that the previous scheme is going to cease. I want to hear from the minister that there is a commitment to the bull hire scheme and its replacement and that bull supply will be a fundamental part of that. I want nothing to be ruled in or out until the study is complete and proper consultation and debate have been had about any possible replacement scheme.

17:53

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare my interest as a member of the NFU and a farmer. I congratulate Jamie McGrigor on securing the debate and I support his motion.

The loss of the livestock improvement scheme will be a huge loss to crofters in the Highlands and Islands and will, in effect, drive cattle off the hills in those fragile areas. For many years, in my previous job as the NFU's hill-farming convener, I championed the scheme, which allowed crofters to keep herds of cattle, and the ram hire scheme, which made sheep flocks viable as well.

At a time when Scottish Natural Heritage is trying to increase the number of cattle with a view to helping the environment, it is utterly bizarre that the minister is withdrawing the scheme for hiring bulls, the effect of which will be to reduce cattle numbers in fragile areas. Furthermore, following the mid-term review, many cattle producers are considering the future of their beef herds, and this may be enough reason for them to stop farming and just take the support.

It is interesting to find so much support for the motion tonight. It was suggested at the Parliamentary Bureau last week that the motion would not receive cross-party support, but if that is so, why have so many members suddenly decided to support the motion although they were not prepared to do so before? Could it have something to do with the fact that the Scottish Crofters Foundation is present in the public gallery?

George Lyon: A question was raised at the bureau this week about the criteria for members' business debates, but no one voted against this matter being debated tonight. I am unsure what John Scott is trying to say.

John Scott: Opprobrium was expressed that the Conservative party had lodged the motion and it was suggested that that was not the proper thing to have done. None of the coalition members who are present tonight signed the motion. Why not? I rest my case.

I urge the minister to consult more widely than he has done on the new scheme. Nobody knows what his proposals are about, so how can there be anything other than fear and dismay in fragile communities at the proposals? For the NFU to describe the withdrawal of the scheme as draconian is, indeed, strong language, but I have to say that I agree totally with John Kinnaird on that. From my understanding, there is no EU imperative to withdraw the scheme. The proposal is symptomatic of the Lib-Lab coalition's inability to do anything for agriculture or crofting.

I welcome Jamie Stone's apparent offer of support and I hope that he and George Lyon will be as good as their word and will, indeed, use the pressure of the coalition to turn the decision on its head, otherwise, we may have to give credence to the rumours that the move has been driven by the Executive's desire to sell off for building development the farm that is home to the animals. The Conservatives would certainly not want to believe that and I look forward to hearing the minister refute that rumour categorically.

17:56

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am a little surprised at John Scott's attitude to the debate, because it seems from the logic of what he said that he would have preferred that none of us had turned up.

As a member of the Scottish Crofting Foundation, I declare an interest in the continued development of that body's activities and of benefits to crofters. However, we need to dig deeper to uncover the politics of the issue. The Crofters Commission may well have a wish to change the crofting agenda. Where does that push come from? If the livestock improvement scheme is an impediment, is the aim to reduce the amount of cattle production in our remote mainland and island areas? If it is, that is a startling revelation. Are the tenets of the forward strategy for agriculture, which are so well met by the north-west Sutherland cattle producers, and the public goods that are already delivered by Shetland crofters, as acknowledged by the common agricultural policy mid-term review, to be set aside because many of those things are helped by the bull scheme?

People have extremely strong views about the move in the areas affected by the scheme and ministers must listen carefully to the experts in the marts, to the farmers and crofters and to the people who run the bull hire scheme. They know that they need to have a large number of bulls available to meet the conditions of transport to remote areas. They also know that, over the years, we have seen a steady improvement in all that has been produced. It worries me intensely

that we are left with an SAC report that comes down to issues such as value for money and the need

"to assess whether the objectives of the schemes are still valid and relevant to the Commissions agenda",

as it says at the start of the report. What is that agenda? I think that the minister had better clarify whether he wants to reduce the number of cattle in the remote areas or is opposed to that.

I cite one example from the SAC report. It states:

"There is some increase in group buying of bulls. There may be a trend towards both increasing use of the Commission hire scheme and buying of bulls for specific uses e.g. breeding replacements. Once again this points to a segmentation of the crofter market with some groups becoming sophisticated in terms of bull selection and others heavily reliant on the scheme."

That suggests to me that the actual conclusion is not about sophistication or otherwise, but about basic need in the most remote communities. Therefore, there is a definite need for a review of the debate with a cool head. People must take the issue away and think again about the fact that we used to have a partnership among the Crofters Commission, the Government and the crofters that ensured that the most remote areas were helped to service their economy by the scheme. At present, we have a big question mark.

Five Liberal Democrat and three Labour MSPs represent the Highlands and several of them are ministers. Surely they can put their heads together and get Ross Finnie to withdraw his remarks about the scheme being axed. The decision needs to be reconsidered. Across the parties, there is a belief that there are many ways forward by which we could ensure that the scheme meets the needs of remote and fragile communities. Indeed, the experts recognise that the scheme is the best way forward for the improved livestock of those areas. We must get away from talking about value for money and move on to the issue of value for sustainable communities.

18:00

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): I welcome the opportunity to debate the livestock improvement scheme and I congratulate Jamie McGrigor on securing the debate.

However, I must deprecate the last two speeches, which attempted to introduce an element of party-political discord into what should be an important members' business debate on the future development of the crofting counties. Presiding Officer, I respectfully suggest that, in that objective, I take second place to no man or woman in the chamber.

It is fair to say that the motion has been somewhat overtaken by my announcement on 5 April. Nevertheless, it might be worth making a couple of points. We made the changes to advance payment because our auditors pointed out that—as some members mentioned—the previous arrangements imposed unnecessary costs and losses. Many crofting groups took too long to pay their bills and we had to deal with some bad debt. The Crofters Commission also wasted resources trying to recover money.

The hire fee for a bull is £160 and the maximum wintering charge is £350. Those are not large sums of money. As members will know, bulls are hired to groups of crofters, so the burden of meeting the charge is shared. Consequently, far from being unreasonable, the hire charge is extremely low given the quality of animal that is supplied. I make those points for the record.

The responses to the Crofters Commission's consultation on its proposals for a crofting development programme demonstrated that the livestock improvement schemes were highly valued by the crofting community. The quality of the bull hire scheme was highly regarded. However, popularity alone does not necessarily mean that a scheme is successful; it could simply mean that the scheme is generous.

The most important point, which should not be lost, is that my announcement committed us to continuing support for cattle improvement. That should be welcomed by everybody who has the crofters' interest at heart. We have undertaken to replace the bull hire scheme with a new grants scheme that will deliver genuine improvements to the cattle stock in crofting areas. We have also undertaken to honour existing hire contracts. I can tell those who are interested that our intention is not to compromise on quality or standards, so we will not give assistance to cheap substitutes. Rather, we wish to create a scheme that will deliver both value for money and—this is the more important objective—genuine improvement in stock quality.

We have commissioned an external consultant to do that work. He understands the existing scheme because he has helped the Crofters Commission to run it over the past few months. After conducting a scoping study and engaging with the main stakeholders, he will develop a set of proposals that will be discussed with a focus group that will be drawn from that body of stakeholders. He will also consider the existing stud farm operation to see whether the farms can be streamlined and made more efficient. If that is possible, the farms could continue to play a role in the improvement of crofters' cattle. I hope that the preliminary proposals will be ready by early September.

We are also looking after those who use the current schemes. In my announcement, I made an offer of training for those who will be affected by the loss of the ram purchase scheme. On that issue, I agree with George Lyon that we should differentiate between the two schemes. Bulls for 2004 are already out in the crofting townships and the existing hires will continue to their natural end.

At the same time as I announced the closure of the livestock improvement schemes, I announced major changes to the crofting counties agricultural grants scheme, which was mentioned by Eleanor Scott. That scheme has a budget of £3.2 million and is of far greater benefit to a much greater number of crofters. The changes to the livestock improvement schemes are taking place against a background of significant and increasing support for crofting. Our proposals are in no way about saving money. We intend to maintain current levels of support for crofting, but to ensure that that support is focused where it is needed, in a manner that will deliver better results from a crofting perspective.

Mr McGrigor: I am glad to hear that the minister is committed to producing something that is better, but he has not really explained what was wrong with the bull hire scheme. Why did it need to be changed? The scheme seems to have been very popular with the people who know about livestock.

Allan Wilson: There are a number of answers to that question. I was going to come to one of those when dealing with the issue of state aid, which was raised by a number of members, including Jamie McGrigor. It is hoped that the new arrangements will enable crofters to get the kind of stock improvement that they want, unlike at present, when they have no real say in deciding which animals are allocated to them. This is an attempt to make a step change and to improve the existing scheme.

Later I will quote from the summary of the evaluation to which George Lyon referred. It demonstrated that most crofters did not have high regard for the quality of the rams supplied by the scheme and that it was not delivering measurable improvement. Support for cattle improvement is continuing, but we are aiming to make it much more effective and to focus on delivering stock improvements that crofters themselves want. That is the point of the consultant's involvement.

In this context, success is difficult to quantify, but I argue that it is best measured by results. In the livestock improvement schemes, there is no clear mechanism for assessing outcomes. However, as members know, we commissioned an independent evaluation by the Scottish Agricultural College, which has been available in the Scottish Parliament information centre since 5 April. The evaluation pointed to deficiencies in the schemes

and its conclusions indicate that retention of the ram purchase scheme cannot be justified. The evaluation also pointed to deficiencies in the bull hire scheme. However, it suggested that there is a continuing strong case for supporting the improvement of cattle in crofting areas—that is the direct answer to Jamie McGrigor's question.

Overall, the value of the schemes to crofters and to the public was much less than the £600,000 that they cost. I respectfully suggest that there is nothing to be gained from going over the areas of concern, which are there to see for anyone who cares to read the evaluation report. The summary states:

"In relation to the current Bull Supply Scheme, the best alternatives, as ranked against a wide range of criteria, are a grant scheme linked to a beef quality programme or devolving the scheme to the most fragile regions where the benefits of genetic improvement and the environmental and social losses of cattle reduction would be greatest."

That seems to be a logical conclusion to which I think we can all subscribe.

The summary continues:

"Even a strategy involving improvement of the status quo through simplification of the stud, introduction of a tighter selection policy, increased charges to allow purchase of better bulls and building a beef improvement programme around use of the scheme could lead to a significant improvement over the current situation."

Those are the objectives that I have set out.

Mr Morrison: I welcome the response that the minister has made to the debate so far. However, when I return to the Western Isles on Friday, can I go with an assurance from him that the refocused bull hire scheme is not a downgrading of the current arrangement and that it will not eventually turn out to be a more expensive version of that arrangement?

Allan Wilson: The scheme is intended to provide quality and real improvement. It is also to be accessible to the groups that have access to the current schemes.

The evaluation is not the only issue. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which is responsible for ensuring UK compliance with the European Community guidelines for state aid in the agricultural sector, has expressed concerns about the schemes. Indeed, I have said as much publicly. For example, it points out that the guidelines prohibit the granting of operating aids and limit the level of permissible support. We did not simply accept those concerns without questioning their basis carefully. No minister likes to take actions that he knows will be unpopular—I certainly do not. For the record, DEFRA has its legal advisers and so do we. As a result of the legal advice that we have

received, we share DEFRA's concerns. I cannot be any clearer than that.

Jim Mather's analogy with New Zealand was perhaps not the most appropriate, given that it has withdrawn agricultural subsidies and the current debate centres on retaining such subsidies. That said, I would argue that subsidy is a side issue. The concern is whether it is an operational aid. With respect to Fergus Ewing, what SEERAD or NFU Scotland thinks does not matter. The trading accounts are available for everyone, including the EC state-aid units, to inspect and it is what they think that matters.

Fergus Ewing: If that is the case, why have objections to the scheme been raised only now and not in any of the previous years in which it has been operating?

Allan Wilson: That is a fair point. All I can say is that the rules and the schemes have changed over time.

We cannot now conceal what we are doing, because that would be improper and illegal. I know that some people outside this Parliament argue that, since other countries do it, so should we, but such an approach is neither long term nor sustainable. After all, we cannot argue for a fair deal in Europe on fisheries and at the same time turn a blind eye to concerns over state aid.

Mr McGrigor: Is the minister suggesting that the scheme contravenes state-aid rules? I have it on good authority from Brussels that it does not.

Allan Wilson: I repeat for Jamie McGrigor's benefit that it does not matter what SEERAD, the NFUS or—with all due respect—his good authority thinks. The trading accounts are available for everyone to see and for the EC state-aid units to inspect. It is what they think that matters. DEFRA's legal advice in this respect is categorical—as is our own. As a result, we will move forward in the way that we said we would.

With respect to colleagues, we need to examine this issue in a less emotive manner. We have closed the Shetland rams scheme, which was created to encourage high-quality wool production and is no longer appropriate. We have also closed the ram purchase scheme, because the evaluation showed that it delivered no measurable improvements. There seems to be consensus in the chamber about that decision. The scheme was not well used—after all, it supplied just over 6 per cent of the rams in use in the Highlands and Islands—and was not regarded as a source of quality rams.

We used UK public money to deliver public benefits. A necessary requirement of any assistance scheme is that it should deliver the benefits that it was created to provide, which is

why we are proposing to replace the bull hire scheme with a more effective alternative. I, more than most people, appreciate the worries that have been expressed on behalf of crofting interests. However, concerns over value for money and state-aid rules meant that the status quo was not an option.

It is important to note that we are not, as has been alleged, giving up on cattle improvement—quite the contrary. We are working hard to develop an alternative scheme that must be effective, an improvement on what went on before and state-aid compliant. I cannot put it more succinctly than that.

We hope to have firm proposals, worked up in close consultation with the industry, by the autumn. Those proposals will prove to be an improvement for the crofting communities concerned.

Meeting closed at 18:15.

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