

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 25 November 2004

Session 2

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CONTENTS

Thursday 25 November 2004

Debates

Col.

FOOD (SUPERMARKETS)	12231
<i>Motion moved—[Shiona Baird].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ross Finnie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Richard Lochhead].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Fergusson].</i>	
Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)	12231
The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie)	12234
Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)	12237
Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)	12241
Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab)	12244
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	12246
Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)	12249
Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab)	12251
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	12253
George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)	12256
Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)	12258
Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)	12260
Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)	12262
Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)	12264
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	12266
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)	12268
Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)	12270
Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)	12271
Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con)	12274
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	12276
Ross Finnie	12278
Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	12280
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	12284
QUESTION TIME	12296
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN	12319
<i>Motion moved—[Johann Lamont].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Christine Grahame].</i>	
The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont)	12319
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)	12324
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)	12326
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	12328
Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)	12330
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	12332
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	12333
Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)	12336
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)	12338
Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)	12340
Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)	12342
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)	12343
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)	12346
Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)	12348
Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)	12350
Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)	12352
Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)	12354
The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm)	12357
DECISION TIME	12362
DEBATING IN SCHOOLS	12369
<i>Motion debated—[Mr Brian Monteith].</i>	

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	12369
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP).....	12372
Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)	12373
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green).....	12375
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con).....	12376
Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)	12377
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	12378
The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson).....	12380

Oral Answers

Col.

FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	12284
Anti-terror Courts (Trials without Jury)	12293
Cabinet (Meetings)	12288
Children and Communities (Protection from Registered Sex Offenders).....	12291
Class Sizes (Partnership Agreement Commitment).....	12294
Prime Minister (Meetings).....	12284
Scottish Executive (Priorities).....	12290
QUESTION TIME	
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE	12296
ENTERPRISE, LIFELONG LEARNING AND TRANSPORT	12296
Campbeltown to Ballycastle Ferry	12298
Contemporary Music	12301
Economic Growth	12299
Edinburgh South Suburban Railway	12302
Freight (Transfer from Road to Rail).....	12296
JUSTICE AND LAW OFFICERS	12303
Disclosure Scotland	12305
Domestic Abuse (LGBT Young People)	12304
Fire Control Rooms (Consultation).....	12307
New Roads and Street Works Act 1991	12303
Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2004	12308
Young People (Drug and Alcohol Abuse).....	12309
GENERAL QUESTIONS	12310
"ambitious, excellent schools"	12310
Central Heating	12316
Contaminated Land (European Court of Justice Ruling).....	12313
Foster Care (Regulation and Inspection)	12314
Planning Guidelines (Renewable Developments)	12314
Sustainable Development Education	12312

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 25 November 2004

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

Food (Supermarkets)

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2056, in the name of Shiona Baird, on supermarkets and the Scottish food chain, and three amendments to the motion.

09:30

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): In this debate on food and supermarkets, we need to ask ourselves some fundamental questions about how well we, as a society and a nation, are being served by the dominance of the four big supermarket chains. Three quarters of the United Kingdom grocery sector is dominated by four major supermarket chains. What effect is that concentration of selling and buying power having on Scottish farmers and producers, on local high streets, on local economies and on consumer choice and health?

The chief executive of the Big Food Group plc, which owns Iceland stores, has given a stark warning that we are at a point at which what we do now about supermarkets will set the terms of our social legacy for the future. We can either act now to curb monopolisation or we can allow choice to be cut even further. The supermarkets would have us believe that one of their big advantages is consumer choice. The reality is that most people drive to just one shop and shop there, and so they are unable to make a choice or even a comparison with other shops. Once people are in the supermarket, the choice is between 20 different kinds of over-processed breakfast cereal or six different thicknesses of loo paper.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Shiona Baird: No, I really must keep going.

Meanwhile, back in the high street, specialised stores, including butchers, bakers, fishmongers and newsagents, are closing at a rate of 50 a week throughout the UK. General stores have been closing at a rate of one a day. Wholesalers, which underpin the local stores, are closing at a rate of six a week, largely as a result of being sidetracked by supermarkets. Local high streets and economies are being decimated, and what

about our food culture and our health? The 2001-02 expenditure and food survey showed that consumption of fresh, raw, unprocessed food had declined, while that of processed food was up. Consumption of green vegetables was down 7 per cent, while consumption of chips was up 6 per cent. Is it just coincidence that the UK's vegetable consumption has declined by almost a third since the 1960s, while the retail dominance of the supermarkets has grown?

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Does the member concede that one of the problems for those of us who have some sympathy with what she is saying is that where we are going is a result of consumers exercising the very choice that she claims is being taken away from them?

Shiona Baird: That is exactly what I am trying to point out. The choice is being taken away by the four major retailers. Where is the choice, if the local butchers and the local bakers are closing down? That is not choice.

Supermarkets now specialise in what they call "healthy options" ranges, many of which are over-processed, high in fat and contain too much salt. Not only that, but the supermarkets charge more for them.

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

Shiona Baird: No.

A recent survey by the Food Commission showed that buying a basket of those healthy options from a supermarket cost 51 per cent more than buying a basket of standard processed food.

We need the facts of supermarket trading practices to be known. When supermarket prices are cut, the reductions are not achieved by cuts in profits; they are achieved by squeezing the producers, suppliers and competitors. Two-for-one offers are funded by the producers.

I should declare an interest: my family farm, although I am now a sleeping partner. When we grew for supermarkets nearly 10 years ago, our organic leeks were rejected because they were too big for the packaging. We were told, "Sorry, your broccoli crop has grown too well. The heads are too big to sell." The quality was perfect, but the size did not suit. We no longer sell to supermarkets. A local farmer's first cutting of organic cauliflowers was rejected because he had trimmed the leaves too much. He now sells to box schemes and specialist outlets. Presentation and uniformity seem to count more than quality with supermarkets. Farmers, as we all know, are being ruthlessly exploited by the supermarkets. As the NFU Scotland has pointed out, five years ago Scotland had 2,200 dairy producers. That number

has fallen to around 1,500. The supermarkets pay dairy farmers 17p to 19p a litre for milk that costs 19p to 20p a litre to produce, and then sell it for 40p to 50p a litre. The figures just do not add up for anyone, apart from the supermarkets.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): We have heard a litany of the problems and, as Alasdair Morgan pointed out, we have some sympathy with what the member is saying, but what is the Green solution? Is it the same solution that the Green party will use with regard to the utilities? Will it nationalise the supermarkets in a Green socialist republic?

Shiona Baird: That just illustrates the paucity of the member's argument.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Answer the question.

Shiona Baird: I will answer the question.

What we want is fair trade—the farmers themselves talk about that. We want a fair balance between the big retailers, and a real choice between them, independent retailers and small local shops. I cannot understand why Mr Lyon, as a farmer, does not agree with that. Perhaps he has been away from farming for too long.

In recognition of the fact that suppliers are getting a bad deal, a code of practice has been devised in an attempt to ensure a better relationship between supermarkets and suppliers. However, the code is failing. Many farmers are not covered by it, and those who are covered by it appear to be so afraid of recriminations from the supermarkets that they are not lodging complaints. Since the inception of the code in 2002, not a single complaint has been made, yet there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence of bad practice. I have personal knowledge of that, but I do not have the time to go into it. That is why the Green party is calling for an independent overseer of the code to ensure proactively that it is enforced and to protect complainants, and why we are calling for the food supply chain to be covered.

Dr Jackson: Will the member take an intervention?

Shiona Baird: No, I have had eight minutes already.

That is why the Green party wants and expects the Executive to put pressure on Westminster to ensure that our farmers and producers are getting the fair deal that they deserve. In a nutshell, the choice is stark: ever-increasing dominance of mega-retailers, or—listen carefully, please—a mixed balance of independent retailers and specialist shops, sourcing locally from thriving communities and supported by a wide range of local trades. I ask members to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that more than three-quarters of the UK grocery sector is dominated by just four supermarket chains; is concerned about the negative impact that the dominance of supermarkets is having on Scottish farmers, independent retailers, high streets, local economies and consumer choice and health; notes that supermarkets also have significant power to control and lower prices being paid to Scottish producers but fail to translate this into lower prices for consumers; notes the Office of Fair Trading's report that fear among suppliers of being delisted by the major supermarkets is preventing them from complaining under the current Supermarket Code of Practice; calls for an independent overseer of the code of practice who will proactively ensure that it is enforced and who will protect complainants from reprisals, and further calls for the code of practice to apply to the whole food supply chain in order to ensure fair trade for all.

09:39

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I am certainly not here this morning to champion the supermarkets, but, quite honestly, the appalling scattergun approach of the Greens is simply not credible. Of course there are problems—

Shiona Baird: Is the minister listening to the NFUS?

Ross Finnie: I am listening to the NFUS, and I will come back to that.

Of course there are problems in some sectors, which I will address, and problems with enforcement of the code of practice, but to condemn the supermarket industry out of hand on the basis of one or two rather skimpy unrelated facts is simply not good enough for a debate in this chamber.

An efficient, competitive and innovative retail sector makes an important contribution to our economy. Consumers demand choice, even within a store. Shiona Baird suggested that there is no choice within stores and that one needs 22 supermarkets in order to get choice, but that is simply not credible.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): The minister talks about choice. The people of Portobello, in my region, will face the devastation of their high street if a new supermarket is built there. They already have nine supermarkets within a 2-mile radius. If the new supermarket is built, that will mean the end of their high street, the end of independent choice and the end—[*Interruption.*] What is the minister's answer? What does he want to see on the high street? Does he want just supermarkets or a range of different shops?

Ross Finnie: Rather than being an intervention, that was probably a more forceful speech than the one that we heard earlier. Interestingly enough, however, it was about planning and not about

supermarkets; we could have a separate debate on planning law.

The idea that Scottish food producers do not benefit from their association with supermarkets in Scotland is nonsense and is not borne out by the facts. Rowan Glen Dairy Products Ltd supplies probiotic drinks from Newton Stewart; Simply Organic Ltd has contracts with Tesco, Asda and Morrisons; Scot Trout Ltd supplies trout and salmon products to Tesco and Sainsbury's; Kettle Produce Ltd supplies Tesco and Marks and Spencer; and McIntosh Donald Ltd provides a wide range of beef products. Not one of those suppliers is saying anything other than that that business is hugely valuable to them and to the farmers who produce the raw materials.

Having said that, I recognise that there is considerable unease about the way in which certain multiples deal with certain sectors. I accept the point that the NFUS put forward about the milk sector, but Shiona Baird chose to extend that point into every sector and that is not what the NFUS is saying. The NFUS is talking about the relationship between the price in the milk sector—the 17p to 19p per litre that the producer might get—and the price of a litre of milk. Shiona Baird should not jump to the conclusion that that is the sole reason for farm closures of in the dairy sector. In earlier debates, we have discussed the lack of vertical integration in the industry and the structural difficulties that the industry has to deal with because of its over-reliance on selling raw milk.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): On vertically integrated co-operatives in the dairy sector, the sector has believed hitherto that it will be difficult to achieve vertical integration and achieve the size that is required to compete with the supermarkets. Will the minister give the Parliament a steer on how easy that might be?

Ross Finnie: My officials have had discussions on that subject with the Office of Fair Trading and our understanding is that a properly planned programme that sets out how that might be achieved would be looked on with some favour by the industry. We will have to take the matter forward in discussion with the industry and the industry will have to take it forward with the OFT. We do not believe that there is an absolute barrier, as has sometimes been suggested.

The motion draws attention, properly, to the effectiveness and enforceability of the supermarket code of practice, which, as Shiona Baird pointed out, was developed in 2002. The code is enforceable only on certain of our major stores. As Shiona Baird said, no complaints have been made. It is important to note that the Office of Fair Trading, in the review of the code's operation that it undertook earlier this year, was worried about that absence of complaints. As a

result, it is carrying out a separate investigation, which is still in progress; I understand that it is expected to be completed shortly. I think that the Parliament will welcome the OFT's independent examination of the operation of the code and I am sure that we will all be interested in the outcome of that audit when it is published.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): When the OFT reports on the code of practice and its failings—we all know that it has failed—what will the Executive do? What representation will the minister make to the Department of Trade and Industry? How will he deal with the results of the OFT review?

Ross Finnie: As always, I will await the outcome of the report before deciding on the tactics and strategy that I will take. We are looking, I hope, for that report to point to how the code of practice can be more properly enforced.

We should not lose sight of the impact of other aspects in relation to Scottish food. We cannot talk about food production without considering the health dimension of what we eat. The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care has embarked on a series of initiatives to try to ensure that our food industry in Scotland takes up the cudgels of improving our health. Despite the criticisms that were made, it is interesting to note that Asda has been improving its core lines by reducing the levels of salt and sugar in its products. We are setting up a Scottish food and health council, with representation from across all sectors, and we are revisiting the school meals service to try to improve standards.

On the point about trying to get more Scottish produce on to the shelves, there is a partnership agreement commitment to try to ensure that public procurement pays particular attention to suppliers who provide an appropriate level not just of Scottish produce, but of Scottish produce that bears all the hallmarks of farm assurance and standards, to ensure local health.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In the light of European Union directives, what influence can the minister have on public procurement of locally produced food? What guidance will he give so that local authorities can get local produce from local suppliers? At present, there are difficulties with that.

Ross Finnie: I understand that. As I indicated, we have launched new guidelines for the public sector to try to ensure that there is a wider range of public procurement, which will address the issue. Seasonality can be incorporated into those standards.

On the promotion of food production, way back in 1999 I launched the Scottish food and drink strategy, which has been driven forward by the

industry in collaboration with the Executive and has brought about a number of significant improvements. We want to deal with basic—

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Ross Finnie: No. I must move on, as I think that I am running out of time.

We are keen to ensure that we implement the “Organic Action Plan” to improve the quality and range of organic produce that is available. We are working closely with the Scottish organic industry and the organics stakeholder group, which has been a valuable forum for the development and implementation of that plan.

In looking at the evidence, one can point to specific elements of the supermarket industry that need close examination. However, I find that the tenor of the motion, which suggests that the supermarket sector is causing all sorts of problems, including the closing down of local communities, simply does not bear close examination.

I have made it clear in my remarks that I regard the operation of the milk sector as a matter that is not just for the supply chain. There are structural issues in the industry and I take on board the point about the investigation that the Office of Fair Trading is undertaking into the operation of the code of practice, but other food sectors in Scotland benefit hugely from the contracts that they receive from the supermarket industry. Without them, there would be a devastating effect on many farmers and primary producers of Scottish food.

I move amendment S2M-2056.4, to leave out from first “notes” to end and insert:

“, while recognising that competition matters, including those relating to supermarkets and the food sector, are reserved to the UK Parliament, notes that the Office of Fair Trading is currently carrying out an independent audit of the Supermarket Code of Practice; agrees with the Executive’s objective, as set out in *A Partnership for a Better Scotland: A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture* and *Scottish Food and Drink Strategy*, of supporting Scotland’s food and drinks industry to build on its reputation for high quality and its strong export record and to ensure that more Scottish produce is processed in Scotland; supports the Executive’s funding of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society which assists farmer co-ops, and welcomes the implementation of the *Organic Action Plan* and the *Eating for Health* action plan.”

09:49

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): There is no doubt that the supermarkets, thanks to their ingenuity and chilling business acumen, have changed the way in which we shop, eat and think in this country. Their phenomenal

growth has seen the likes of Tesco reach the stage at which sales in the UK have reached £13 billion.

Yesterday, we heard that the Government is investing £2.1 million to develop the marine energy sector in Scotland. That would not even pay the salary of Tesco’s chief executive, which is nearly £3 million. In 2003, it was said that he received 255 times the average income of farmers in the United Kingdom.

The supermarkets will be with us for the foreseeable future and consumers are voting with their feet, which is why supermarkets are so successful. People are work obsessed and impatient and they like convenience, which is why they use supermarkets. They like to be able to buy fresh fruit and DVDs round the clock. They can shop for whatever they like whenever they like. They can buy economy or luxury lines in-store or online. Consumers just want quality, safety, choice and low prices, and as far as they are concerned, they can have that from their supermarkets.

However, all good things have a price. We have in-store bakeries, pharmacies and meat and fish counters, which have taken their toll on the high streets in our towns and villages throughout Scotland. That is why many high streets are littered with “To Let” signs and boarded-up windows. We are all aware of the recent study that said that every time a new supermarket opens, 276 jobs are lost locally.

Supermarkets take advantage of global food production, which also has a cost, because they go for the cheapest rather than the closest source, which runs up food miles. That has environmental consequences.

The crux of today’s debate is the power of the big four supermarkets and their impact on Scotland’s primary producers. As has been said, the big four control 75 per cent of grocery retail in the UK and Scotland. That leaves suppliers in a vulnerable situation, because they have fewer customers and more purchasing power is put in the hands of fewer supermarket giants. Many people in Scotland believe that that has resulted in some supermarkets abusing their power and being viewed as the private sector’s bully-boys.

The supermarkets have soaring profits and someone must pay to allow them to make those profits. At the top of the list are suppliers. Primary producers are at the bottom of the food chain—it is a David and Goliath situation. In 1999, the Rural Affairs Committee took evidence from an economist who told us that only 15p in every pound that is spent on groceries in Scotland goes to the farmer. We must investigate what happens between the plough and the plate. The SNP urges Ross Finnie to investigate the situation locally in

Scotland to find out where money goes and what role supermarkets and everyone else play in the food supply chain. We urge him to say that he will do that.

Milk provides the most topical illustration of what is happening. I have read the executive summary of a Milk Development Council report that was published in August, which says:

"Over the past ten years farmgate prices and farm margins have fallen, dairy processor margins have remained fairly constant, while retailer margins have increased across all products."

The NFUS has said that a quarter of family farms in Scotland went under in the past five years, which has a knock-on impact on the rest of the rural economy and not just on farms. That is a problem. We must protect our primary producers, because we need food security in Scotland, as well as Europe and the rest of the world—that rarely comes up in debate.

The current climate favours supermarkets and we must consider how we can tip the balance in favour of suppliers. The code of practice is one avenue for achieving that. The SNP is sympathetic to the sentiments in the Green party's motion and supports the campaign by the NFUS and others to strengthen the code and appoint an independent overseer. However, we must be realistic. Even if an independent overseer is appointed and people are given anonymity, people will not complain, because of the imbalance of power between supermarkets and suppliers. No matter what the circumstances are, supermarkets will always be able to track the source of a complaint. The danger that suppliers will be blackballed always exists, so we must be realistic. The Green party's motion is pretty naive, because it does not offer a wide range of solutions.

If we want to empower suppliers and primary producers, we need Government help through public procurement, so that our suppliers do not have just a few customers but have diverse customers, which include the national health service and education institutions. We need a report from the minister on the extent to which public procurement assists local suppliers. A requirement to cut packaging would also incentivise the procurement of supplies from local sources.

It is important that consumers have the information with which to make informed choices. Labelling is one way to achieve that. If the consumer is informed, they will make better choices. If they know that produce has better welfare standards and is local, they will be more likely to buy it. Providing that information is one way to help suppliers in Scotland.

Supermarkets must compete against one another not only on price—that is not as much of an issue as it used to be—but on welfare standards, freshness, traceability and ethically clean food. If they do that, Scotland will have a huge opportunity, because that will create a win-win situation for Scottish suppliers, which can tick the boxes for all those criteria.

Not only Governments, but consumers, can put pressure on supermarkets. The debate about genetic modification meant that all the supermarkets took genetically modified foods off their shelves because of pressure from the public, and not just from the Government.

We must consider vertical integration and expanding co-operatives. I am pleased that the minister mentioned that.

We ask the minister to convene a summit of supermarkets in Scotland at which he will speak to them directly about all the issues that have been discussed in the debate. It is well within the minister's power to do that, so why does he not go ahead and do it? At least that would offer one way of discussing the issues with supermarket heads. In the past few years, I have pressed the minister in the Parliament to hold such meetings, but few have taken place. Now he has the opportunity to have them.

The over-30-months scheme is affecting the beef sector in particular. The Food Standards Agency gave advice months ago that it is safe for such meat to re-enter the food chain, but we still wait for the scheme to be scrapped. One reason why the beef sector cannot increase its profitability is that it can give beef only to supermarkets. If we can reopen our overseas export markets, suppliers will be able to obtain a better price for their beef, which will allow them to increase their profitability. It is imperative that there is an end to the dithering and delay and that the minister ends the scheme as soon as possible.

Ross Finnie: I share the member's concern and frustration, but I hope that he accepts that if he were ever to be a minister and the Food Standards Agency produced a report about which the chief medical officers had queries that they wanted to be resolved, he would not wilfully ignore their advice. I accept that the time has come, but I hope that he accepts that a chief medical officer's view should not be wilfully overridden.

Richard Lochhead: If I were the minister, I would ask myself what the purpose of establishing the Food Standards Agency was. Its role is to give the Government independent advice. The Government has ignored and sat on that independent advice for the past 16 months. Surely it should listen to the Food Standards Agency, which it established to give it independent advice.

The Government can address many issues to help suppliers and our farmers in particular. It would help if the minister pulled his head out of the sand and started to be proactive to address the situation, which is a huge concern in rural Scotland. We must do something about it. We have some powers—it is a pity that we do not have more—and we must use them. I urge the minister to take on board and act on some of the proactive and productive ideas that arise from today's debate to help our farmers.

I move amendment S2M-2056.1, to insert at end:

“recognises that the behaviour of supermarkets can be influenced by pressure from informed consumers as well as the government; calls for a Scottish Executive investigation into each sector's share of the profits between the plough and plate and particularly the farmer's share of every pound spent on groceries; further calls on the Scottish Executive to convene a supermarkets' summit to discuss ongoing concerns; recognises that the more local produce on supermarket shelves and less “food miles” the better it is for the environment and costs; supports a public procurement policy that ensures where possible food is sourced locally; notes that the beef sector's profitability can be increased by scrapping the Over Thirty Months scheme in accordance with Food Standards Agency advice, and calls for this to happen.”

09:58

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): I was, in speaking to the amendment in my name, going to congratulate the Green party on bringing the subject to Parliament for debate. Unfortunately, Shiona Baird took only two interventions—it is not so much a debate as a lecture. I congratulate George Lyon and Alasdair Morgan on managing to intervene during her opening speech. They obviously know a great secret that I do not.

George Lyon: Not that it did much good.

Alex Fergusson: I agree.

The subject is topical and fairly relevant and touches on two issues. The first has been, and remains, of concern to many communities throughout Scotland, and the second was brought vividly to our attention recently by the lobby from NFUS. I will touch on both subjects.

This morning, Chris Ballance asked me whether my amendment was a bit weaselly, to which the answer is no. He asked whether we could have lodged an amendment that said that we almost agreed with the Greens' motion. As many members have said, one can agree with much in the motion. We thought long and hard about whether to propose adding words to the motion, but were forced to conclude that the second half of the motion's first section—if that is not too complicated—is too prescriptive. It is too simplistic to say that all supermarkets are bad, which is in

effect what the motion says. I accept the need for better product information, but to suggest that the dominance of supermarkets is having a negative impact on consumers' health almost defies belief.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Fergusson: Unlike the opening speaker for the Scottish Green Party, I will give way.

Patrick Harvie: Does the member accept that the basis of the motion is to challenge the overwhelming power and dominance of the big four supermarkets? As the motion says, those supermarkets have taken over three quarters of retail in the United Kingdom. We are not saying that all supermarkets are always bad—we are saying that the dominance and power of the supermarkets are bad.

Alex Fergusson: That is not what the motion says. If the member studies the motion, he will find that the Scottish Green Party is saying that all supermarkets are bad. That is the only way I can read the motion, although I accept that it deals with the fact that there are four dominant supermarkets.

Despite the wording of the motion, consumers can make one simple choice, which is not to buy from supermarkets. However, year on year they seem to choose to do so. We cannot and should not try to get away from the fact that, on the whole, customers like supermarkets.

The question that we should ask is this: How do we achieve the right balance in a free and competitive society? That question is currently being asked in my nearest market town, Castle Douglas in Galloway, which makes a very interesting example. Castle Douglas is renowned all over the south-west of Scotland as an excellent shopping town. Remarkably, for a town of its size, it retains four butchers, one of whom is a specialist pork butcher, as well as a diverse range of independent retail outlets, very few of which represent national chains. The town draws people from far and wide, to such an extent that come election time it is hardly worth canvassing or leafleting the main street on Saturdays, as most people in it come from outwith the constituency.

There is also a Co-op supermarket within a short distance of the main street. Tesco is now proposing to build another supermarket outwith the town centre, which is the cause of no little controversy. Most of the existing retailers, almost everyone from outwith Castle Douglas and many of those who live in the town are opposed to the proposal and everyone agrees that there is room for only one supermarket in the town. However, one must accept that for many people, especially the less well-off people in the town, the proposal offers greater choice—to begin with, at least—

possibly cheaper food and job prospects of sorts. It is a question of balance that is not easy to answer. Like other members, I have considerable reservations about the impact that the opening of a superstore can have, particularly on a small rural community. However, the motion's claim that there is no good side to supermarket development is not true. We accept that supermarket development can have a negative impact, but we cannot accept that that is, as the motion states, always the case. It is not.

We are happy to support the second part of the motion, which draws back from the call that has been made of late for a legal toughening of the supermarket code of practice. I am pleased that the motion does so, as that is the preferable way forward. A code is not a hard-and-fast law, but any code must be enforceable and fair to all parties, and it is crystal clear that the supermarket code of practice is not working for all parties. I suggest that it is working only for the supermarkets.

As other members have said, the current plight of the dairy farming sector illustrates the point all too clearly. As the member for a constituency that has a high proportion of Scotland's dairy farmers, I cannot be other than deeply concerned about that plight. Ross Finnie was absolutely right when he said last week at question time that

"moves must be made towards creating more vertical integration so that we are less dependent on the raw milk price."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 2004; c 12053.]

I understand that that means revisiting competition law, which is a UK matter, but one on which the Scottish Executive should exert considerable pressure. I sincerely hope that it is doing so.

Until the Executive's pressure bears fruit, enforcement of the code of practice—some way of ensuring that the pot of money that is available throughout the chain is evenly spread—is important. It cannot be right that the producer of a litre of milk should receive 17p or 18p, when the retailer gets 45p or 50p and it costs at least 20p to produce the milk in the first place. It certainly cannot be right that fear of being delisted by the supermarkets prevents complaints by producers. If an enforcer could change that, we would support it. If legal back-up or strengthening were required as a last resort, we would support that, too. Something drastic needs to be done when 200 to 300 cow herds are packing up in my constituency—I am talking about modern and efficient units in a producer-friendly arena. That is a serious situation, and serious situations demand serious action.

We do not accept that all supermarkets have a negative impact or that all have a positive one, but we believe that they could do much more to present a positive image—a point on which my colleagues will expand later. As has been

mentioned, they could source more local produce. Better and clearer labelling is important. We could encourage farmers' markets to expand the choice that is available. Above all, we could ensure that our primary producers are consistently paid a fair share of the overall moneys that are available for their product, whatever it may be. The goal must be fair shares for all. It is a tragedy that we have to call for that in the first place. Doing something about it is a different matter.

I move amendment S2M-2056.2, to leave out from "negative" to end and insert,

"impact that the dominance of supermarkets can have on Scottish farmers, producers and communities; notes the Office of Fair Trading's report that fear among suppliers of being delisted by the major supermarkets is preventing them from complaining under the current Supermarket Code of Practice; calls for an independent overseer of the code of practice who will proactively ensure that it is enforced and who will protect complainants from reprisals, and further calls for the code of practice to apply to the whole food supply chain in order to ensure fair trade for all, with particular emphasis on ensuring that the primary producer receives a fair reward for his or her product."

10:06

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): I was, as a committed vegetarian since the mid-1980s, looking forward to the debate. I thought that we would have a serious debate about healthy food, its production and its distribution. Food matters, for all sorts of reasons that I will explore later, so I was pleased when I heard that the Greens intended to devote some of their time to debating it. However, their motion does nothing of the sort—it addresses matters that are expressly reserved to Westminster, but nothing else. I regret that the Green party, which shares many Labour values, has chosen to abandon the constructive approach that Robin Harper took during the previous session of Parliament. On this occasion, it has lodged a motion that offers little insight and no solutions and that addresses reserved matters, rather than issues over which we have control.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Scott Barrie: No—I want first to make some progress. The devolution settlement is supported by a majority of Scots. Some members may have difficulty accepting that, but it is the established will.

Now that I have got that off my chest, I will return to food. There is little in the Greens' pamphlet "Join the food revolution ..." with which I disagree. It is a little simplistic in places, but I share many of the pamphlet's sentiments. We are all in favour of providing schoolchildren with healthy meals. That is why the Executive published a set of nutritional standards for school lunches and has invested more than £55 million in the hungry for success initiative.

We are all in favour of reducing food miles. That is why the partnership agreement says explicitly:

"We will encourage localised food distribution systems involving more local processing of produce."

In the next paragraph, it states:

"We will support local marketing schemes, with clear accreditation and labelling of local produce to increase consumers' power to identify and choose Scottish produce. We will work with supermarkets and farming representatives to encourage greater sourcing and clear labelling of local food items and food produced by organic and sustainable farming methods such as LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming)."

Richard Lochhead: The member said that the Executive has pledged to work with the supermarkets. Can he provide us with information on what has happened to fulfil that pledge?

Scott Barrie: I was quoting from the partnership agreement, which states clearly that it is the Executive's intention to work both with producers and with suppliers of food. That is the genesis of the debate that we are having. Alex Fergusson spoke about the balance that must be struck between those who produce our food and those who sell it.

As a Unison member—for the avoidance of doubt, I declare an interest—I am all in favour of the union's food for good charter, and thank the Green party for its support of the charter.

Unlike our opponents, Labour has a good record on food and agriculture. The wax-jacket brigade to my right likes to paint itself as the farmer's friend, but I am not sure that we should take any lectures from the party that brought us BSE, that had our beef banned the world over and that presided over the salmonella in eggs fiasco. It wants to perform the same trick again, this time by playing fast and loose with amnesic shellfish poisoning to ruin our shellfish industry. The Tories and the SNP would destroy our fishing industry by ignoring the simple fact that with no fish there would be no industry. I pay tribute to Robin Harper's consistent support of the Executive on that matter.

After noting the substance of Shiona Baird's motion, I confess that I am puzzled as to why the Green party thought that it was a good idea to throw away its debating time on competition law—a matter that is reserved to Westminster—and why it wants to pre-empt the Office of Fair Trading's audit of the supermarket code of practice.

I know that the Greens might not have a lot of constituency casework, but they seem to have got carried away with trying to keep themselves occupied. Rather than concentrate on what the people of Scotland elected members of the Scottish Parliament to do, they have got caught up in their own rhetoric and presented it to Parliament as a considered view. The Greens cannot

reasonably complain about the Executive's record of action on food and agriculture, which the minister outlined earlier, because they agree with most of it. They cannot bring themselves to say how they would use Parliament's powers to improve the health of Scotland's people and its food industry. If their motion—on entirely reserved matters—is an argument for more powers for the Scottish Parliament or for independence, which the Greens say they support, it is pretty thin gruel.

As the Greens should know by now, the Office of Fair Trading is currently carrying out an independent audit of the supermarket code of practice. The audit is to see what, if any, substance there is in the complaints that the Greens present as fact. Those of us on the Labour benches think that it would be a better idea to wait until the audit is complete before reaching a firm conclusion. However, on today's evidence, the Greens are never ones to let the facts get in their way.

In their search for baddies, the Greens have chosen to launch an attack on supermarkets without taking the trouble to read fully what the Competition Commission report has to say on the matter. The Green motion states:

"supermarkets also have significant power to control and lower prices being paid to Scottish producers but fail to translate this into lower prices for consumers".

The Competition Commission states:

"We were satisfied that cost reductions at the farm gate had either been passed through to retail prices or, where they had not, that there had been cost increases elsewhere in the supply chain."

The Competition Commission found no evidence of excessive profiteering by supermarkets, nor any evidence that unreasonably high prices were being charged. The Greens might have more confidence in their anti-business prejudice than in the Competition Commission and the Office of Fair Trading, but I do not think that the rest of Parliament does.

The Executive and the UK Government at Westminster have taken a clear lead in safeguarding our food and improving the nation's economy and health. The Greens have a well-intentioned and generally sensible food policy; it is just a pity that they had so little confidence in it that they chose to lodge such a poor motion for debate today.

10:12

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I begin by challenging the notions that all is well in our food chain and, indeed, that all the Executive work to which Scott Barrie referred is having the effect that he suggests.

The impact of supermarket growth has been profound. The Scottish Retail Consortium—from which all members have heard in the past day or two—claims that supermarkets ensure permanent access to food for all members of society. Why, in that case, does food poverty continue to exist in Scotland? Why, if the takeover by the big four supermarkets of over three quarters of our food retail has been a positive development, do an average of 5,000 people in every parliamentary constituency in the UK suffer from food poverty? Why do 40 per cent of people admitted to hospital show signs of malnutrition? Why is a healthy diet out of reach for millions in a rich country like ours? It is because the disproportionate power of the big four retailers has allowed them to change and distort our food chain, our food culture, and even our physical communities, to suit their own ends and to satisfy the demands of shareholders at the expense of producers, consumers, communities and the environment.

Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab): Is the member saying seriously that, by abolishing big supermarkets, people who live in the most deprived communities that we represent would have more access to cheap and healthy food than they do at the moment? I suspect that that is not the case.

Patrick Harvie: I take the point and refer the member to a comment that one of our Scottish Socialist Party colleagues made in the most recent election. On being asked whether the party wanted to nationalise Tesco, Tommy Sheridan answered with a wry smile, and perhaps a joke, “Not yet.”

We do not want to nationalise or abolish; we want to reduce the power and the dominance of the supermarkets. We want to put supermarkets back to where people wanted them in the first place—as part of a healthy and diverse mix of retail.

Food poverty is not just about the price of a loaf of bread or tin of beans. It is obvious to anyone that supermarkets can offer incredibly cheap deals on a few product lines if and when they choose to. However, their immense marketing muscle is always geared towards pushing highly processed products which, as well as being dubious on health grounds, makes it difficult to judge value for money. The reality is that most of those products are wildly more expensive than the cost of their ingredients.

There is also the cost of getting to the supermarket in the first place. When people have lost the option of buying locally, they travel hundreds of miles every year to do their shopping. That brings additional costs to those on low incomes who are unable to shop locally.

As Mark Ballard articulated earlier—only to be ignored by Mr Finnie—communities that oppose the growth of supermarkets, even communities that are oversupplied by supermarkets, cannot do so easily. The minister, in the finest tradition of the Scottish Executive silo mentality, dismissed that point as a planning matter. The role of the planning system is a central part of the story of the development—or, rather, overdevelopment—of supermarkets and until we redress the balance in the planning system in favour of communities, that will continue to be a problem.

Supermarkets can increase in size, build more parking spaces and open new stores with ease. Small shops cannot. Indeed, when small shops try to develop, they are hit with rates increases and when they try to attract shoppers, they know that those shoppers are comparing free parking at the supermarket with charged parking on the high street. The Executive's reform of the planning system must ensure that the wishes of communities are represented in the system that currently ignores them.

It is sad that many members who have spoken in today's debate are under the impression that buying three quarters of our groceries from four companies is the only way we can live. They argue that only big global supermarkets can offer the range of foods that people want to buy these days. That is nonsense—only supermarkets have the buying power that allows them to dominate markets. If that power were distributed more fairly and exercised more locally, demand for those products would still exist, there would still be those who wanted to meet that demand, exotic foods would not go out of fashion and it is likely that they would be traded more fairly. It is also likely that the products that we produce here would be sold here rather than our simultaneously importing and exporting vast quantities of the same stuff.

Only supermarkets—so the argument goes—can offer all the extra services that are developed alongside them. That is nonsense, too. Only supermarkets are being given the opportunity to develop in those ways. If someone runs one of the last handful of independent shops in their local high street, developing new services is not easily done because they are concerned with immediate survival. Every time a neighbour shuts up shop, the range of goods and services that draws people to the high street is diminished. If the butcher goes, the baker suffers. If the bank branch closes, the dry cleaner has to worry. However, a thriving locally owned retail cluster can develop co-operatively, even to the point of offering online ordering, combined home delivery schemes, child care while people shop and all the other attractive extras.

Some people would argue that to return to local food systems would be a backward step and that

we cannot go backwards. I say that if we have made the wrong turn, if we have come the wrong way and if we look up and realise that we are heading in the wrong direction, we should turn back. I do not suggest that we turn back the clock, but we want recognition that the course of our food culture is heading in the wrong direction and we must turn it back. If we look down south, we see that the trend is several years more advanced than it is up here. It is years again more advanced in the United States. Do we want to head in that direction? If we want to end food poverty, to have a healthy diet for all and to have a healthy local economy for every town and city, it is time to turn back.

10:19

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): The impact of supermarkets on small shops and primary producers is not a topic that has become important in the past few weeks during which it has become the topic of press releases from the Green party; that impact has developed over at least the past three decades. In my constituency—as, I suspect, in all members' constituencies—we have seen predation by supermarkets and its effects on small shops. In my constituency, Nairnites leave to go to Forres supermarkets on one hand and Inverness supermarkets on the other. The impact of that on the high street has been inexorable, consistent, persistent and has happened over a matter of decades.

We all agree about that, but we disagree in at least two respects. First, the alleged solution that has been proposed by the Green party would be completely ineffective. The Greens call for

“an independent overseer of the code of practice who will proactively ensure that it is enforced”—

a sort of Rambo of the protection world, or an Arnie Schwarzenegger who would arrive on the scene to protect primary producers and small shops from supermarkets. The idea belongs in the realms of fantasy.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

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

Shiona Baird: Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: This seems to be a good point at which to give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Mark Ruskell—no, Patrick Harvie will intervene.

Patrick Harvie: Does the member seriously suggest that such a massive industry should operate without an independent regulator? If he is

not suggesting that, what would be the regulator's role in enforcing the code of conduct?

Fergus Ewing: I suggest to Mr Harvie and his colleagues that the thoughtful, helpful and practical suggestions that are made in the NFUS briefing are a good read. We all agree that some of those suggestions should be adopted. However, the Government has a role to play and other measures to tackle the effects of supermarkets should at least be seriously considered.

First, bargaining strength is notoriously unequal. Since the Tories in their wisdom decided to abolish the milk marketing boards there has been an absence of collective bargaining strength on the part of the dairy sector. Without that strength, it is difficult to envisage how a legislative solution could be effective. Secondly, as Richard Lochhead said, the Government does not seem to have used its influence, which is huge. I refer to the Government's ability not necessarily to make legislation or to amend the regulatory regime—as the Greens propose—but simply to state that enough is enough and that farmers must get a better deal. If the Prime Minister decided to depart from his usual topics of the day and devote attention to the matter, Tesco et al would listen.

Our devolved powers could be used to address supermarkets' rateable values and to shift the burden of business rates from the small shop in the high street to Tesco in the business park outwith the town. I have corresponded with rates assessors on the matter and the Executive has the power to do that.

The Greens decided to debate food, so I would be interested to know whether they have come to a view on matters about which I sent an e-mail to Shiona Baird on 25 February. That e-mail followed disgraceful and false stories that a report sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts put about in relation to the salmon industry. The research was shown to be bogus and Scottish Quality Salmon helpfully provided us with the facts and the truth. Ms Baird attended a meeting at which I suggested a way of helping to promote salmon as a vital part of a nutritious diet, which is of particular value in the cognitive development of the unborn child—

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: The member will get her chance.

I suggested that it would be useful if a representative of each political party agreed to participate in a photocall, at which we would eat farmed salmon and show that we acknowledge salmon to be a valuable part of our diet. However, Ms Baird did not respond to my e-mail that asked the Scottish Green Party to participate. The

Greens did not say, "Yes; not only is salmon safe to eat but it is a valuable part of our diet." The Greens did not acknowledge that the FSA suggests that two portions of oily fish per week should be eaten as part of a healthy diet. I wait for the Greens to make those statements. If the Greens want to pose in the role of the farmers' protectors, I suggest that they start by having clear and unequivocal policies.

Shiona Baird: I recollect that at the meeting that Fergus Ewing mentions considerable concern was expressed about the number of fish farms that are not engaged in quality control. I do not quite remember the figure, but the number is very high. Does the member agree that that is a major problem?

Fergus Ewing: Ms Baird decided not to answer my e-mail of 25 February. Farmed salmon is an essential part of a nutritious diet and it would be helpful if the Scottish Green Party would say that. Apparently it will not do so even now.

For the Greens to cast themselves in the role of farmers' friends seems to be a spectacular example of political miscasting. It is like asking Norman Wisdom to play Dirty Harry, or Arnold Schwarzenegger to play Mozart. The Greens are good in their new role as blatant populists—

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. The member is well over time.

Fergus Ewing: The Greens have espoused the grey politics that they said that they would eschew and the yellow politics that we heard from Allan Wilson yesterday, because they are afraid to come off the fence and give a clear view and a serious policy on food or virtually anything else.

10:26

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I have sympathy with the emotion behind the Scottish Green Party motion. Like other members, I agree that there are serious issues to be debated. The Scottish Parliament has the power and competence to take action on many of those issues and it would have been preferable if the motion had addressed them. However, the motion does not do so, so I cannot support it.

The motion takes no account of the reality of consumer choice or the demand created by global communications and faster transport. It almost harks back to a woolly, baa-lamb, bucolic utopia, which I do not recall ever having existed. As a child in rural County Dublin in the 1950s, I recall that at this time of year we would eat boiled, stewed or roast beef, pork or mutton, local fish—assuming it was there to be caught—potatoes, carrots, cabbage, turnips and leeks.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Christine May: I ask the member to give me a minute.

We used to have apples for pudding, because they were available at this time of year. By the time I did a catering management course in the mid-60s not much had changed in relation to the availability of what we now accept as standard fare and think that we have the right to demand, not just for ourselves but for our communities. Kate Maclean mentioned the choice that is available to her constituents. It is right that our constituents should have that choice and that it should be delivered as fairly as possible—I will return to that point.

I also recall the health effects of poor food hygiene and handling processes. Nobody dies of botulism any more—at least, there are only isolated cases. The incidence of tuberculosis transferring from cattle to humans is mercifully rare, although I am aware that the incidence of TB from other sources is increasing.

I welcome the variety in our diet that we now enjoy.

Eleanor Scott: Will the member give way?

Christine May: I will just finish my point.

In the mid-60s I made a Hungarian goulash for the first time and served it to my family. My Dad looked at it and declared that the wallpaper that had just gone up in our hall looked better than the goulash. He asked to be served plain food and no more foreign muck.

The industry gives access to a wide range of safe food all year round.

Eleanor Scott: Does the member accept that although diseases from poor hygiene have decreased, obesity and related conditions such as type 2 diabetes have increased hugely? Does she accept that we face a ticking time bomb of diseases that are directly related to our nutritional practices and food culture?

Christine May: I am pleased that the member makes that point. I agree with her and I ask her to acknowledge that the Executive has control over and is taking action on those matters.

The total retail market for groceries in the UK is £115 billion per annum. The proportion of household income that is spent on groceries is 13.4 per cent and has decreased since my childhood. The sector employs 12 per cent of the Scottish work force. I want to concentrate on employment.

Robin Harper: In the 1950s, wages were far lower than they are today. Nowadays our standard of living is far better and the amount of money that

we have to spend is far greater than was the case then. However, food prices were much higher in the 1950s, because we had just come out of the war. There was no cheap food policy in those days either—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quickly, please.

Robin Harper: Does Christine May agree that it not possible to make comparisons between food prices or the proportion of income that is spent on food now and the position in the 1950s? Those comparisons have no relevance.

Christine May: I do not agree with Robin Harper. I am not speaking in the debate in order to talk about proportions of income; I simply highlighted the issue as an example of why the food industry is an important part of our economy.

The food industry is important for our farmers in the range of products that they produce. It is also important for biodiversity—my colleague Scott Barrie referred to the LEAF programme in that respect. Local biodiversity action plans, which are supported by the farming community in Fife and across Scotland, are doing wonders for our countryside and for the quality of food that we get.

Other important elements of the food industry are diversification, handling, processing and packaging, transport and logistics—we need only think of our use of the Rosyth ferry link to access European markets—and foreign languages: Kettle Produce in North East Fife, which neighbours my constituency, employs Czech, Spanish, Italian, German and French speakers to deal with the various countries to which the company exports and from which it arranges imports.

Tourism is also important, as is the co-operative movement, which no member has mentioned so far in the debate. The co-operative movement has had a huge effect on fair trade and on the ability of farmers to access markets through their local agricultural co-operatives. In addition, the Co-op builds stores in local communities. The final element that I want to mention is organics, because of the additional choice that that has given us.

The debate is about consumer choice, consumer incomes and dealing with the effects of poor diet. I support Ross Finnie's amendment; I cannot support the motion.

10:32

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I begin by drawing the attention of members to my entry in the register of members' interests. My entry shows that I am a farmer but, to give more full information, I should say that I am a dairy farmer and am a contracted supplier to Robert Wiseman Dairies.

It is interesting that the Greens should have lodged the motion that we are debating today, given that it relies heavily on much of the information that the NFU Scotland has put to the Parliament through its lobbying in recent weeks and by other means. That said, having heard some of the opening speeches in the debate and some of the comments that members of the Green party have made in their interventions, it seems that they decided to focus the debate on their belief that we should be attacking global capitalism. The Greens are trying to prevent the benefits of free trade from filtering down to the ordinary people who benefit from the existence of supermarkets. People use supermarkets because they provide quality at competitive prices. Supermarkets also allow people to spend a much smaller proportion of their income on food than was the case in the past.

For example, the town of Arbroath in the north-east of Scotland has only one supermarket at the moment to serve a population of about 25,000 people. Several applications have been made to build another supermarket in the town—indeed, quite some competition has emerged to get permission to do that. The consistent view of the people of Arbroath and the surrounding area is that they want another supermarket, because they want competition in the retail sector in the town. They do not want to have to go out of the town to benefit from cheap supermarket food, which is a benefit that is acquired through competition.

Although I believe that supermarkets serve an important purpose in the production of cheap food, I also agree that there is a problem with them. In that regard, I turn to Fergus Ewing's remarks about the abolition of the milk marketing boards. Given that he does not have my experience of going through that process, I remind him that undertaking collective bargaining on behalf of the farmer was not one of the roles of the supermarket, whereas the role of the milk marketing boards was to set a price that was acceptable to processors and buyers. Ultimately, their role was to guarantee the survival of the farmer, but they had to do that at the same time as guaranteeing that the price of milk was kept down.

As a result, in the early 1990s, a lot of pressure was put on the Government to end the regulatory process and allow the market to deliver a fairer return. I can vouch for the fact that, after the milk marketing boards were abolished in the autumn of 1994, milk prices rose—not by a little but by a lot. In my experience, the price of milk rose by 22 per cent to a peak in early 1997. That rise in price was the benefit that came from releasing milk production from the regulatory process. However, those who bought milk were not subject to the same regulation as those who sold it. Consequently, the opportunity was taken more

recently to manipulate the process through which milk passes before it is sold to the consumer. At the end of the day, the process has ensured that too much of the profit lands in the hands of the retailer and not nearly enough in the hands of those who are lower down the process.

If we are to follow the terms of the motion in this debate about supermarkets, I agree that we have to talk about regulation and competition, but therein lies the problem: we need to ensure that we have a regulatory environment that allows fair competition across the board, which means that those who produce milk in Scotland need to act for their own benefit. Action is happening in that respect—I refer to the attempt to integrate the interests of co-operatives and those of the processors that is under way as a result of First Milk Ltd taking a shareholding in Robert Wiseman Dairies. In a small country such as Scotland, we can never afford to believe that one company can actually hold a monopoly. I hope that the link between First Milk and Robert Wiseman Dairies is the start of an integration that will be fruitful in the long term.

Dairy farmers need the support of the minister, who said that his department has had discussions with the Office of Fair Trading. We need to ensure that he makes strong representations on behalf of Scottish dairy farmers and that he takes the opportunity to point out the imbalance that has emerged in the market.

An inquiry was held in the House of Commons into the milk trade. Having looked at the committee report, perhaps through rose-coloured spectacles, I feel that the wool was pulled over committee members' eyes on that occasion. The supermarkets seemed to manage to give the distinct impression that somebody else—and not them—was profiteering.

However, the facts speak for themselves. Milk prices have fallen back from the peak in the mid-1990s to only 17p or 18p a litre, the level that the majority of farmers are being paid today. The margin that is being made by the dairy companies is clearly identifiable, because they publish their profits and the number of litres that they process in a year. It is clear that companies such as Robert Wiseman are making at or just under 2.5p per litre for processing milk.

As a consequence, somebody, somewhere, is soaking up 18 pence of the typical milk price and the only suspects are the supermarkets. If we are not to see a level playing field in competition regulation, we will have to look closely at the implementation of the supermarket code of practice. In the first instance, if it can be enforced through negotiation, it can be made to deliver for farmers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quickly, please.

Alex Johnstone: If the code cannot be enforced, we will have to look at more rigorous regulation in the longer term.

10:38

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Like other colleagues who have spoken in the debate, I too would like to see action on the supermarket code of practice. If we can, we should try to bring some transparency to the trading relationship that exists between processors, farmers and supermarkets. However, even if that happens, it will not solve the fundamental problem that faces the milk industry, which is that the price of milk is below the cost of production.

Resolving the unequal struggle between farmers, processors and supermarkets for a fair share of the retail price will take more than modernisation and making the code of conduct that governs the relationship more transparent. I would like to explore one or two ideas that might resolve some of the problems. As we heard from other speakers, the supermarkets and processors always manage to maintain their margins. In any squeeze on price, it is the guy at the bottom of the chain—the supplier—who always takes the pain. In this case, farmers are forced to accept what is left; the processors and the supermarkets always maintain their profit margin.

How can the primary producers take on the power of the multiples and extract a fair price and a decent return for their efforts? I believe that the answer lies in looking to other countries in Europe and to New Zealand and Australia. They faced the same challenge: some would say that they faced a greater challenge because they have to trade outwith their own countries. In those countries, the primary producers have banded together into co-operatives. They have moved up the value chain, captured the processors' and the middle men's margin and now deal directly with the retailers face to face. It is ironic that Arla Foods, which is one of the biggest milk processors in the United Kingdom—it caused the most recent upset in the marketplace—is a Danish-owned farmers' co-operative. Arla trades here, makes profits from processing Scottish milk and returns them to Danish farmers.

It is also ironic that Irish farmers in the Irish co-operative movement make up a significant slice of the processing industry in the beef market. The margins are returned to Irish co-operative members—farmers in Ireland. We must follow that model in Scotland. Like Alex Johnstone, I support the efforts of First Milk, the producer co-operative, which has taken steps in that direction through its purchase of a 15 per cent stake in Robert

Wiseman Dairies, one of the biggest and most profitable processors of milk in the UK.

I know that the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, which is sponsored by the Scottish Executive, provides support to First Milk on an ongoing basis to help it to meet its objective of moving up the value chain and trying to return some of the processors' margin back to the raw milk producers. That objective is not easy to achieve, but nevertheless it is an opportunity that must be seized if we are to put dairy farmers back in a position of strength.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): George Lyon talks about getting back the margin from the processors, but he said that the main margin was with the supermarkets. How does he intend to get the margin back from them?

George Lyon: I said that we should take the margin back from the milk processors. Robert Wiseman Dairies revealed at the NFU Scotland presentation several weeks ago that its margin is 2.5p net: 2.5p a litre would go a long way towards solving the problems that the primary producers face today.

The great sadness is that the dairy industry was in a position of strength back in 1992. We had vertically integrated milk co-operatives, such as the Scottish Milk Marketing Board and the English Milk Marketing Board. However—Conservative members seem to forget this and Alex Johnstone rewrote history in his speech—in an act of wilful ideological destruction the Tories dismantled the milk marketing boards and forced farmers to disband the co-ops that the industry is now trying to rebuild. The misfortunes of the dairy industry lie very much at the door of a Tory Government that was intent on ensuring that vertically integrated co-ops could not exist after it dismantled the milk marketing boards.

Alex Johnstone: Is the member aware that when the milk marketing boards were wound up they lost their regulatory function and were allowed to operate in a manner in which they had not been allowed to operate previously? Although it was not compulsory, all milk marketing boards initially chose to operate on the basis on which they had operated previously but without the regulatory function. That is why the price of milk went up rather than down.

George Lyon: Alex Johnstone should examine his memory closely. As he may remember, the Tory Government insisted that the processing sector, which the farmers owned, and the producer side were to be totally separated. They were not allowed, by law, to become vertically integrated after the dismantling of the milk marketing boards. We have heard enough of Alex Johnstone's hypocrisy on the matter.

I will address another measure that would make a difference. I support the calls from Richard Lochhead and other members for the ending of the over-30-months scheme, but only if the chief medical officers support that. Otherwise, we could end up destroying hard-won consumer confidence and the reputation that we have now built in Brussels.

Fergus Ewing: George Lyon will be aware that the Food Standards Agency's advice on the matter was originally issued in July last year and confirmed this year. Why, after almost 18 months, have the chief medical officers not clarified their position? That delay is completely unreasonable and it has not been explained.

George Lyon: I agree that there has been an unreasonable delay. I cannot speak for the chief medical officers and the doubts that they might have over the proposals put forward by the Food Standards Agency, but if politicians were to override the chief medical officers and end the scheme while the chief medical officers were still being publicly quoted as saying that there was a risk, I have no doubt that we would destroy the consumer confidence that we have worked so hard to regain. I ask Fergus Ewing to support that point of view.

The Greens have tried to pretend today that they are cuddly, nice people who are concerned only with protecting our environment. The reality is that they are anti-business and anti-consumer choice. There is precious little to choose between them and the Scottish Socialist Party in these matters.

10:45

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): I am sure that the Greens will be chuffed with George Lyon's last comment.

I welcome this debate on food. Food is one of the central issues of our age because it occupies a fundamental position in people's lives. Regardless of age, income, social standing, culture or religious belief every individual has to eat and therefore has a stake in where food comes from and how it is produced. A debate is raging on the health issues and on many other issues related to food. Provision of local food in Scotland impacts on four main policy areas: the economy, the environment, communities and health.

A change has taken place over the past decade. The supermarkets have moved in, but the idea of a local food sector has gained momentum and credibility. Food initiatives have developed all over Scotland and research shows that those have had wide-ranging and long-term benefits, especially for health. We cannot have a debate on food without linking it immediately to health—I will not speak about health, but the two matters are closely

linked. Access to and the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables have for some time been recognised as key components of health strategies. A number of initiatives such as community cafes and food co-operatives have been supported and funded by the Health Department.

The issue is complicated. I support the Greens' motion, but Kate Maclean was right to say that closing down a local supermarket in a deprived area would not give people better access to cheap, healthy food. That is not a solution or a way forward. However, I ask whether members have ever bought Tesco basic beans? God knows what is in them. There is an issue of quality as well as of price. Tesco will be chuffed about this, but its basic range is the slurry and the sludge—there is no question about that. However, it is cheap, costing 9p or 12p a tin.

Closing down the local supermarket is not the answer, so what would enable us to challenge the supermarkets and break the hold that they have on the market, particularly given that most people in Scotland earn less than £25,000 a year? I would like to see the development of local produce. I have been looking at the retail end of the co-operatives, but the points that George Lyon makes about producers being involved in co-operatives are valid. There is an opportunity, as the Executive is considering the creation of a co-operative development agency in addition to Scottish Enterprise. I would like such an agency to be created as part of a coherent strategy on the issue of local food to encourage co-ops at producer level and at retail level. As Christine May said, that is not a new idea—this is the third time that I have ended up agreeing with her in a debate.

My ex-comrades in the Labour Party who claim a history with the co-operative movement should relearn the lessons of that movement. People who were in the socialist movement were much more visionary than are some people in the Labour Party today. There is no need to reinvent the wheel; the co-operative movement has already shown that it works. It was successful and competed with other suppliers, delivering cheap, healthy goods to working-class communities throughout Britain. We should consider setting up and funding such co-operatives. Ross Finnie's department agrees that that is important. It already has a number of measures to support agri-food marketing initiatives, including the processing and marketing grant scheme, and it also supports food producers. There are a number of other measures, but those measures are timid and do not go far enough—the situation is like that of David versus Goliath.

There is significant scope to increase the uptake of food from local producers, but that will not

happen through the supermarkets. I agree with the call for regulation in the Greens' motion. Why should we not have regulation? The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets regulates electricity prices. We regulate telecoms prices and a lot of other prices. Why should we not regulate agreements between supermarkets and producers?

Increasing the uptake of local food needs a co-ordinated approach involving, for example, the management of food co-ops, local colleges and social enterprise. Public procurement is important, as Richard Lochhead said. When Finnish school teachers came to Scotland to discuss free school meals, they told us that they secured their fruit and berries through public procurement, which encouraged and built on the local produce sector. We should go in that direction. In my opinion, a Bernard Matthews turkey drummer should never get anywhere near a school-dinner plate in this country.

My last point is for the Tories. The drive internationally is for fair trade. The drive of the World Trade Organisation is to bring down barriers and bring in cheap produce from other countries, but loads of problems are associated with that approach. The big multinationals are running riot. In the 21st century, farming is going to become like the mining industry in the 1980s. We closed down all the mines, and the private companies that supply electricity now import coal from Poland. Without the common agricultural policy subsidy, farming would go to the wall in the face of international competition, and that is what will happen if current policies continue and if the supermarkets are allowed to run riot. Far be it from me to have sympathy for the Tories, but they do not have a policy to solve the problem.

10:52

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I declare an interest as a sponsored member of the Co-operative Party.

I support the amendment in the name of Ross Finnie and welcome the debate. I agree with every member who has said that food is an important topic. Like Christine May, I am old enough to remember what it was like to live in a community without supermarkets in the 1950s. Competition among supermarkets undoubtedly has made food much more affordable than it was in those days, and choice is much greater.

I remember my mother trundling home heavy bags of food that did not come from supermarkets to feed a family of four. Compare that with the bus services that some supermarkets provide specifically to help villagers from our most remote and poorest areas. I do not like my memory of those days, when my mother and many other

women were worn out before their time because of the menial tasks and hardship that they faced.

Patrick Harvie: I remind Helen Eadie that in my speech I specifically said that we are not asking to turn the clock back to a time before any of the advantages of modern society existed. We are asking for a re-evaluation of what the dominance of the big four retailers is doing to many aspects of our lives. I hope that she will address that.

Helen Eadie: The point was well made by Scott Barrie when he referred to the report on competition law that was prepared at Westminster. The Greens are using time here that ought to be used by politicians at Westminster to consider the issues.

We should examine what the Labour Party and Labour-led councils have done throughout the United Kingdom, but in Scotland in particular. One of the first things that our Executive did when it came into being was to ensure that food in hospitals was prepared in-house, so that cook-chill food no longer travelled vast distances from Wales and other places. That is one example of a good initiative.

We should examine what local authorities have done throughout the United Kingdom. Communities that had poor access to grocery provision established their own food co-operatives on a not-for-profit basis to provide people with a local source of food. One such scheme for community food co-operatives is run by the Co-operative Wholesale Society. Co-ops can be established at various levels, from a community fruit-and-vegetable service consisting of a mobile trolley to a full-time community store.

In the past, local authorities in Strathclyde, Fife and throughout Scotland financed, encouraged and promoted such schemes in their areas, so they are not new. I say to Frances Curran that that has not been just a socialist vision for years, as we have had that same vision in the Labour Party. We will constantly fight to establish food co-operatives because we know that they are right and that they are good for local communities. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation supported a study conducted by researchers from King's College London that showed that such community initiatives are good because they address a range of issues, such as social inclusion, involve local people and assist them to develop and gain skills that they might not develop or gain otherwise.

Finally, I contrast our situation with that in Europe. We need to debate the size of our supermarkets and examine what other member states have done, but everything that we do should be driven by what our people want—we should not simply listen to what is happening elsewhere.

In an effort to protect town and district centres, many European Community member states have adopted planning or retail licensing legislation that is similar in emphasis to national planning policy guideline 6 and its Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish equivalents. Out-of-town development has been restricted in Italy through the use of licensing laws that are administered by town and regional authorities, while the requirement in Spain for a licence from a local authority has led to non-uniform superstore development throughout the country. The 1981 ministerial general policy directive in Ireland, which limited the number of new shopping centres, is thought to have stemmed the increase in the number of new supermarkets and helped the independent food retail sector.

Let me cite other recent pieces of legislation. In 1993, France and Portugal enforced a moratorium on all out-of-town hypermarkets and shopping centres in defence of smaller traders. In France, a public inquiry is necessary before permission can be given for any retail outlet of more than 6,000m². Also in France, the provisions of the 1973 loi Royer, which enabled local authorities to veto supermarket developments of more than 1,000m² or 1,500m² depending on local population, were extended in 1996 by the loi Raffarin, which provided local authorities with a veto on developments of more than 300m². Jean-Pierre Raffarin, who sponsored the new law as Minister for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Trade and Small-Scale Industry, commented on its increased restrictions in January 1997:

"It is true that we must be more attentive towards the development of town centres. We want to re-adjust the commercial landscape in (the small shopkeeper's) favour in order to defend the value of commerce as an element of social and economic cohesion".

We need to bear all that in mind, but the bottom line has to be what is most advantageous for our local people and our shoppers. We must stop ignoring their wishes.

10:58

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): We have heard how the supermarkets have a devastating social, environmental and economic effect. Against that, we have the virtues of competition and the 3p tin of baked beans. The argument is not new. I remind people of what John Ruskin wrote in the 19th century about what happens:

"whenever we buy, or try to buy, cheap goods—goods offered at a price which we know cannot be remunerative for the labour involved in them. Whenever we buy such goods, remember we are stealing somebody's labour. Don't let us mince the matter. I say, in plain Saxon, STEALING—taking from him the proper reward of his work, and putting it into our own pocket. You know well enough that the thing could not have been offered you at that price, unless

distress of some kind had forced the producer to part with it. You take advantage of this distress, and you force as much out of him as you can under the circumstances."

Stewart Stevenson: Has the member ever accepted a free offer?

Mark Ballard: Yes. I have bought milk at a low price, but it was not until I went to the NFUS reception that I realised why milk is so cheap—the reason is that farmers are paid less for the milk than it costs to produce it. That must be challenged; people do not know about the situation, which is why it is important that we have a debate about food. People should realise that the producers—the dairy farmers of Scotland—are being squeezed, while Tesco's profits go up and up. Ultimately, there is no such thing as cheap food; somebody somewhere always pays the price.

I turn to the adverse economic impacts of supermarkets. It is estimated that since the 1940s about 100,000 small local shops have been forced out of business. Ninety pence in every pound that is spent in one of the big supermarket chains leaves the local area, whereas every pound that is spent in a local shop doubles its value to the local economy. Between 1995 and 2000, check-out prices rose by 21 per cent, but farm-gate prices rose by only 2 per cent. The relentless expansion of out-of-town superstores is creating an economic vacuum that is sucking the life out of urban centres and building ghost towns before our very eyes. I referred earlier to Portobello, where a supermarket may be imposed on the local community, which will devastate Portobello High Street.

When confronted with the sad realities, some people say, "So what? That is the market in action," and they talk of Adam Smith's invisible hand, about which the Tories like to remind us. I remind Alex Fergusson that the motion mentions the impact of the "dominance of supermarkets" on

"farmers, independent retailers, high streets, local economies and consumer choice and health".

We should remember that the cumulative effect of individual choices is results that no one desires, such as the decline in rural communities and urban high streets, the growth in traffic congestion—which is caused by lorries travelling from centralised distribution points and the fact that 75 per cent of the people who visit supermarkets go there by car—and the loss of small retail outlets.

The argument should never be closed off by talking about what consumers want, because what some consumers want as food shoppers may not be what we all want as citizens, householders, employees, motorists or pedestrians, or, for that matter, as shoppers for other goods and services.

Given the margins with which small shops run, the actions of a small minority in choosing supermarkets lead to the death of small shops and the ending of consumer choice.

Christine May: Does the member accept that supermarkets such as the Co-op have done a huge amount to bring fairly large town-centre supermarkets back into communities and to set up small supermarkets in more outlying areas?

Mark Ballard: Yes. We need a diversity of retail outlets, which is what Shiona Baird's motion calls for.

The dominance of supermarkets means that the free market cannot operate or provide diversity. We are approaching the stage at which an almost unregulated monopoly sells us more than 75 per cent of our food. The sector is unregulated largely because Governments, wherever they are, are too scared to take on the power of the supermarkets. Supermarkets offer only the illusion of low price. I have reflected on what Christine May said about her apple puddings. Those apples were likely locally produced and of a local variety—the kind of apples that one cannot get in supermarkets these days because they order centrally and sell single varieties of apples. Because a few varieties of apple dominate in supermarkets, orchards throughout the country are being grubbed up.

We can and must do more to ensure the continued viability of communities, local economies and local food economies. The future of food security in Scotland depends on our taking action now, which is why I support Shiona Baird's motion.

11:05

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I welcome the debate, if only because it allows us to discuss the important topic of healthy food. I will come to the issue of supermarkets in a moment, but on a slightly frivolous note—we need a bit of frivolity this morning—I was pleased to see that chocolate is now in and cough medicine is out. I am sure that the Greens support that, given some of the trade names of cough medicines.

To return to the real issues, several members attended last week's meeting of the NFUS and dairy farmers, at which concern was raised about supermarket structures. I will return to that important point, but I must point out that it is unfortunate that the Green party's motion seems to criticise every aspect of supermarkets. The first point on which I disagree with the motion is on choice. I accept what is said about choice between shops, but the choice that is provided within supermarkets is possibly their biggest selling point.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Dr Jackson: I was not allowed to intervene earlier, but go on.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful. Does the member accept that the choice that supermarkets offer is one that is convenient for them to offer, which is why they are not good at providing fresh ingredients such as meat, vegetables and fish and why they want to sell packaged, processed food?

Dr Jackson: I disagree. Like Christine May, I will return to my childhood—I remember that the range of goods on offer in the corner shop in the village where I grew up was not what the Greens imply. I also remember the cost of the produce in that shop. One aspect that the Greens have not addressed is that, for deprived communities such as those that Kate Maclean talked about, supermarkets can offer fresh, safe food at a reasonable price.

It has been suggested that supermarkets take over a lot of high street trade, but developments in all members' communities are aiming to bring back community shops, such as the one in Gartmore in my constituency. There are also regular farmers markets, such as the one in Stirling and those in more rural areas, and initiatives such as the Stirling Health & Well-being Alliance, which works with deprived communities to show people how to make better use of vegetables and fresh fruit in their cooking.

Mark Ballard: The member talks about improving community access to shops and about the community shops in her area, but what does she say to people who feel that they are losing their community shops because supermarkets are moving in?

Dr Jackson: I am not saying that we do not have to consider the balance between supermarkets and local shops, but I am saying that the Greens' portrayal of everything that is wrong about supermarkets is just not true and is completely imbalanced.

Ross Finnie gave many examples of supermarkets using local produce, but Green members have not mentioned that, nor did they mention the ranges of safe organic food in supermarkets.

Shiona Baird: What does the member say on the issue that we raise about the price that is offered to producers?

Dr Jackson: That brings me on nicely to dairy farmers and to the meeting that several members attended last week. That issue is a real concern, as is the code of practice, which is obviously not working. After all, since its introduction, none of the complaints that have been made has been taken up.

Members might recall that, last week, Alasdair Morgan asked Ross Finnie a parliamentary question on this very subject. I do not want to take words out of the minister's mouth that he might want to use later, but I should point out that he said in response:

"There is no doubt that there is an enormous sense of disappointment that the code is not being operated properly. The Scottish Executive is taking up the matter to see whether there is another way of working that in conjunction with the industry."

The minister also pointed out that there was a need for

"more vertical integration so that we are less dependent on the raw milk price."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 2004; c 12053.]

It is not the case that the minister and the Executive are not trying to address the matter. However, I take on board Richard Lochhead's point that the committees and the Executive should get involved in the issue. Certainly most MSPs who attended last week's meeting felt that we have to keep up the pressure.

I am sure that the minister will assure us that, once the OFT report is complete, he will keep us updated about the current position and will work closely with the UK Government on the issue. After all, as my MSP colleagues have pointed out, many of these matters are reserved to Westminster.

I should also point out that the Greens did not mention the issue of freight and the infrastructure by which produce reaches the Scottish market. We could have spent a lot more time discussing the fact that we need to make that a strategic issue. In the end, I feel that, because the Green party's motion is so unbalanced, we should support the Executive amendment.

11:11

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I will begin by posing a few questions. Instead of going to the fridge in the morning for my milk, should I walk a mile down the road to the field and personally milk the cow, a task for which, having never tried it, I am ill-fitted?

Christine May: Is there something that the member has not done?

Stewart Stevenson: I always start with confessions, because it might get the audience on my side.

Should I drink that milk unpasteurised? Should I really go back to basics and drink the milk from a cow that has not been tuberculin tested? Not even the Greens are suggesting that we roll the clock back that much. I see that my colleagues are also relieved about that.

We all accept that processing food has benefits for public safety and convenience. As a result, I hope that no one in the debate yearns for a return to subsistence farming and only local production and consumption. The world is simply not like that.

That said, we need to have some view of the world that we want before we can decide on the nostrums that will deliver it. I believe that people want one-stop shopping, and we have proven that by going to the places where such shopping is easy. They want decent quality and make discriminating choices both between supermarkets and between supermarkets and other alternatives.

Increasingly, people want year-round availability. When I was a bairn, fruit and vegetables were seasonal, but consumers no longer want such seasonality. They also want convenient products that free up personal time, which is why pre-prepared food dominates so many of our supermarket shelves. In fact, such a concept is not particularly new: the Cornish pasty is a convenience food that the worker used to take to the field. It was designed particularly for that purpose, with a crust that the worker's grubby hand could hold while he ate the rest of it.

Consumers want free parking, but they also want fewer supermarkets. We have to try to resolve the contradictions in what the public want.

Shiona Baird: The member's Cornish pasty would have been home-made from fresh ingredients. Does the member agree that, in that regard, there would be a significant difference between the nutritional benefits of what is being offered for sale now and those of the food that was eaten then?

Stewart Stevenson: I suspect that there were Cornish pasties that could poison people and Cornish pasties that would be excellent for them. There is merit in having consistency in delivered products and a processing system that supports public safety. That said, the supermarkets are not free from criticism.

Although supermarkets dominate the market, the biggest buyer is the Government. As Richard Lochhead has advocated in the SNP amendment, the Government not only has a role in drawing the supermarkets into a debate in the hope that we might bang heads together for the benefit of consumers, producers and our communities but should be doing more to support our primary producers.

In that respect, I make no apology for returning to the subject of pork. Although our welfare standards for pork production are incredibly high, standards in the rest of the EU—the free market within which we operate—are not so high. What happens? Because produce is cheaper in other countries, the Government and others buy from

there. The Government needs to address that matter.

My constituency contains primary producers and producers of processed foods, both of which are important to my constituents. Indeed, most of the salmon, beef and chicken in supermarkets comes from factories in my constituency. It is a shame that people cannot always tell that that is the case. One would have to know the three-digit code on a Tesco label that identifies the supplier. I hope that, when the Government speaks to the supermarkets, it persuades them to break the code to let us find out which produce is local.

It would also be worth discussing the issue of transport with the supermarkets. Although the Tesco supermarket in Fraserburgh sells fish that is caught and landed in the north-east, that fish has come via the north-east of England. It does not even use local suppliers.

We have free choice. When I go to my local butcher, John Stewart—I will give him a name check, because he is worth it—he tells me which field the beef has come from. The meat is also cheaper than it is at Tesco. I have—and I make—that choice. However, supermarkets have many advantages, particularly with regard to business rates, and I invite the minister to tell us what he plans to do about that.

I am happy to support Richard Lochhead's amendment.

11:18

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Those of us of a certain age remember the 1950s and the image of the housewife putting on her coat and hat and picking up her basket to go down to the butcher, the fishmonger, the greengrocer and the baker. It was not that idyllic. We did not have fridges, which meant that the daily shop was a necessity, come rain, hail, sleet or snow. There were heavy shopping bags to carry, shopping took ages, choices were limited and produce was relatively more expensive.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Nora Radcliffe: I think that Patrick Harvie is simply going to repeat what he said before. I will carry on, because my time is limited.

In 1950, a third of household incomes was spent on food; in 2000, a sixth was spent on it.

Robin Harper rose—

Nora Radcliffe: The introduction of self-service supermarkets in the 1950s offered speed, choice and convenience. Perhaps it is not entirely a coincidence that the expansion of supermarkets has been paralleled by an increase in female employment.

How food is sourced, distributed and sold has changed. Food is an important part of the economy. For example, in Scotland, the food and drink industry employs 55,000 people and generates £6 billion in sales. It is fiercely competitive; as the Green party's motion points out, three quarters of the UK market has been cornered by four large chains. There is no doubt that those large players have clout and use it, sometimes to the detriment of smaller players and suppliers. Howegarden in my constituency went bust when the buyer for its loose carrots unilaterally and without notice docked the price from 16p a pound to 12p a pound. However, there has been a response to such practices. A code of practice was introduced following the Competition Commission's report in 2000. There is doubt about how effective the code has been. It is limited in its application and has weaknesses, but there has been a response to that—the OFT is carrying out an audit. All that is reserved and our MPs are dealing with it.

I return to Scotland. As other members have said, there are positive elements to supermarkets. If customers did not support them, they would not exist. What is needed is a balance across the retail sector and in communities. We in the Scottish Parliament should be concentrating on what we can do to help to support the food industry in Scotland.

Robin Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

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

We should be capitalising on the undoubted advantages that we have. We want to move added value closer to primary producers and stimulate local demand for local produce. A lot of good work is being done through initiatives such as farmers markets and local food networks. Increasingly, outlets for local produce are opening up in the catering sector as well as the retail sector, as our population chooses to eat out more often than ever before and discerning tourists go looking for local food.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

Nora Radcliffe: Yes.

Richard Lochhead: I thank the member for taking an intervention. I clearly have something that Robin Harper does not have.

I remind Nora Radcliffe that she represents one of the most agriculture-dependent constituencies in not just Scotland but the whole of the UK and her constituents would welcome an investigation by the minister into what happens to every pound spent on groceries between the plough and the plate. Would she support such an investigation?

Nora Radcliffe: I would indeed. Such an investigation is happening.

I will go back to my script. Public procurement is a huge chunk of the food market and a great deal more can and should be done in that area. Who more than growing children and people battling illness need the benefits of fresh nutritious food? NHS Quality Improvement Scotland's food standard setting is an important step. Mind you, my experience of seeing hospital food when I visited family members in Raigmore hospital and the Edinburgh royal infirmary suggests that there is huge scope for further improvement.

The Executive's support for school meals has been significant and the improvement is probably encouraging schoolchildren to eat their healthy school meals and not skive off to the chipper. We would benefit from there being cookery classes for all children, many of whom do not see fresh food being prepared from raw materials or enjoy the taste of it in their homes. That could provide long-term benefits for children's health and could change their buying patterns when they start to run their own households. As many have said, how consumers exercise their buying power is the real lever in changing retail.

The Scottish community diet project is working away at making it affordable for low-income families to choose fresh food and there are now nearly 500 community food initiatives in operation. A number of speakers have extolled the value of co-operatives and I endorse what has been said: co-operatives offer one way of creating more equal bargaining.

It is disappointing that the Green motion focuses on reserved matters, given that there is much in our remit to support an indigenous industry that has a turnover of £6 billion. Where are the Greens' solutions? It would be nice to have a statutory code of conduct imposed on global multinational businesses with every aspect of their business operations regulated in a green, independent, socialist republic of Scotland, but that ain't going to happen. Let us operate within the realms of the possible, the practical and the helpful and support the Executive amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give Mike Rumbles a tight two minutes.

11:24

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am astonished at what I have heard from the Green party, with its left-wing, anti-market economy stance. I say to Mark Ballard that many of my constituents in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine would like to have access to a local supermarket, rather than having to travel 16 miles to Sainsbury's in Aberdeen or the like.

Eleanor Scott: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike Rumbles: No.

In Banchory there is one small supermarket, which was owned by Morrisons until recently but which is now sold, thankfully. Given the lack of supermarkets, Morrisons was able to fleece my constituents on Deeside with its high and unfair prices. Why were there high prices? There was a lack of competition. There is a real need in parts of Scotland for more opportunity and more supermarkets.

I turn to Mark Ballard's sob story about the 3p can of baked beans, which was a ridiculously sad example. That is what is known as a loss leader and it is welcome. It is called the market economy. Are the Greens really saying that we are exploiting farmers from the wealthiest nation on earth—where our baked beans come from? The Greens should get real. They are very much in tune with the Scottish Socialist Party. It is important that the Scottish people are made aware of the Greens' policies in this field.

11:25

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): This morning we have heard a debate of contrasts. We have heard from those who spoke from agricultural experience, such as George Lyon, Alex Johnstone and Alex Fergusson, we have heard from those who reflected on life and the realities of being brought up in 1950s Scotland and Ireland—and we have had a contribution from the Green party.

The motion that the Greens have composed deals exclusively with issues that are not within the competence of this Parliament. That is a regrettable tactic, particularly when we consider Robin Harper's contribution in the first four years of the Parliament.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Morrison: Certainly not.

Scott Barrie ably demonstrated that that parliamentary tactic is exactly the tactic deployed by another party in the chamber. If the Green party has any desire to be taken seriously, it need only consider how the public view the party in question.

Many members have mentioned the organic sector. The UK organic market has increased rapidly in recent years, with growth rates of 30 to 50 per cent. Despite those dramatic increases, organic sales still represent an all-too-small proportion of the total food sector. We all appreciate that it is simply not in the Executive's gift to guarantee that a given amount of land will

be in organic production, but we should also consider meaningfully ways to increase production and consumption. We should be looking at how the considerable support that we give farming is spent. Can the money be better spent? Can it be better deployed? Can it be better used to help to produce and market organic produce? At the end of the day, co-operation and partnership among all parts of the organic food chain are required to realise our shared aspirations.

What crofters from my constituency in the Western Isles need is assistance to help them to convert and, within minimal adaptation costs, return to non-intensive crofting techniques that have safeguarded and helped to maintain our pristine environment for generations. They need support to produce organic food and to ensure that they reach a market that has been sensibly developed and which readily buys the fruit of their labours.

Mr McGrigor: The member referred to the crofters in his constituency. Does he agree that a different form of marketing should be employed? Rather than marketing produce as organic, some of the animals should be marketed as free-range, because it is so difficult to become organic. A great deal of the land in the member's constituency is virtually organic already, as are the animals on it.

Mr Morrison: Consumers are familiar with the concept of free-range eggs, but free-range beef or lamb would be a new concept. The marketplace and consumers widely appreciate the concept of organic produce. The minister demonstrated clearly in his opening speech that the Executive wants the Scottish organic sector to achieve its potential to supply at least 70 per cent of Scottish demand for organic products.

I agree with Alex Fergusson, Sylvia Jackson and Nora Radcliffe, who were all correct to highlight the Greens' simplistic attitude that all supermarkets are bad. That attitude is both simplistic and wrong.

I will share with members the experience and responsible attitude of the Co-op in the Western Isles. It is by far the most dominant retail force in the Western Isles, although Morrisons also has a presence—sadly, I have no interest to declare in that company. The Co-op buys locally produced milk, salmon, bread, oatcakes, beer and other products. It has a good relationship with crofters, from whom it buys organic lamb or beef—call it what you will, the Co-op will buy it. The Co-op also ensures that the produce is labelled as local and organic.

I agree with other members from across the parties who have said that the supermarkets have to do more. Stewart Stevenson made some salient

points in that regard. If they buy more goods locally, source goods locally and label goods clearly, everyone will get a fair share.

The Scottish islands make a massive contribution to food production. Scottish salmon represents 40 per cent of all Scottish food exports. In my constituency, the industry produces an estimated £60 million-worth of salmon—a food that was previously found only on the tables of lairds and canny crofters but which is now a nutritious food that is consumed by millions in the UK and beyond. Another worrying departure for me is that I found myself agreeing with what Fergus Ewing said about fish farming and the Pew Charitable Trusts—

Eleanor Scott: Will the member give way?

Mr Morrison: Certainly not.

Bogus research was provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts and was happily endorsed by the Green party.

Robin Harper: Will the member give way?

Mr Morrison: I certainly will not.

Robin Harper: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Harper, the member is not taking an intervention. You will sit down.

Mr Morrison: Mr Harper has wasted 15 seconds. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Green party is singularly irresponsible with regard to the wonderful product that is salmon. There is not one anti-fish-farming bandwagon that the Green party has not leaped on. It willingly joins the other vultures that circle fish farming and do their best to destroy it.

Supermarkets do not threaten the viability of the villages in the Hebrides that I represent, but the policies of the Green party certainly do.

On scallops, the Green party members—displaying rampant hypocrisy—preen themselves in the chamber although, a year ago, they failed to support a measure that would have supported and protected small inshore fishermen.

Eleanor Scott: Does the member accept that the reason why the Greens, among others, felt that that proposed conservation measure would not be effective was that we thought that it would drive effort inshore, which is what has happened?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish now, Mr Morrison.

Mr Morrison: The Green party's explanation is as incoherent today as it was a year ago. Members should ignore its ill-thought-out motion and support the amendment in Ross Finnie's name.

11:32

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland)

(Con): I declare an interest as a member of the NFUS. I no longer farm actively but, reflecting on my former life, I listened with interest to some of the fairly inappropriate and uneducated comments that have been made in the chamber today. In my days of producing beef and lamb, I was involved in several co-operative schemes relating to the purchase of raw materials, oil and fuel and to the sale of my produce, which was always of the highest quality. I jumped through all the hoops that were required by the supermarkets and I was quality assured by many organisations whose names have not been mentioned today. We had to work hard and did not necessarily get a price; if we did not meet the quality requirements, we did not get the market. That sense of realism has been absent from today's debate. Of course, consumer interest is always at the base of all that.

The Greens' approach has been muddled. The opening speaker delivered a lecture that was full of gloom and, although she did not go as far as suggesting that everything should be nationalised and closed down, she was not far from doing so. I accept one or two of the points that she made about the changes in the local marketplace and the loss of fresh vegetable shops—that has happened in my local town of Stonehaven, where there is a supermarket. However, I am looking forward to a farmers market starting up in Stonehaven. On Saturday morning, I was at the farmers market in Banchory and saw the shelves cleared in a matter of minutes, which was unbelievable. People will go out and seek choice.

Again, however, we got no solutions from the Greens. All we heard was moaning and groaning as, just like the SNP, the Greens lapsed into a constitutional exercise.

Mr Ruskell: The member's speech is incredible. The Conservatives' amendment reflects the second part of our motion. On the code of conduct, the Conservatives are proposing the same course of action that we are. The member should realise that there is a consensus in the Parliament and that his party and mine are part of that consensus.

Mr Davidson: I recall that, when Alex Fergusson took the Green party's motion apart earlier, he declined to accept the first part and agreed with the second part. I am talking about the Green party's approach to the debate and the things that one or two of its members have said today. I should say that one or two points that they made were reasonable.

I welcome what Ross Finnie said about the OFT's investigation into the code of practice. I look forward to reviewing that report fully. Everyone in

the chamber agrees that there have been a number of problems and that those problems must be approached in a manner that is positive for the consumer and the producer.

Ross Finnie did not go far enough in relation to public procurement. I would like much more effort to be made to purchase locally. Not only is that sensible, but it makes food fresher and minimises the inconvenience involved in taking food halfway around the country and delivering it, not quite as fresh as it was, several days later.

Organic action plans have been mentioned, but we should remember that they relate to a niche market. There is almost no premium for organic produce and there is certainly no premium for organic milk, because there is overproduction in that area.

I agreed with Richard Lochhead's comments about quality, safety, low prices and convenience. That leads me to Alex Fergusson's speech, which dealt with consumer choice. Of course, we are a more affluent nation than we used to be and, with the exception of people in certain areas, we have more disposable income. That was reflected in the comments that, for example, Nora Radcliffe made about convenience and about working women wanting to be able to save time and to spend more quality time with their families.

Vertical integration has been mentioned. I was a member of a co-operative that is now an international pharmaceutical distribution company. The co-operative linked pharmacists with distributors, enabling them to purchase materials, for example, but we found that we could not go all the way internationally without becoming a publicly quoted company because of issues relating to the rules of the marketplace. Nonetheless, there comes a point at which vertical integration can go quite a long way towards solving some of the problems that we have seen.

Alex Fergusson closed by talking about farmers markets, fair prices and fair shares for all. The concept of fair shares for all or a level playing field is important if our agricultural industry is to survive as we know it.

Scott Barrie, too, delivered a lecture, allowing no interventions. He accused us of being off the planet on the issue of amnesic shellfish poisoning. Does he not realise that Executive ministers have accepted our position and have, very nicely, done a U-turn on end-product testing? Perhaps he has to catch up in that regard.

We have not spent enough time on the issue of labelling. People have a right to know what is in their food. Does the 3p can of beans say how much sugar, salt and other ingredients it contains? Proper labelling should say where products come from. We have traceability, but the information is

hidden in codes. There should be clarity for the man or woman in the street. In that regard, we have to ensure that schools teach people how to shop for fresh food and how to prepare and serve it to their families.

The Conservatives support the promotion of food clubs, box schemes and farmers markets, particularly in areas where there is little choice or disposable income. Some people in society are not blessed with a lot of affluence and there are people who do not have sufficient education to prevent them from going down the route suggested by the television advert of the day. The Government has a duty to get involved in that regard.

We agree that the over-30-months scheme should be removed. We worry why the chief medical officers have not come up with an answer, but there is no way in which we can deal with the situation without having their support and being aware of their decision. When I used to export meat to Italy, people knew that it was safe.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish now, Mr Davidson.

Mr Davidson: The moment there is doubt and public confidence is damaged, that is a disaster for everyone. When—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Davidson, you must finish now.

Mr Davidson: I am on my last sentence. When the Government here dealt with the foot-and-mouth outbreak, it did so on the best advice available. That is exactly what we did with BSE.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was two sentences.

11:39

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): This debate has allowed us to determine whether the Government in Scotland has taken any part in an attempt to review the role of the big four supermarkets. Undoubtedly, the actions of supermarkets affect the vast majority of people. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that the supermarkets operate in a competitive framework that we in Scotland can be happy to sign up to? I know that the matter is reserved, but we need a combined Scottish voice to show that, across all the parties, we are dissatisfied with the voluntary code of practice and want to find a way of making the code statutory.

How do we do that? The NFUS has suggested that the voluntary code should not only cover the supermarkets but be extended to the whole supply chain. Farmers rarely deal directly with the supermarkets, so they are not covered by the

code. The code should be extended to include farmers who supply via an intermediary such as a wholesaler or a dairy. That suggests that the way in which the code was drawn up was not all encompassing. We need to revisit the code to ensure that it protects each of the steps in the chain.

Scott Barrie and others have talked about the way in which the Competition Commission has acted. If any members have read Joanna Blythman's book "Shopped: The Shocking Power of British Supermarkets", they will recognise that the Competition Commission has not been tough enough in dealing with complaints; the few that have been made have drifted away into the sand.

For example, in 1999, the English NFU complained to the Competition Commission about Safeway's demand that producers pay money to join an ethical trading initiative. Has anything changed? Well, Safeway merely said that the scheme was not compulsory and that producers could say if they did not want to take part. The fact is that anyone who puts their head above the parapet knows that they will be blacklisted. That example and many others show that the Competition Commission's control has not worked.

Scott Barrie suggested that the partnership agreement was beginning to tackle such problems, but we have waited through today's debate for the minister or any Labour or Liberal Democrat member to tell us what the Scottish Government is doing. Will we hear something new in the minister's winding-up speech? We have heard nothing new so far.

I have two quotations that sum up the conflicting aspects of the debates. The first is from the Scottish Retail Consortium's briefing, which states:

"Net profit margins across all the supermarket groups have not increased over the past 10 years, with the average operating margin being tighter now than in the 1990's. This is clear evidence of efficiency gains being passed on directly to consumers."

In contrast, the NFUS briefing states:

"Farmers are at the raw end of the deal, and not just on milk. Whether it is milk, meat, fruit or vegetable production, the cut-throat business of winning market-share is driving down prices, with farmers paying the ultimate price."

If that does not describe the crisis that we face because of the lack of control over the big supermarkets and the lack of a Scottish voice to deal with that, I do not know what does. Those contrasting statements illustrate the problem exactly.

Nora Radcliffe told us that the Government is conducting an investigation. We would like to know what that investigation is doing and when we will hear about it—perhaps the minister can tell us what is going on. The SNP's amendment asks the

minister to call a summit and to have regular meetings with the supermarkets to express what I believe is the widespread view in the chamber that their practices have to change. That will enable us in Scotland to have a collective voice. If the Government will not be the representative of that collective voice, who will be? The Scottish Executive should speak up.

We have to consider the Government's role, but the consumer's role is important, too. In order to make any progress, we have to make the higher demands that consumers in Europe make of their supermarkets. We must educate people to use their power and to think about the way in which they buy produce. People must recognise that, if they continue to buy convenience food, that will not realise the potential for far healthier food.

The producers have tried to get vertical integration, as George Lyon mentioned. Fergus Ewing asked that the producers be given better bargaining powers. My arguments have shown the need for far more Scottish produce to be processed in Scotland, as the Government's amendment says. However, we need a framework to be put in place to allow that to happen, as the evidence shows that it is not happening at the moment. We demand action. We must have a summit on food immediately so that we can make progress and tell the British Government what Scotland thinks.

11:45

Ross Finnie: The confusion that we all experienced at the outset of the debate has, by and large, not gone away. It is quite extraordinary to make such vague and generalised allegations against the whole of the supermarket industry as the Greens have done. Notwithstanding the fact that no one in the chamber has claimed that the supermarkets are doing everything right or that there are no specific evidence-based issues that require to be examined, the Greens have persisted in condemning and damning everything that the supermarkets do.

Robin Harper: Will the minister give way?

Ross Finnie: I will make my point first.

The Greens make an absolute assertion on the negative impact of the supermarkets on

"farmers, independent retailers, high streets, local economies and consumer choice and health".

There is no qualification to that outright condemnation. Indeed, I listened carefully to what Patrick Harvie said; he told us that supermarkets were responsible for food poverty and malnutrition. I thought that we would get some balance from Mark Ballard, but he made it absolutely clear that he would uproot the supermarkets root and branch.

Patrick Harvie: If the minister goes to the Parliament's website tomorrow and reads what I said, he will see that I was clearly arguing that all is not well with our food chain, that food poverty still exists and that the claim made on behalf of the supermarkets by their mouthpiece that they have ensured access to cheap food for all is simply untrue.

Ross Finnie: The member is trying to modify his position by way of an intervention when that is not what the Greens' motion says and not what Green members have said throughout the debate, as all other members have recognised.

Richard Lochhead and Rob Gibson proposed a summit. I am not sure quite what that would achieve. As a minister, I make it my job to keep in regular touch with the supermarkets. We should understand that, when the supermarkets talk about consumers and prices, they make it clear that consumers are indicating a resistance to prices going higher just because we think that the prices should be pushed up. Indeed, they make no equivocation about the fact that, if they can access quality produce from other countries, they will do so. Simply calling a summit and telling the supermarkets to act like King Canute will not solve that problem.

Richard Lochhead: In his opening speech for the Labour Party, Scott Barrie said that, according to the partnership agreement, the coalition would speak to the supermarkets. The idea of a summit with the supermarkets, convened by the minister, seems to be a sensible way of doing that. Will the minister explain what communications he has had with the supermarkets about many of the issues on which there is consensus in the chamber? During the past few years, there seem to have been no formal meetings with the supermarkets in Scotland.

Ross Finnie: That is absolute nonsense. A week after the deal between Safeway and Morrisons was concluded, I had a meeting with Morrisons. During the summer, I met representatives from Sainsbury and Tesco.

Richard Lochhead: I am talking about formal, joint meetings.

Ross Finnie: I am having those discussions on a regular basis; I constantly talk to people who work for those chains to raise issues of concern about Scottish food. I do not have to call a summit just because the SNP is unaware of what conversations and meetings with individuals can do.

A number of valid points have been raised, dealing with the issues rather than just what is in the motion. Richard Lochhead, Alex Fergusson, David Davidson and others raised the important issue of labelling. We are making much progress

at the Scottish and EU levels in relation to primary produce. Labelling of processed food presents a greater difficulty, as members will appreciate, but we are trying to make progress on that, too. We are concerned to ensure that consumers are provided with the labelling to which they are entitled, which should be as comprehensive and as careful as possible.

On the location and growth of supermarkets, I find the Green party slightly patronising in its suggestion that consumers have no voice and that they would rather not go to a supermarket but just end up there by accident. The argument seems to be that consumers leave their local store only because they lose their way or that, although they like the local store's produce, they just want to go elsewhere. That is fatuous nonsense, but we have had to listen to it all morning. The Greens suggest that 80 per cent of the trade takes place in a supermarket because the consumer does not want to go there. Really? Please let us get back to reality.

There has been a lack of evidence. In a very good intervention, Fergus Ewing asked the Greens what they would do about Scottish salmon, but they responded with more of the vague nonsense that we have had all morning, saying that not many people in the industry are quality assured. Given that 90 per cent of Scottish salmon farmers are quality assured, the Greens have no basis for sitting on their hands and refusing to give a direct answer to the question.

On the local planning process, we try to ensure that national policy guidelines on locations are applied. On food processing, I wholly agree that we need to encourage the industry in Scotland. That is why we provide food processing and marketing grants. Indeed, the £45 million investment since 2001 has geared £200 million investment and has affected the supermarkets' position. On public procurement, the Scottish Executive is anxious to ensure that we promote the right policies both in organisations that we control directly, such as health and education establishments, and in other agencies.

In summing up, I think that we are back where we started. Every party save the Green party recognises that, provided that we have the evidence, we ought to address certain elements of the way in which the supermarkets operate. However, a blanket condemnation of all that the supermarkets stand for and a patronising attitude towards consumers simply will not wash. I stand by the amendment in my name.

11:52

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)): In some ways, the debate has been

disappointing, because many members are in denial about the crisis in our food culture.

Christine May claimed that food hygiene has increased over the years, but that belies the health problem that is caused by our diet. Coronary heart disease costs the UK taxpayer £10 billion a year. Obesity costs £2.5 billion a year.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

Mr Ruskell: No, I will not.

Shiona Baird explained how the consumption of vegetables has reduced by a third since the 1960s. Yes, the SNP is right that public procurement has a role in increasing that consumption—that is why the Greens have championed that policy in the Parliament for the past five years. However, members are in denial about the role of retailing, as if it somehow had no impact on our food consumption. Some 88 per cent of our food is purchased through supermarkets; we have a food health crisis. Understand the link.

Choice has been much discussed, but there are many different aspects to choice. We must understand that, every week, 50 independent retailers across the UK close down. Their margins are being squeezed by the price war that is being conducted by the supermarkets on the edges of our towns and cities.

Let us not be naive. The supermarkets control the way in which we view food from the moment we walk into the store by employing various marketing techniques, such as buy-one-get-one-free promotions and the introduction of bakery aromas at particular points throughout the store. They even alter the beats per minute of the music as we walk around the store to slow us down to look at particular shelves. That is just simple marketing, which has been around for the past 50 years. Why cannot the Parliament see through it?

On price, supermarkets are prepared to use loss leaders such as beans, as Frances Curran mentioned, but they are also quite prepared, as Patrick Harvie pointed out, to pile costs on to processed food, which they then market aggressively. Processed food is high in salt, high in fat and high in sugar. Given the ingredients of such food, it represents bad value for consumers.

George Lyon: Since half past 9 this morning, members in the chamber have been waiting for the Greens to suggest some solutions to the many problems that they keep raising. Can we perhaps hear a solution in the remaining three or four minutes of Mark Ruskell's speech?

Mr Ruskell: I am waiting for George Lyon to support the motion, which, like the one he signed last week, calls for the code of practice to be strengthened. That George Lyon refuses to come out in favour of that is absolutely incredible.

Farmers get paid 17p a litre for milk that costs them 20p a litre to produce, but the supermarkets sell it for 50p. The price difference goes into supermarket profits. I refer George Lyon and Mike Rumbles to some helpful research that was provided by Liberal Democrats at Westminster. Over the past 15 years, supermarket profits have risen by 300 per cent. The salaries of supermarket chief executives have risen by 557 per cent while farm incomes have struggled, rising less than 30 per cent. Andrew George, who is the Lib Dem shadow minister for food, said:

"Someone must be making money here, and it isn't farmers. People are paying more for their food, yet British farmers are not getting their fair share."

I suggest that Mike Rumbles should listen to his colleagues in Westminster and learn from them.

Nobody is saying that supermarkets are evil. However, the supermarkets are dominant. Patrick Harvie has pointed that out throughout today's debate, but few members have been able to bring themselves to support him on that. Face the reality.

Many members have mentioned the limited choice that was available to them as children in the 1950s. I grew up in the 1970s, when there were supermarkets, from which my parents were able to get good-quality food. However, in those days, the supermarkets had links to farmers and local shops. The problem is the dominance that the supermarkets have gained over the past 30 years. That dominance is now skewing our food economies.

Of course supermarkets have a role to play in providing food choice in low-income communities, but let us not forget that many studies, such as the Midlothian food basket study, have shown that supermarkets put up prices in low-income communities because such communities end up with smaller stores that have less food space. How does that bring about the social justice to which the Labour Party, like the Greens, is so wedded?

The impact of the supermarkets on our communities needs to be tackled as a planning issue. I was pleased to hear Helen Eadie mention some solutions that are being pursued elsewhere, but ultimately we cannot dodge the fact that the supermarket code of conduct is failing. The Scottish Parliament might not necessarily have the powers to turn the code of conduct into regulation, but does the minister honestly claim that we cannot lobby for change? Will he not talk to the Westminster Government about the issue?

We need action. We need to ensure that suppliers are not fearful of being delisted by supermarkets if they take up a case under the code of conduct. We need an independent overseer and we need to ensure that the code of

conduct applies to the whole food supply chain. Of course there will be fears that such a move might breach EU competition rules, but the same arguments were used against local public procurement just several years ago. Today, we have procurement guidelines both in Scotland and in England and Wales that get round the EU competition laws. Why cannot we do the same on the regulation of supermarkets?

Fergus Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Ruskell: I do not have time.

Fergus Ewing: Why not?

Mr Ruskell: I am in my final minute, but I will take an intervention. Make it quick.

Fergus Ewing: Will Mr Ruskell answer the question that his colleague refused to answer earlier? Should Scottish farmed salmon be available for purchase by consumers in supermarkets or anywhere else in Scotland? Yes or no?

Mr Ruskell: I will reserve my judgment on that until I see clear evidence from the Executive on whether contamination of farmed salmon is decreasing year on year. We await those figures from the minister. When we receive them, we will start to answer Mr Ewing's point. The Greens favour a fact-based approach.

Finally, Scott Barrie accused us of refusing to work in consensus. What utter rubbish. Three weeks ago, the Green party lodged a motion that contained much of what is in our motion today and members of all parties signed it. Much of the text of the Tory motion that we supported last week is reflected in today's motion and in the SNP and Tory amendments. There is real consensus that the code of conduct is not working and that action needs to be taken. Members need to support either our motion or one of those two amendments to maintain the consensus in the Parliament.

We need a unified approach to give the minister a mandate to make the case at Westminster for Scottish farmers, which I know is what Liberal Democrat voters want their MSPs to do. We need to stand shoulder to shoulder with our farming industry and shoulder to shoulder with the communities that have been affected by supermarkets. We need Executive action. I am still waiting to hear what action the minister will take on the OFT audit. I shall keep waiting.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues will be discussed. (S2F-1218)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I expect to meet with the Prime Minister in the near future.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that he is looking forward to that. The First Minister never tires of telling us that spending on the health service has gone up since Labour came to power. However, during that same period, according to the Executive's own figures published today, the number of patients being treated in our hospitals has fallen and the length of time that patients are waiting to be treated has increased. Will the First Minister explain why it is the case that people in Scotland are paying more and getting less?

The First Minister: They are not. The reason why fewer people are being treated in hospitals is that they are being treated in the community, which I think is an important modernisation of our health service, one that is appropriate for many patients right across Scotland and one that ensures that they have better treatment closer to home. That, as I understood it, was the key principle behind the policies announced by the Scottish National Party earlier this week. I hope that Miss Sturgeon is not going to contradict that today.

In addition, what we see in Scotland today is the concerted action that has been taken over recent years resulting in no one with a guarantee waiting longer than 12 months for an in-patient appointment and no one now, as today's figures show, waiting more than nine months for an in-patient appointment. Those are significant improvements for those who were waiting longest and for those who needed treatment more than others. In both cases, that has been a considerable achievement by the doctors, nurses and other professional and support staff in our national health service.

Nicola Sturgeon: There is a great big flaw in the First Minister's argument. If it was the case that demand on hospitals was falling because more and more people were being treated in the community, surely one would expect the hospitals to be speeding up waiting times because they had fewer patients to see. It does not add up.

I can understand why the First Minister wants to gloss over the hard facts, but let me spell them out to him. There are fewer out-patients, fewer in-patients and fewer day-case patients being treated now than there were in 1999, and the time that they are waiting to be treated has got longer. Even in the language of Labour spin doctors, that is a failure. Andy Kerr told us this morning that the answer is an expansion of the private sector—not the use of existing private capacity, because we all know that that is tiny, but an expansion of the private sector in Scotland. That is something that Malcolm Chisholm said he would not do because it would be at the expense of the NHS and would draw staff away from our hospitals. Will the First Minister explain where exactly the staff will come from that the private sector will need to recruit if it is to expand?

The First Minister: There again we see a contradiction in just four days. On Monday, the SNP was calling for us to recruit staff from outside Scotland to help the health service in Scotland, and four days later it is protesting at the prospect of that very possibility. We need change in our national health service and we need further action on those waiting times that are still long and on those areas, such as out-patients, where not enough progress has been made. However, it would be wrong of Miss Sturgeon not to recognise the guarantees that we gave—not targets but guarantees—to ensure that waiting for in-patients stopped beyond 12 months first of all, and then stopped beyond nine months. We are now pursuing a target—not just a target but a guarantee—of ensuring that, by the end of next year, no one waits longer than six months. Those guarantees were important for those who were waiting the longest in our health service.

The choice between the different parties in this Parliament is about where we go from here. I believe that there is a clear choice. We can ensure that we put ideology to one side and do what is best for the patient in the national health service in Scotland, and we can ensure that not only do we have a quality national health service but that we use the resources of others too. Alternatively, we can do what the Scottish National Party would like us to do—fossilise the health service in Scotland into something that it perhaps once was but cannot be in the future. We need more flexibility and more choice in order to meet the needs of patients today. Finally, we can privatise the health service, as I am sure we are about to hear in a moment from the Tories. Those are the fundamental choices. Neither the Labour Party nor the Liberal Democrats will fossilise or privatise the health service; we will just work hard to make it better. That is what we should be doing for Scotland, and that is what we will do.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is fascinating that the First Minister failed even to mention the new policy that the health minister has been trumpeting all over the media today. He failed to answer the central question: where will the extra staff come from to expand the private sector in Scotland? At a time when services throughout Scotland are being centralised because there are not enough staff to maintain them and when vacancy rates for hospital staff are at an all-time high, does the First Minister expect us to believe that extra doctors and nurses can just be magicked out of thin air? It is time that the First Minister got real. Is it not reality that the doctors and nurses that the private sector will recruit will be taken from the health service, and that the so-called announcement this morning is just a panic measure in the face of yet another set of disastrous waiting time statistics that show up the failure of the Executive to get to grips with the health service? Is it not the case that the First Minister's new policy, far from benefiting patients, will simply rob Peter to pay Paul?

The First Minister: We can see quite clearly here the choice that there will be in the health service in Scotland. The health minister has made it very clear this morning that the changes that he will propose in some detail next month in a paper to the Parliament will not be at the expense of the health service in Scotland. Those changes will ensure that there is additional capacity, that there are additional operations, that there are additional treatments, and therefore that additional patients are treated more quickly across the length and breadth of Scotland.

Ms Sturgeon is saying that she will be opposed to every one of those operations and treatments. She will be opposed to every one of those patients getting better care, simply because of an ideological objection to the measures that will be proposed. That is wrong. That is not putting the patients first. We will put the patients first, and we will deliver a better health service.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am not opposed to additional operations or treatments. I am pointing out the blatantly obvious fact that additional operations and treatments will take additional doctors and nurses. The question that the First Minister has failed to answer is, if those doctors and nurses are not going to come from the national health service, where will they come from? The First Minister should answer the question and stop ducking and diving.

The First Minister: Perhaps I should quote from the document that the Scottish National Party produced earlier this week, in which it recommends

“Aggressive national and international recruitment campaigns”.

Three days ago, Ms Sturgeon supported what we are going to propose, but today she does not because, as leader of the Opposition, she has to oppose it. The reality is that the Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition puts patients first in Scotland. We said that we would put those patients who were waiting longest first; we have done so. Those who are waiting longer than 12 months now have a firm guarantee that is being met. Those waiting longer than nine months have a firm guarantee that is being met. We said that we would ensure that waiting times and out-patients would become the focus of our activity; on both of those, we are delivering the improvements that we said we would. From last year to this year, the figures show it clearly.

We have also said that we want to go further and we will go further, not just inside the national health service, but under the control of the national health service, with it in the driving seat, using here in Scotland excess capacity from elsewhere to shorten waiting times, to deliver for patients and to put patients first. That—not putting our ideology before those patients' needs—should be the duty of the Parliament.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): I think that the First Minister is aware of concerns that I have previously raised about health services at St John's hospital. However, does the First Minister agree that announcements made by Lothian NHS Board this week about the introduction at St John's of additional cardiology services, and of additional obstetricians to support the fastest growing maternity unit in Scotland, the development at St John's of a regional head and neck centre and the awarding of university teaching status to St John's, represent a positive step forward? Does the First Minister agree that that series of measures will secure a long-term viable future for St John's as one of the three main acute hospitals in Lothian? Would it not have been welcome if Ms Sturgeon had recognised that today, given the issues that she has previously raised in that connection?

The First Minister: First, I welcome the announcements that were made this week about St John's in Livingston. It is an important hospital and I believe that its future has been secured as a result of the announcements. It will now deliver comprehensive services to a wider catchment area and that will help to secure its future even more. It is regrettable that the Opposition is prepared to play politics with individual cases but is not prepared to welcome improvements in the health service when they happen. I hope that Opposition members will be big enough to welcome those changes today, as Fiona Hyslop has done—I name her as a member of the SNP who was big enough to do that and I hope that Ms Sturgeon will do that too.

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): Given that Greater Glasgow NHS Board tells us that it has 10,000 people on its orthopaedic waiting list, and given that most orthopaedic surgeons work in the NHS—only a few have small private commitments—how will the Scottish Executive's proposal to involve the private sector significantly reduce the number of people in Strathkelvin and Bearsden who are on the waiting list and who need surgery?

The First Minister: That is precisely the problem that we need to address. That could not be done by squeezing more capacity from the existing surgeons and the staff who support them in their work. That is precisely why we need to look at additional capacity from elsewhere and bring it into Scotland to make sure that waiting lists can come down. That is what we are doing. This morning, the Minister for Health and Community Care made clear the guarantee that health service resources will not be diverted to achieve that objective. Additional resources will be attracted to Scotland in order to secure the best possible results for patients.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1219)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): At the next Cabinet meeting we will discuss issues that are of importance to the people of Scotland.

David McLetchie: There is no greater issue of importance to the people of Scotland than the state of our national health service. Of all the parties in the Parliament, the Scottish Conservative party alone has consistently argued that we need to make much greater use of the independent sector for the benefit of all our patients, so today's news, if it is true, is welcome. The sinners are finally repenting. However, we should not pretend that the news is anything other than a humiliating U-turn and an admission of the abject failure of the Scottish Executive's approach. Is it not the truth that, despite all the bravado and bluster of the past five years about going it alone, the First Minister has been forced to adopt an English solution to a Scottish problem of his Executive's creation?

The First Minister: The Conservatives and the health service—where do we begin to talk about that? In recent years there has been a reduction in health service management and a reduction in the longest waits—in fact, there has been abolition of some of the longest waits that existed in Scotland prior to the existence of this Parliament. There has been a reduction in the waits of people who face the key killer diseases that have plagued Scotland

for far too long: cancer, strokes and heart disease. With the existence of the Parliament, there has also been action on public health in Scotland. Such action was long needed and long demanded and it is now happening. Of course change is required in our health service and the considerable improvements that are already in place need to be pursued further, but key changes have taken place. The reduction in bureaucracy and management, the reduction in the longest waits, the treatments for those with the key killer diseases and the improvements in public health are key changes of which the Parliament can be proud.

David McLetchie: The First Minister gave no answer to my first question, but if he wants to debate records, I will debate records. To give two examples, the median wait for an out-patient appointment in 1997, under the Tories, was 34 days but the median wait today, under Labour, is 55 days, which is 21 days longer. The median wait for in-patient appointments under the Tories in 1997 was 34 days but the median wait under the Labour Scottish Executive is 43 days. The people of Scotland got a far better health service from the Tories than they have ever had from Labour.

Let us test how substantial the U-turn is. Are we to have permanent, purpose-built and independently run diagnostic and treatment centres, or are Scottish patients simply to be shipped down to England for treatment? In other words, is Mr Kerr announcing a temporary fix or a long-overdue fundamental change of approach to how we run our health service?

The First Minister: The initiative will be a long-term improvement in provisions in the health service in Scotland and will be based here, in the interests of patients in Scotland. I assure the member that it will be significantly better than the long-term fundamental change of approach that the Conservative party would implement. That would take the resources that we will use to treat patients fairly and equally throughout the length and breadth of Scotland and use them to subsidise those who can afford to pay for private care.

We will ensure that the health service in Scotland remains free at the point of need and that people are treated when they need treatment. The Tories would use the same resources to subsidise those who can afford to pay. They would privatise use of the health service at the individual point of need. That is a fundamental divide between their and our long-term strategies.

David McLetchie: Does the First Minister think that it takes a special kind of genius to spend much more taxpayers' money, yet have even more patients waiting even longer for treatment? That fact is indisputable. Will he and his Executive

finally end the parochialism, complacency and arrogance that have characterised their health service policy from day one and recognise that people in Scotland want solutions that work in our health service, not the dogma that has been forced down our throats for the past five years?

The First Minister: No amount of reading out questions that were prepared before answers had been heard can hide the fundamental divide between the Conservative approach and the Government's approach to the health service in Scotland. Even when the pretence that the Conservatives maintain about health policy—that it is all about diagnostic and treatment centres—is progressed by the coalition Government in Scotland, they cannot welcome that, because their hidden agenda is to subsidise those who can afford to pay and to ignore those who cannot afford to pay. That divide would exist in the health service in Scotland if the Conservatives were in charge and we are intent on preventing it from being created.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There is one constituency question, from Karen Gillon.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Given the considerable interest in my constituency in corporate culpable homicide, I welcome the Executive's announcement that it will consult on related proposals. As businesses have considerable resources to ensure that their voices and their views are heard, what steps will the Executive take to ensure that the equally legitimate voices of ordinary Scots are heard and that their concerns are taken on board? What is the timescale for consultation and legislation likely to be?

The First Minister: The Minister for Justice intends to publish early in the new year a consultation paper on developing the options for implementing new laws.

Scottish Executive (Priorities)

3. Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's current top priorities are. (S2F-1230)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Our top priority is to improve growth in the Scottish economy in order to create the wealth and prosperity that are required to close opportunity gaps and to help to fund our public services.

Ms Byrne: The Executive sets out in the partnership agreement the policy that secondary 1 and 2 maths and English classes should have a maximum of 20 pupils by 2007 and that primary 1 classes should have a maximum of 25 pupils. Why is the First Minister backtracking on that pledge? As a former teacher, like me, he must surely be

aware that smaller classes are better for pupils and teachers.

The First Minister: We are not backtracking on that policy. In our recent budget, we allocated resources to achieve it. Through our recent education policy statements, we have also taken actions to ensure that we have not only the right facilities available in our schools, but the appropriate number of teachers trained to deliver the commitment.

Ms Byrne: I am astonished that the First Minister believes that allowing head teachers in secondary schools to set class size limits is not backtracking. Does he accept that a flagship policy of the Executive has been reduced to ashes? Teachers will agree with me that smaller classes are vital if we are to solve problems of indiscipline and to deliver greater educational opportunities for all our young people. Will the Executive give a guarantee to the Educational Institute of Scotland that it will honour the partnership agreement and reduce class sizes as promised?

The First Minister: I repeat the point that I made earlier to Mr McLetchie: it would be better if the member responded to the answers that were given, instead of reading out prepared questions regardless of the answers. There are a few things in tatters in the Parliament, but our class sizes pledge is not one of them.

Teachers will be trained and recruited to deliver the commitments that we have made on class sizes. Resources have been allocated to ensure that our school buildings and the facilities that are available in our schools are in the modern state that is required to deliver the class sizes that we have pledged and the commitments that we have made to Scotland's children and to parents. It is entirely appropriate that the Minister for Education and Young People should decide to have a discussion with head teachers about how best to implement the policy.

Children and Communities (Protection from Registered Sex Offenders)

4. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Executive is considering to better protect children and communities from registered sex offenders. (S2F-1227)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We believe that there is a strong case for ending automatic early release of sex offenders and are examining the effectiveness of the sex offenders notification scheme at an operational level. We aim to deliver better public protection through closer supervision of sex offenders in the community and will legislate to promote joint working between the police, prisons and criminal

justice social work in assessing, monitoring and managing the risk posed by sex offenders.

Paul Martin: I welcome the commitments that the First Minister and the Minister for Justice have given. I seek assurances from the First Minister that the Executive will keep an open mind in dealing with a number of issues that local communities have raised. I refer in particular to housing allocation policy, which is currently appalling, and the widening of access to the sex offenders register. I seek assurances that the Parliament will have an opportunity to interrogate every possibility to ensure that registered sex offenders pose the minimum risk to our children.

The First Minister: These are deadly serious issues. It is vitally important that when we consider them in the Parliament we do so with the best of evidence and the best of motives. That is why we will take decisions about sex offenders, their punishments, their supervision in the community and about how information is revealed about them in the interests of the safety and security of Scotland's children and young people. In doing so, we are prepared to consider the options that Paul Martin has suggested. The Minister for Justice met Paul Martin this week and is considering those matters. All the decisions that we make will be based on the maximum safety and security, the maximum supervision of sex offenders in the community and the maximum rehabilitation of sex offenders when they are in custody.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I associate myself with the concerns that Paul Martin has expressed on behalf of his constituents in the light of the Leggate case. Does the First Minister agree that if the policy in relation to early release of sex offenders is to change, that has implications for the prison estate, as there will be a need for extra places in an already overcrowded prison estate? How does he intend to respond to that?

The First Minister: It is precisely because of the implications of any change in policy that we need to consider such a change carefully. If we implement the change, we must do so over an appropriate timescale. We should not make immediate announcements of an immediate change in policy if the appropriate arrangements are not yet in place. I know that Stewart Stevenson takes a serious and responsible approach to this matter and that he represents both his constituents and the facilities in his constituency powerfully in the Parliament. I respect his views on the matter and am sure that the Minister for Justice would be happy to discuss it with him in detail.

Anti-terror Courts (Trials without Jury)

5. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive has had any discussions with the Home Office regarding trials without jury in anti-terror courts. (S2F-1240)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with the Home Office on a wide range of issues, including anti-terrorism measures.

Margaret Smith: The First Minister will be aware of the concern in the chamber about the possible impact of such trials on our distinct legal system. Does he agree that the prosecution of terrorism offences is a major challenge for our legal system and that we should not lightly abandon civil liberties that have stood us in good stead for many centuries? Will the First Minister give a commitment that, a long time before any such development is introduced in Scotland, the Scottish Law Commission will have a full review of the operation of Scottish courts in relation to terrorism offences, the Executive will conduct a consultation on the subject, and the Scottish Parliament will have an opportunity for full and proper scrutiny, a full debate and a vote on the subject?

The First Minister: It is important to start my answer with three facts. First, we have in recent times in Scotland had a non-jury trial in the Lockerbie case. It was held under special arrangements to deal with particular circumstances that were deemed to have been appropriate on that occasion.

Secondly, this Parliament and devolved Government rejected the option of non-jury trials that were introduced in England and Wales for some fraud and other cases in recent years.

Thirdly, I understand that the Home Secretary floated the proposal as one of a range of possibilities that might appear in an options paper from the Home Office in the near future. If the Home Secretary wishes, we will be happy to have a serious discussion about that proposal with him. However, any such suggestion would be pursued throughout the United Kingdom for consistency and I would expect it to be subject to some serious discussion by our devolved Government and by this Parliament.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): The First Minister has already said that Scotland has demonstrated a robust response to acts of terrorism, as it did in the Lockerbie trial, which was set up in the Hague and held under Scots law and as a non-jury trial—but importantly, by agreement. Will the First Minister assure me that he will continue to seek discussions with the Home Secretary so that we as a Parliament are clear

what those proposals mean for Scotland, because controversial issues are involved, and will he assure the Parliament that any controversial proposals will not be imposed on the Scottish system without discussion and justification?

The First Minister: There are a number of serious issues to consider here and that is why I would regard any suggestion from the Home Secretary on the matter as a subject worthy of serious discussion inside our devolved Government and also inside the Parliament.

Even if such trials were proposed only for another part of the United Kingdom, that would still have implications for Scotland. I am not instinctively supportive of non-jury trials, but it would be wrong of me to say never to any proposal that might help to deal with terrorism. Although we have a duty to have a serious discussion about the matter, we need to wait and see whether the Home Secretary makes such a proposal, and if so, what the nature of that proposal might be before we make assumptions or judgments about it.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Is it not the case that the proposed European constitution will open the door to non-jury trials? Will the First Minister re-examine that aspect and perhaps reassess his position on the proposed European constitution?

The First Minister: I never cease to be amazed by Phil Gallie's ability to bring the proposed European constitution into any discussion that takes place in this Parliament. One of the good things about the recently agreed treaty to establish a European constitution is that the constitution would protect the Scottish criminal justice system. That is one of the reasons why I will vote yes in the referendum on the constitution that will happen in Britain at some point in the next two years.

Class Sizes

(Partnership Agreement Commitment)

6. Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive intends to review the partnership agreement commitment on class sizes. (S2F-1234)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): As I said earlier, in our budget announced in September 2004 and in our education policies, we have allocated the resources and agreed the actions required to meet our target of classes of 20 in secondary 1 and 2 for mathematics and English. Representations from head teachers on the implementation of that plan in individual schools are being considered.

Fiona Hyslop: I welcome the fact that the Government has taken up the Scottish National Party's agenda on class sizes, just as Lothian

NHS Board has taken up SNP proposals for improvements to services in West Lothian, although Labour members have made not a single point about the options and we still do not have accident, emergency trauma, orthopaedics and emergency surgery—

The Presiding Officer: Your question was about class sizes.

Fiona Hyslop: Is it not the case that the Executive knew that it would never be able to meet its pledges on class sizes and that it would have to increase intakes for teacher training in English and mathematics by 100 per cent to do so? Will the First Minister admit that those pledges represent a betrayal of the trust of parents and pupils in Scotland? Will he admit that he knew from the start that the pledges on class sizes would be broken?

The First Minister: A number of different education policies are pursued in the Parliament and one that the SNP has consistently supported is the abandonment of the school building and reform programme. That policy would lead to higher class sizes in old buildings that are not fit for the 21st century and the SNP should be ashamed of that.

Ms Hyslop accuses us of listening to head teachers and responding accordingly. I think that people throughout Scotland want politicians to listen more to representations from those who deliver our public services and it is entirely responsible of us to do so. That position has been adopted consistently by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in the Parliament and the people of Scotland expect us to follow that policy. Indeed, politicians of other parties called on us to follow that policy. One of those politicians said:

“We should listen to what teachers and head teachers say. Head teachers have told me that they would prefer the flexibility of making their own choices, rather than the dislocation and disruption of ... classes, which result from the requirement to meet the class size target.”—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2002; c 6182.]

The politician who said that was Fiona Hyslop.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time.

12:32

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and Transport

Freight (Transfer from Road to Rail)

1. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to encourage the transfer of more freight from road to rail. (S2O-4211)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): A total of 20 awards of freight facilities grant have been made to rail projects in Scotland since July 1999. Those awards of grant total more than £37 million and will remove 18 million lorry miles from Scotland's roads each year.

Dr Jackson: The minister knows that I am a supporter of rail freight. There is a continuing issue in Crianlarich, however, where timber wagons are being shunted at 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the morning. Can the minister outline further how a Scottish strategy for rail freight is being developed? In particular, how are infrastructure changes to be assessed? Could the minister say a little more about the grant that he mentioned? How can the finance be accessed so that concerns in communities such as Crianlarich can be addressed?

Nicol Stephen: Sylvia Jackson knows my concern about the issue, because I recently met her and representatives of English Welsh & Scottish Railway Ltd and Network Rail to discuss the problem. All of us want to encourage more freight being transported on our rail system and by water in order to take the pressure off roads and reduce congestion. That means making some difficult choices. It is difficult to access the main rail network, particularly the single-track rail lines in the Highlands, during the day when passenger services use the lines. In assessing such applications, our priority is to promote freight by rail and to expand the use of rail freight.

We must, of course, also consider the interests of local communities. I welcome the decision of EWS and Network Rail to inform the local community better about issues in respect of movement of rail freight at Crianlarich, and to do what they can to maintain their timetable there.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the rail companies should not be subject to undue criticism, given that the alternative—transport by lorry—would be

subject to no control at all, at any time of day or night? Is the minister aware that many businesses contact MSPs with good cases for using existing rail sidings, or for moving timber and other merchandise by rail from locations that are very close to existing rail lines? Those businesses find it very difficult to get rail freight companies—in Scotland, that is usually EWS—to take any interest in their propositions.

Nicol Stephen: If Alasdair Morgan has specific examples, I will be interested to hear about them and to learn more about businesses' difficulties. The Scottish Executive is anxious to promote schemes that involve rail freight and we are putting millions of pounds into freight facilities grant projects. Track access grant is also available for rail schemes.

I agree very much that we must encourage businesses to transport more freight on our railways and by sea. Through the Executive and the funding schemes, we have the capability to support that, but if there are blockages, I want to know about them. I would be grateful if Alasdair Morgan could write to me on the matter that he raises.

More than 5,000 lorry journeys per year have been taken off the road in the Crianlarich area as a result of the rail freight scheme.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware that Safeway Stores Ltd uses the freight facilities grant to move goods to the north of Scotland. Safeway has been bought by Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc, which is selling on the smaller Safeway stores in the north to Somerfield plc. Has the minister had any discussions with Morrison or Somerfield about continuation of the use of rail freight facilities, which has enabled lorries to be taken off the roads in the north of Scotland, with goods being shipped by rail instead?

Nicol Stephen: No, I have not had any such direct discussions. If there was a threat to those services, I would be pleased to become involved.

The trend among all the larger superstores and companies—such as Safeway, Tesco plc and Asda Ltd—has been to move towards taking their goods to their stores around Scotland by rail where they can; we have given support grants to encourage such schemes. I do not want us to move backwards in relation to any company. At the end of the day, we are clearly talking about commercial decisions, but I hope that we can grow rail freight and encourage more superstores and other companies to send their freight by rail over the coming years in Scotland.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I cite Rannoch Station in my constituency as an example of where there could be ministerial

intervention to encourage getting more freight off the roads and on to railways. Forest Enterprise Scotland has worked extremely hard under difficult circumstances to try to engage rail companies in removing from road transport similar quantities of timber to those that have been removed around Crianlarich. The community would breathe a sigh of relief if the lorry loads were to be removed from the roads in the Rannoch area. Will the minister intervene in that case and try to speed up the endlessly long process in order to achieve the desirable objective?

Nicol Stephen: I emphasise that it frustrates me, too, when I hear about long delays. If there is a solid proposal to move freight from lorries to rail, it should be speeded along and supported in every possible way. If John Swinney writes to me with more details on the matter, I will be happy to look further into it.

Campbeltown to Ballycastle Ferry

2. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide an update on progress being made on the Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry. (S2O-4185)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): On 7 September, I met representatives of the Dalriada Business Action Group, which has been leading that important project locally. That meeting allowed us to make significant progress with our proposals, and we are now consulting the Northern Ireland Office before we make an announcement on the proposed ferry service. That announcement will be made in due course.

George Lyon: I thank the minister for that update.

The community in Campbeltown has expressed to me its concern that there is resistance in the Northern Ireland Office to the proposal. Will the minister clarify whether that has been his experience in his discussions with the Northern Ireland Office?

Nicol Stephen: I have received no response from the Northern Ireland Office on the proposal that has been put to it. The Northern Ireland Office was clearly an important partner in relation to the previous tender. It was intended that the split in annual support would be around £700,000 from the Scottish Executive and £300,000 from the Northern Ireland Office, so the NIO has clearly been a significant and important partner in the project. I would like things to remain that way, and we await its response.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister agree that it seems to be the Ballycastle end that continually holds the project up? If the proposal falls through, will the

minister consider a link from Campbeltown to another port in Northern Ireland, such as Larne?

Nicol Stephen: Jamie McGrigor is being unfair, as the Ballycastle end has been very supportive of the proposal. I have received representations from elected representatives in Ballycastle—indeed, they have attended meetings in Campbeltown—that clearly indicate their strong support for the initiative. I want to proceed in partnership with the Campbeltown community and Northern Ireland, which is an important partner in the project.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am saddened about the lack of response from the Northern Ireland Office. What specific steps will now be taken to encourage the active and supportive participation of politicians and administrators in Northern Ireland in such a crucial project?

Nicol Stephen: As I have already said, I am certain that there is in Northern Ireland strong cross-party support for the proposal, and the strongest support of all is in the Campbeltown area. I do not think that anybody should read too much into what I have said about the Northern Ireland Office's position. The meeting that I mentioned was in September. Since then, the Scottish Executive has had work to do to ensure that the proposal that has been put to us by the Dalriada Business Action Group can be delivered. Subsequent to that, we have been in contact with the Northern Ireland Office, and I have no doubt that it will get back to us soon. I want to maintain the momentum. It is some time since the previous tendering process failed to proceed, so it is important that we keep the project alive, if that is at all possible.

Economic Growth

3. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will set a target for economic growth for Scotland. (S2O-4203)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): The Executive is committed to working with the United Kingdom Government and to using the powers of the Scottish Parliament to create the conditions for a higher level of economic growth in Scotland. However, the outcome depends on the actions of the private sector, the business cycle, conditions in the global economy and other factors, which makes an explicit gross domestic product target inappropriate to guide Executive policy.

Nevertheless, we have a responsibility to create the conditions that will enable the economy to grow in terms of infrastructure, business support, skills, education and so on. That will pay off in the

longer term and we have set targets for specific improvements in those areas.

Murdo Fraser: I appreciate that there are other factors in play, but I cannot understand why it would not be possible to set a target relative to GDP growth in the rest of the UK. It is rather bizarre that, although the Executive seems to have targets for everything else under the sun, it refuses to set a target for what it calls its number 1 priority. Is it too cynical to suggest that the reason why it will not set a target is that it is afraid that it will not meet that target, which would expose the failures at the heart of the Executive's economic policy?

Mr Wallace: That suggestion is too cynical. Murdo Fraser accepts that a number of factors that have a direct bearing on growth are totally outwith the powers of the Scottish Executive.

It is important to bear in mind that the seasonally adjusted Scottish GDP rose by 1.8 per cent over the year to the second quarter of this year and by 0.9 per cent in the second quarter of 2004. We take growth forecasts from independent forecasters such as the Fraser of Allander institute, Cambridge Econometrics Ltd and Experian Business Strategies Ltd, each of which has produced projections for growth in 2004 and 2005 that are above the long-run average growth. That is encouraging. We sometimes do not acknowledge the good growth figures that we have or the upturn in confidence that has been reported in many business reports and surveys.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): The minister will be aware that the Scottish Borders region has the lowest wages in Scotland. What policies does he have in hand to increase economic growth in the Scottish Borders? Does he think that restoration of the Borders railway line is key to the restoration of economic growth in that area?

Mr Wallace: The position that we have taken on that railway line is well known and Christine Grahame knows that I have expressed my views on its importance on many occasions.

A range of policies are set out in the refreshed "A Smart, Successful Scotland: Strategic direction to the Enterprise Networks and an enterprise strategy for Scotland", which I published two weeks ago, that will ensure the development of skills that are relevant to the Borders. Through Scottish Enterprise Borders and the business gateway, there is also a range of support for companies that wish to develop in the Borders. I am encouraged specifically by meetings that I had earlier in the year with people who are engaged in the textiles industry which—as Christine Grahame knows—is of considerable importance to the Borders. The amount of work that is being done

through Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise Borders to lend support to the textiles industry is also important.

Contemporary Music

4. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the value is to the economy of contemporary music. (S2O-4272)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I call Jim Wallace—I beg your pardon. I have Jim Wallace in my script, but I will have Allan Wilson.

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): My knowledge of contemporary music is well known, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): It is better than mine.

Allan Wilson: That is arguable.

That information is neither routinely collated nor centrally compiled. However, the 2003 Scottish Enterprise report, "Mapping the music industry in Scotland", suggests that the sector is worth more than £100 million in annual sales and music services.

Pauline McNeill: According to DF Concerts Ltd, the Performing Right Society Ltd and the Concert Promoters Association Ltd, contemporary music ticket sales generate £40.7 million in Scotland. As the minister may be aware, Scotland spends more per head on live music tickets than the UK average. This year, we sent 15 bands to the South by Southwest showcase, which was headlined by Franz Ferdinand. He may also know that, in UK terms, music is our third largest export—a fact that is not well known.

Does the minister agree and acknowledge that the music industry is in its own right a key sector of our economy and that it has the potential to add value to other sectors of the economy? Will he ensure that our enterprise agencies give due priority and support to that key sector?

Allan Wilson: I am happy to agree with that proposition and I will share a few other interesting statistics about the music industry. It is made up of 2,000 full-time employees and 2,000 part-time workers. Consumer spending totals £331 million and total public investment is £17.9 million, for a prospective industry income of £106 million. Those figures demonstrate clearly that it is a very significant sector of the Scottish economy, which is why we have strategies in place for the creative industries, of which the music sector is an important part. Scottish Arts Council spending next year will be a record £25 million, so that we can exploit the industry and the economic benefit that flows from it.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Recent figures from Shetland show that music and musicians bring in £6 million to the Shetland economy. In Shetland the music industry is bigger than the knitwear industry, which means that it is big in Shetland terms. Will the minister consider providing a breakdown of the contemporary music industry into its parts, in particular traditional music, to give us a regular idea of what traditional music contributes to the economy so that we can promote it even better?

Allan Wilson: I am happy to agree to that request. When I was studying the statistics in forming a response to Pauline McNeill's question, I was struck by the fact that the traditional sector is worth as much as income from, for example, Franz Ferdinand, the successful Scottish band to which Pauline McNeill referred. As the member knows, I am a great supporter of the traditional music sector, so I would be happy to examine the contribution that it makes to the wider Scottish economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Edinburgh South Suburban Railway

6. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the reopening of the Edinburgh south suburban railway. (S2O-4176)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): No formal discussions have been held recently with the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the reopening of the Edinburgh south suburban railway.

Mike Pringle: After years of Liberal Democrat pressure, the City of Edinburgh Council has agreed to try to secure funding for a suburban commuter railway in my constituency. Will the minister give the assurance today that he will meet the council and give careful consideration to its request for help with funding to develop the scheme, given the benefit that the line will bring to the people of my constituency of Edinburgh South and many other residents throughout Edinburgh?

Nicol Stephen: These are issues for the City of Edinburgh Council to progress in the first instance. I know that the council has received a study and that it has not yet requested a meeting with the Executive, whose transport officials would be very willing to meet the council to discuss that and any other quality public transport projects in Edinburgh. As members know, we are already supporting a wide range of significant public transport projects in Edinburgh. We have a solid track record of support for the development of

feasibility studies for public transport schemes throughout Scotland.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I thank the minister for making a positive commitment to work with the City of Edinburgh Council and I re-emphasise the points that Mike Pringle made.

Recently, the council approved the project to which Mike Pringle referred, which is supported by both Labour and the Liberal Democrats. We are all keen for this important but relatively small piece of transport infrastructure to be added to Edinburgh's suburban railway network. Anything that the minister can do to ensure that the council and the Scottish Executive take a partnership approach to the project would be hugely appreciated. In what areas might the Scottish Executive assist with the funding of this crucial but relatively modest transport proposal?

Nicol Stephen: Perhaps better than any other MSP, Sarah Boyack knows the process that must be undergone to secure approval for a project of this kind. An initial feasibility study has been carried out. If that is positive and the project has the support of the City of Edinburgh Council, I expect that there will be a further stage or stages to the work before commissioning of the project can go ahead. The Executive can help in that area through, for example, Scottish transport appraisal guidance and the development of the detailed engineering work that is required for any project of this kind. We have a consistent record of supporting such initiatives where communities and councils support them.

Justice and Law Officers

New Roads and Street Works Act 1991

1. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many reports have been made to procurators fiscal under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and how many prosecutions have followed. (S2O-4240)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Mrs Elish Angiolini): In the past two financial years, 22 charges were reported, of which four were prosecuted. We do not hold information for prior to 2002.

David Mundell: I thank the Solicitor General for Scotland for her response. Is she aware that local authorities in Scotland recently gave evidence to the Local Government and Transport Committee that suggested that procurators fiscal are not keen to prosecute offences under the 1991 act because they deem such prosecutions to be not in the public interest? Will she look into those claims? Does she agree that enhanced provisions in the

Transport (Scotland) Bill are hardly likely to be effective if prosecutions do not follow from them?

Mrs Angiolini: What David Mundell says surprises me; I will certainly look into the suggestion that prosecutors are reluctant to prosecute, as I have met few prosecutors of that disposition. The reality is that the subject is certainly not the most specific area of prosecutorial activity. It is relevant that the Transport (Scotland) Bill will contain provisions that will make enforcement much more feasible in the sense that it will introduce fixed penalties and accelerate the process as well as introduce enhanced penalties that will reflect the seriousness of offences at the more serious end of the scale.

Domestic Abuse (LGBT Young People)

2. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how the criminal justice system protects lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people from being victims of abuse within domestic settings. (S2O-4291)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): The criminal justice system extends the same protection against abuse to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people as it does to all young people. The Executive is committed to a three-year child protection reform programme to help ensure that all children and young people get the help they need when they need it.

Mark Ballard: I thank the minister for that answer. Many LGBT young people in Scotland become trapped in a cycle of violence and intimidation in domestic settings after they come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Will the minister ensure that all police are adequately trained to refer LGBT young people to local support groups, where that is in their best interests? Sufficient referral to such local support groups is the best way for LGBT young men and women to get access to help and support.

Hugh Henry: The question of training is a matter for the police themselves and for chief constables. However, I know that the police take seriously the legislation that Parliament has passed and the policy intentions that it has articulated. I also know, from discussions with the police, that they are committed to training on a range of issues, including equal opportunity issues, and to ensuring that people are not discriminated against because of personal matters such as sexuality, religion, culture, race and so on. It is to the credit of the police that they also do training now on issues such as how to cope with problems from people who have Alzheimer's disease.

We will encourage the police to give due attention to the problem that Mark Ballard highlights, but how training is implemented at local level remains a matter for chief constables.

Disclosure Scotland

3. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied with the performance of Disclosure Scotland. (S2O-4177)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): At the week ending 21 November, Disclosure Scotland processed 99 per cent of standard and enhanced applications in an average of 3.5 days. At that same date, 100 per cent of basic applications were issued in an average of 3 days. When the handling time of the registered bodies is taken into account, the average time taken, as at 21 November, from applicant signature to posting for the higher-level certificates, was 33 days. Disclosure Scotland's performance has improved considerably and it is taking action to alert registered bodies of the need to deal with their part of the process as timeously as possible.

Mike Pringle: It has been brought to my attention that, although the headline figures for Disclosure Scotland are quite good and the organisation is meeting its target in that regard, many applications are not being processed because they are rejected before they enter the system. When the applications are sent into the agency in Perth, some are returned, with the inevitable result that there is a considerable delay. Will the minister agree to examine the design of the form to prevent what is in my view an unnecessary extension of the time that elapses between the posting of an application and its being received and officially entering the system?

Cathy Jamieson: There are two important issues. The first is that we ensure that the voluntary organisations that send applications through the central registered body in Scotland recognise that they have to get them in as quickly as possible. We acknowledge that there have been some problems with that and additional funding has been provided to ensure that that part of the process can be speeded up.

However, it is important that the forms are completed correctly and that erroneous or incomplete information is not supplied. Given that we are talking about the protection of young people, we must ensure that we get the correct information. I have received some complaints about the fact that forms have been returned because they had been completed in the wrong colour ink. I have asked people to investigate whether technology could deal with that and have instigated an examination of the form to ensure

that it is easy to understand and as easy as possible to complete.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): Does the minister recall recent correspondence from me on behalf of the area commissioner of Forth valley scouts, who is very supportive of the principles of the legislation that established Disclosure Scotland, but who is nevertheless very concerned about certain matters, including the impact on volunteer recruitment of a complete ban on service prior to receipt of a disclosure? If the matter is simply about bureaucratic delay, will the minister consider the possibility of allowing service under strict supervision until such time as a disclosure is received?

Cathy Jamieson: I always remember correspondence from the member; he frequently reminds me if I do not respond in time. The point that Dennis Canavan makes has been made by a number of other members. It is important to recognise why we have disclosure. Disclosure is not about replacing the recruitment and training processes and the supervision that take place in paid-employment situations or in the voluntary sector; it is a part of that process. There have been situations in the voluntary sector and in paid-employment situations whereby people have been able to continue to work, but on a supervised basis. That matter was discussed at a recent meeting of the Parliament's Education Committee, when people expressed concerns about the situation.

We will have to examine Sir Michael Richard's report, as it could have further implications. I want to speed up the process and ensure that we do not have unnecessary bureaucracy but, at the end of the day, it may well be worth while to take one or two days longer to get things right to protect children.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that the welfare of children is all-important and that part of the task of ensuring their welfare is to promote their health through participation in safe sports and other activities? Dennis Canavan has just chaired a meeting of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on sports, at which the Scottish Youth Football Association gave us figures that showed that 40,000 young people play football in Scotland and 10,000 volunteers give them support. Does she acknowledge the magnitude of the problem that disclosure presents to such organisations?

Cathy Jamieson: It is rare that I agree with Phil Gallie, but on this occasion I agree with him about the valuable role that such organisations play. I know that not just in Ayrshire but throughout Scotland a huge number of volunteers are involved in a range of activities that involve young people. I acknowledge that many volunteers are

involved in helping with footballing activities. However, we must remember that, although the vast majority of those volunteers would never dream of harming children, it is sadly the case that there have been serious cases in which children have been abused through the involvement in such activities of volunteers and paid officials.

I stress again that I want a system that is not overly bureaucratic, but which gives the best protection to our children. I am more than happy to try to work with the voluntary organisations to ensure that that is what we achieve.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I am sure that everyone in the chamber would agree that we want a disclosure process that ensures the greatest protection of our young people. I am sure that the minister also agrees that many pieces of what could be called misinformation have been going around lately about the disclosure process and the time that it can take to go through it. The information that the minister shared this afternoon throws some light on the situation.

Although Dennis Canavan raised a serious point about the fact that bureaucracy might be putting off people from volunteering, I do not agree with it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have a question, please?

Cathie Craigie: Will the minister commission research on the subject? That would show whether volunteers are being put off in the way that Dennis Canavan described or confirm the findings of Volunteer Development Scotland that 86 per cent of people are not put off by the disclosure process.

Cathy Jamieson: I do not want to stray into matters that do not fall within the direct remit of my portfolio. The ministers who have responsibility for justice work closely with the ministers whose communities portfolio responsibility includes the main responsibility for dealing with matters in the voluntary sector. I will raise the issue with them.

Fire Control Rooms (Consultation)

4. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will respond to the consultation on fire control rooms in Scotland. (S2O-4248)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): We received 20 formal responses to the consultation on the control rooms report. Our intention is to do further work to address the issues that were raised in the responses. We will discuss with stakeholders the outcome of that work when it has been completed and before any final decisions are taken.

Maureen Macmillan: I am glad that the minister will take a more in-depth look at the situation. He is aware of the concerns that I have expressed to him about the future of the control room in Inverness. Can he give some kind of timescale for the new part of the consultation? I am sure that he appreciates how damaging the uncertainty is for control room staff.

Hugh Henry: I appreciate the concerns that Maureen Macmillan has expressed about the uncertainty. I recognise that it is in everyone's best interests to know what is intended for the future. However, during the consultation that we have undertaken to date, some complex and specific issues were raised, one of which was the questioning of the financial basis on which the calculations were made in the consultants' report. I have given a commitment that we will re-examine the figures. I intend to return to first principles and ensure that all the figures are accurate.

A number of members have raised specific questions on the issue of locality and the fact that local knowledge is imperative. During the debate on the Fire (Scotland) Bill last week, some very different examples were raised, one of which was the fact that, although the Highlands and Islands covers an area the size of Wales, no locality issues seem to be involved—people can understand each other across the area. Other members raised issues with regard to the central belt and the north-east of Scotland. We intend to go back and look carefully at the issues. The only assurance that I can give Maureen Macmillan is that we will do that work thoroughly. We will take as long as necessary to ensure that we have examined every aspect of the argument.

Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2004

5. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is monitoring the changes resulting from the Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2004. (S2O-4282)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): The Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2004 will be implemented in phases. The first phase will start from April 2005, when measures assisting child witnesses in High Court, sheriff court solemn cases and children's hearings court procedures will be commenced. The Scottish Executive will establish a monitoring and evaluation system before then to track how well the act is working once it has been implemented.

Eleanor Scott: The minister is aware that there is genuine concern that very little may change for child witnesses, despite the passage of the act. This week it was reported that problems arose for child witnesses in a High Court case. What specific measures are being taken to change the

culture of those in the legal system with regard to the use of child witnesses? Will the minister commit to reporting annually to the Parliament, giving detailed information on the effectiveness of the act, including an analysis of cases that involve child witnesses?

Hugh Henry: I hesitate to go into the details of the case that the member mentions. My understanding of that case is not quite the same as was expressed. Nevertheless, I will examine the matter.

We have said that we will look at implementation in stages. We know that there is a need to have adequate training and that the various partners that are involved in the process are committed to that. I have been impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication that have been shown. People want to make the act work. It is inevitable that there will be problems in any new system, but they will not occur for the want of trying or commitment.

We will certainly learn from any mistakes that are made. If people identify problems as the act starts to come into force, they should by all means come back to the Executive. Information on how well the act is working will be made available by the usual processes. I have no doubt that the committees of the Parliament will keep an eye on the matter and on other pieces of legislation that are implemented to ensure that they have the desired effect. Frankly, there is no point in passing legislation if we do not examine its effect. I am sure that members will do that in due course through the committees of the Parliament.

Young People (Drug and Alcohol Abuse)

6. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to tackle drug and alcohol abuse by young people. (S2O-4267)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Drug and alcohol misuse can have a devastating effect on the lives of young people. It damages health, it puts immense pressure on family relationships and it can cause major problems for communities. That is why the Executive is working with partners throughout Scotland to tackle the problem. Our approach is based on preventing young people from becoming involved in drug and alcohol misuse in the first place, but ensuring that we have appropriate programmes in place when they do.

Jeremy Purvis: I hope that the minister will join me in commending one of those programmes in my constituency: the Reiver project in Galashiels, which receives referrals from public agencies to support young people with alcohol abuse problems. Regrettably, the referrals have included people as young as eight in the past year. Will the

minister ensure that projects such as that one, which works very well with Lothian and Borders police and Scottish Borders Council in a fully integrated alcohol abuse programme, can draw down money from the drug and alcohol action teams to ensure that the problem is addressed at a younger age? In the long term, that would mean that there would be reduced calls for expenditure on adult alcohol abuse programmes.

Cathy Jamieson: I am aware of the project to which the member refers, which is funded partly through Lloyds TSB. Some of the very good work that is being done by that project is exactly what we want to see being done elsewhere. Of course, as we talk about the ability to respond to local need, there are times when it is important that such decisions are taken locally. I will examine how the drug action teams spend their money, because I want to ensure that there are positive outcomes, but there is a case for decisions being made at a local level and I expect that to continue.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister accept that one way in which we could divert young people from substance misuse is to expand the provision of youth facilities throughout Scotland? Does she accept that in some communities, in particular rural communities, there are often no such facilities? Should not the Scottish Executive conduct an audit of youth facilities in Scotland?

Cathy Jamieson: Richard Lochhead raises a number of issues. There are many positive projects throughout Scotland. I could list a range of projects that focus specifically on drug and alcohol misuse. There are very positive examples of projects in rural communities, the most successful of which are those that young people themselves are directly involved in.

Peter Peacock, in his role as Minister for Education and Young People, recently convened a meeting that I attended, along with the then Minister for Communities, at which we considered how to ensure that the whole agenda on youth work is taken forward.

General Questions

“ambitious, excellent schools”

1. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions have taken place with teachers, head teachers and their trade unions regarding the implementation of “ambitious, excellent schools”. (S2O-4251)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): I have regular discussions with teachers, head teachers and teacher unions on education matters, and in the recent past they

have related to our plans set out in “ambitious, excellent schools”.

Mr McAveety: I welcome the minister's answer. Does he agree that the developments are essential if we are to progress Scottish education? Further, does he agree that they would be utterly jeopardised by the Conservatives' reckless proposal to remove £600 million from the education budget over the next three years, which would ensure that we could not deliver on “ambitious, excellent schools”?

Peter Peacock: First, I am glad to confirm that the Conservatives propose £600 million of cuts. Frank McAveety is right: there is a stark contrast in Scotland and in this chamber between the approach that the parties on this side of the chamber take to education—we plan to invest in our education services, to increase choice for our young people in schools, and to improve standards—and the policies of the Conservatives, which seek to do the opposite. The Conservatives want to promote choice between schools, which automatically means that there should be second-best schools in Scotland. We utterly reject that. They also wish to cut £600 million from the education budget, which would put in jeopardy all the progress that we are making and threaten the future of young people in Scotland.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I see that we have another loyal Labour back bench.

There is cross-party support for a number of measures in the programme, but the programme will rely on the professionalism, enthusiasm and good will of teachers if it is to be implemented successfully. Bearing in mind the fact that there is disquiet about the roll-out of the McCrone agreement by some local authorities, does the minister accept the constructive suggestion that we need to review the roll-out and implementation of McCrone if some of the measures in the programme are to be implemented successfully?

Peter Peacock: The McCrone agreement has brought a huge number of benefits. We now have far better-paid teachers. In fact, we have just concluded another pay deal for the next four years, which will help to increase teachers' salaries and stabilise their earnings. We have far better induction processes than we had before and better processes for probationer teachers. We have chartered teachers in our schools. We have continuing professional development in a way that we never had before. That is real progress. Every target that we set for the implementation of the McCrone findings has been met, therefore there is no need for a fundamental review.

I accept completely that we require the good will of teachers towards our reform agenda. I have spent a lot of time this month talking to teachers

and head teachers about the reform agenda, and it is receiving enthusiastic support. The clear difference between the approach that we are taking now and the approach that was taken in past years is that we seek to free up teachers and to remove burdens and restrictions on them to allow them to do their professional job. Teachers are welcoming that.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I refute totally the minister's comments in response to the question. It has already been pointed out to the minister that the Conservatives are offering real devolution in education in Scotland—devolution that the minister supposedly supported. Does the minister agree that it is far better that money is directed at the point of contact, rather than by ministers and councillors at the centre, who do not always realise what is going on at local level and what the local education requirements are?

Peter Peacock: While Phil Gallie argues that we should direct to head teachers money that we are going to spend, the Conservatives propose to cut the money that we propose to spend on head teachers. It is no use Phil Gallie or his colleagues shaking their heads and pretending that their commitment does not exist. Their party leader made the commitment to cut our spending on education by £600 million. Everybody in Scotland should be clear about that. There is a fundamental difference in approach. We want to invest in education; the Conservatives want to cut it.

Sustainable Development Education

2. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): My apologies for rising to a provocation this morning, Presiding Officer.

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied with its progress in taking forward education for sustainable development in schools. (S2O-4285)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): The sustainable development education liaison group, which meets quarterly, continues to make progress. One of the group's early tasks was the commissioning and publication of a baseline research study of the status and provision of sustainable development education in other parts of the United Kingdom. The research has now been completed and the report is being circulated to education authorities throughout Scotland—I am sure that I could make a copy available to Mr Harper. The group has recruited a development officer to make progress with its programme of work from January next year.

Robin Harper: I am aware that that research has been completed and I would love to receive a copy. However, I am concerned that, despite a

passing mention of sustainable development in the Minister for Education and Young People's foreword to the new curriculum framework document, there is no further mention of sustainable development in the substance of that document. Will the minister reassure members that the Executive's commitment to education on sustainable development will see its way into the heart of the new curriculum?

Euan Robson: Yes. Part of our proposal is to free up the curriculum to introduce choice and, clearly, sustainable development education will form part of that. It is not possible to restate commitments time after time in documents, but there is no doubt that we see that as the future and that we look forward to the subject being included in the new three to 18 curriculum, which will be the first such curriculum in Scotland.

Contaminated Land (European Court of Justice Ruling)

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects to reach a conclusion on the implication of the Van de Walle case in relation to contaminated land. (S2O-4286)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): While we are still considering the full implications of that case, our initial assessment is that it is unlikely to lead to major changes in waste management practice in Scotland.

Patrick Harvie: I thank the minister for that answer, which echoes a written answer that I have received in saying that the implications are still under consideration.

In a letter to Semple Fraser solicitors, the Executive has acknowledged that the judgment means that land that is contaminated by waste is itself to be regarded as waste under the environmental regulations. However, the Executive goes on to dismiss the idea that that might alter its consideration of the environmental aspects of the report on the M74 northern extension, which we all anticipate. How can the minister say, on the one hand, that the implications are still being considered and, on the other hand, that the process that is known technically as encapsulation—or simply concreting over and building on top—remains an acceptable way in which to deal with contaminated land?

Lewis Macdonald: If Mr Harvie had listened more closely to my initial answer, he would have heard that we are still considering the full implications, but that our initial assessment is that the judgment is unlikely to lead to major changes in waste management in Scotland. We have come to that conclusion because, in the main, the causes of pollution and land that is contaminated

by pollution are treated together anyway—an oil spill cannot be separated from the ground on to which the oil has spilled. Therefore, although we are still considering the Van de Walle judgment, the principle that it appears to reinforce is one by which we already abide.

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): Does the minister agree that, given Mr Harvie's concern about contaminated land, he should welcome the proposed M74 northern extension, which in my constituency alone would result in the capping of a large number of contaminated land sites?

Lewis Macdonald: Janis Hughes makes a valid point. I hope that Patrick Harvie and the Green Party will support effective action to deal with contaminated land, rather than hope that we cannot afford to take such action.

Foster Care (Regulation and Inspection)

4. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive which areas will be selected for the care commission pilot studies of the regulation and inspection of foster care. (S2O-4193)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): That is an operational matter for the care commission. I understand that the commission is discussing the pilot inspections with providers and that the organisations that are to take part will be confirmed soon.

Mary Scanlon: Given the recent debates on foster caring and the minister's commitment to an audit, how will the Executive work with the care commission to ensure that the information and experience that the commission gains in its regulation and inspection work are included in that audit?

Euan Robson: We will work closely with the care commission on that. The pilot inspections will involve a mix of urban and rural authorities as well as voluntary organisations. The process will be incremental, because extra pilots will be added during the year. The results of the pilots will inform the operational processes for adoption and fostering services and we will take any lessons on board in the way that Mary Scanlon suggests.

Planning Guidelines (Renewable Developments)

5. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will take forward its review of planning guidelines for renewable developments. (S2O-4270)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): Independent research will be commissioned early next year to assess the effectiveness of existing planning policies. The recently established environmental advisory forum for renewable energy development and other stakeholders will be involved both in the research and in the subsequent policy review.

Christine May: I know that, like me, the minister acknowledges that we need to strike a balance between the interests of communities and the interest of the economy. Renewables are important, particularly in my constituency, but many of the jobs that they will bring will come in the future.

I want to raise with the minister the particular issue of opencast mining, in which land will be used frequently to provide energy crops. The review of national planning policy guideline 16 appears to be based on a presumption against any further opencast development. Does the minister agree that it might be possible to find another way of addressing communities' very relevant concerns while protecting coal stocks?

Johann Lamont: I do not know whether the member's question was a test on which of my NPPGs we were going to talk about. I hope that I do not fall at the first hurdle.

The forum for renewable energy development was established in response to NPPG 6, but the member is referring in particular to NPPG 16.

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): The minister knows her NPPGs.

Johann Lamont: Yes, but I get a bit confused when I get to PANs.

Consultation on the revised opencast guidance will close on 3 December 2004 and finalised guidance will be issued in spring 2005.

The member will be aware that the review already recognises that the current guidance has provided a sound and robust framework that has significantly enhanced planning authorities' ability effectively to control the adverse impact of opencast coal development on local communities and the environment and that, of course, strikes the balance that the member refers to. Although there is some contention about the impact of NPPG 16, it is clear that the overall level of production in Scotland has not been affected by its introduction. Indeed, the level of production in 1998 was 6.2 million tonnes, whereas the level of production in 2002 was 7.1 million tonnes. In any case, the member can rest assured that the Scottish Executive is very much aware of the issues surrounding the matter and will report in the spring. We remain committed to understanding the

environmental issues and the economic pressures on local communities.

Central Heating

6. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will accelerate the installation of free central heating systems for the most vulnerable people. (S2O-4268)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): We have accelerated the installation of free central heating systems for the most vulnerable people by extending this year's programme to include people over 80 years old who have partial or inefficient systems. We are considering how we might target most effectively the fuel poor in future programmes.

Jeremy Purvis: I thank the minister for his reply, for extending the programme and for the consideration that he is giving to accelerating it in the future. However, winter is arguably upon us, and the most vulnerable older people will unfortunately have had to wait too long for the central heating programme to become relevant to them and to receive the benefits that many thousands of households have received as a result of this welcome policy. Will the minister give urgent consideration to the matter? Indeed, will the Executive consider using council direct labour organisations to install free central heating in the neediest households now to ensure that people receive those benefits and that DLOs draw down funding through the programme?

Malcolm Chisholm: We are now mainly considering the new spending review period between 2006 and 2008, because the current programme has been established up until April 2006. Our commitment in that programme is to all older people and the social rented sector. As people will acknowledge, that represents the biggest ever investment in an energy programme and is targeted on the most vulnerable. Of course, we want to cut delays as much as possible; some delays are unavoidable, but I am sure that some can be dealt with. We will do everything that we can to ensure that the people who are entitled to free central heating installation get it as quickly as possible.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): As the minister knows, I welcome all those developments in the provision of central heating to the public. However, is he aware of any legal basis for landlords denying tenants the free installation programme, despite all the criteria having been met? Does the Executive keep a central record, perhaps along with others who are involved in the provision, of instances of landlords denying tenants central heating systems? What action does he believe the Executive can take to remedy

the situation? Although we can name and shame the landlords, it seems to me that an element of feudal obstruction is involved. Does the Executive see a way forward?

Malcolm Chisholm: I certainly understand Margaret Ewing's frustration. I am sure that naming and shaming landlords is one option, although I do not think that she would regard that as adequate. John Home Robertson, who, like Margaret Ewing, has a long-standing interest in the matter, asked a question about it, which I think that Johann Lamont answered yesterday, indicating that since 2001 seven people had been refused a central heating system by their landlord. I am sure that we all agree that that is seven too many. As the answer indicated, nothing can be done under the current legislation, but members will know that a housing bill is planned. We are considering the registration of private landlords and action has already been taken on some aspects of that under the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004. We might be able to consider the matter in that context, if not in others. I thank Margaret Ewing and John Home Robertson for drawing it to our attention.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Will the minister revisit the guidance that was issued to the Eaga Partnership regarding the replacement of obsolete central heating systems for the over-80s? Only last week an 84-year-old constituent of mine was told that his radiators would have to be shifted, because some of them were under windows. Eaga told me that it has no flexibility because of the Executive's guidance. Could not a balance be struck between energy efficiency, which is important, and the not inconsiderable inconvenience that would be caused to elderly and possibly vulnerable people who might have to undertake extensive redecoration and would experience delays and expense as a result of such unwanted extra work?

Malcolm Chisholm: I was not aware of that issue and I thank Elaine Murray for drawing it to my attention. It would be wrong to give a snap response to her question, but I will certainly look into the matter and get back to her with my considered thoughts.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Does the minister agree that despite the fact that the programme to provide free central heating systems, which has been instituted, is most excellent, the Executive and the Government at Westminster must provide people with enough money to operate the systems? It is no use having an up-to-date system that one cannot afford to turn on. Until that is achieved, the systems that have been installed are not much use to many vulnerable people.

Malcolm Chisholm: There are three parts to eliminating fuel poverty. We are doing all that we can in relation to energy efficiency. As I said, the programme is the biggest ever. The second issue is the price of fuel and members will be aware that I wrote recently to the fuel companies about that. The third part of the equation is income. I cannot in one answer rerun the debate that we had about pensions two weeks ago, but I am sure that John Swinburne will acknowledge that the poorest pensioners have benefited enormously from the measures that have been taken by the Labour Government since 1997.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate the Executive on the success of the excellent scheme, but I want to press the minister further on the subject of the handful of recalcitrant private landlords who are refusing to allow their pensioner tenants the benefits of central heating when they could have it free, gratis and for nothing, funded by the Scottish Executive. Will the minister at least name and shame the seven individuals who have taken such disgraceful action?

Malcolm Chisholm: I said that I had sympathy with that point of view when Margaret Ewing expressed it. I am sure that the key issue that Margaret Ewing, John Home Robertson and others will want us to address is what can be done in regulations and the legislation to ensure that landlords do not take such action. Under the current legislation, there is nothing we can do, except name and shame the landlords.

Violence Against Women

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2059, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on violence against women, and one amendment to that motion.

15:00

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): Earlier this month, we debated the serious issue of domestic abuse and its impact on women and children. That debate demonstrated the shared commitment across the chamber to tackling domestic abuse and the need to do all that we can to challenge those men who abuse and to protect people who suffer as a result. During that debate, we set out the Executive's belief that domestic abuse has its foundation in the inequalities between men and women and the abuse of power within a relationship. As long as there is wider acceptance of gender inequality, the task of addressing the issue will be harder.

I know that that is a controversial issue for some. Let me make it clear that two separate matters are involved. We can deal with individual victims of crime, however they present themselves and whatever their needs are, within the justice system. However, if we are going to challenge the issues that cause crime, we will have to examine and understand the patterns that develop.

An issue that has been raised in this regard is that, while we have a problem with domestic abuse, we also have a problem with, for example, knife crime. It is interesting that the very people who were hesitant about the provisions of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill, which sought to prevent youth disorder, address the development of gang culture and challenge young male crime in our communities, are the same people who now do not want to talk specifically about gender-related crime. As we know, we have to understand the pattern of behaviour. In relation to the experience of young men who are the victims of the knife culture that we now live in, we have to recognise that if we do not address the fact that it is young men who carry knives and young men who fall victim to knife crimes, we will not solve that problem either. We should be comfortable debating all issues relating to crime and violence in terms of a proper understanding of what generates them in the first place.

No one should be in any doubt that the struggle for women's equality is real and far from over. Lone parents, the majority of whom are women, struggle to run their households. Women are concentrated in the lowest-paid jobs. Women experience discrimination and harassment in

employment. Disabled women, women from ethnic minority communities, older women and lesbian and bisexual women experience multiple discrimination. The pay gap between men and women is 11 per cent, a figure that rises significantly for older women and part-time workers. Women are still not visible in boardrooms, senior management positions or public offices at anything like the levels that they should be.

Women's inequality is still with us. Nowhere is that inequality more marked than in the violence that is perpetrated against women by men.

On this international day for the elimination of violence against women, we are in good company. The United Nations has highlighted the fact that violence against women

"is arguably the world's most prevalent, pervasive and systemic problem. It is a problem without borders, a universal scourge on women and their families that knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth"

and the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, said that it is

"perhaps the most shameful human rights violation."

The UN also states:

"Unless tackled systematically at all levels of society with zero-tolerance policies and a concerted effort by the international community and governments to make it socially unacceptable and a crime, gender-based violence will stall any real progress towards equality, development and peace."

It is right that we mark today—the UN international day for the elimination of violence against women—with a debate in the Scottish Parliament. Across the world, the day of action—as well as the 16 days of action that follow—is recognised by Governments, voluntary organisations, trade unions, local, national and international groups and men and women who support the campaign to highlight the fact that male violence against women is a human rights issue.

We should recognise that that consensus was not always there. It is not that long since the blame for domestic abuse, rape and other sexual assaults on women was somehow laid at the door of women. It was assumed that women had brought that violence upon themselves by the way in which they behaved, the way in which they dressed or the choices that they made about the places in which they lived. That is why the debate on violence against women is important. We should celebrate the fact that there is a growing consensus about the unacceptability of violence against women.

In the debate on 4 November, we stated that domestic abuse is just one aspect of violence against women. There are many others and, as

always, the statistics are sobering. We know the figures on domestic abuse: more than 36,000 incidents were reported in 2002 and 11 women died as a result of domestic abuse. Between 1994 and 2003, 237 women were murdered in Scotland—43 per cent by their partners or ex-partners. The total number of male deaths over the same period was higher but, significantly, in 6 per cent of cases the main accused was a partner or ex-partner. Recorded cases of rape and attempted rape increased by 8 per cent to reach 988 in 2003, which is the highest number ever recorded. Those are a few of the reasons why we must act.

Violence against women takes many forms such as prostitution, trafficking, pornography and sexual assault. The Executive and I are aware that there are diverse views on those issues. I hope that through the Parliament and its committees we can address those difficulties where there is not an absolutely right or wrong position but where the issues desperately require to be sorted.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): On the subject of female genital mutilation, there has been some comment that that tends to be carried out by women. Does the minister agree that it forms part of the violence against women by men because it is men who require it as part of a tradition?

Johann Lamont: I recognise the points that Elaine Smith makes and as the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Bill goes through the Parliament, there will be an opportunity properly to explore those issues further.

The Executive's work in the area of violence against women is at an early stage, but work has begun. Our recent debate on domestic abuse highlighted the progress that has been made during the past few years so I will not repeat those points. It is sufficient to say that the work has been considerable.

The wider violence agenda is at an earlier stage. The national group to address violence against women, which was chaired by Mary Mulligan when she was the Deputy Minister for Communities, last year changed its name, its membership and its remit. It is actively working to set its agenda for the way forward.

One of our first moves was to give support for infrastructure for and delivery of services to women who are experiencing violence.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As part of the review, will the minister be considering male violence against men, and male rape in particular?

Johann Lamont: The member will be aware that there was a referral to the Scottish Law Commission on the issues of rape and the point that she has raised will be addressed. We look forward to hearing what is said. We abhor rape and sexual assault however it is expressed.

We established a new violence against women service development fund at the end of 2003, and in March we awarded £1.5 million in funding to support 21 projects across Scotland. That funding is designed to improve and extend the services that are offered to women, which have been under-resourced for too long.

We are the first Government department in the United Kingdom to provide direct support to rape crisis centres, radically transforming their ability to serve and support. The £1.96 million that we are giving over the next two years to 10 local rape crisis groups represents a major investment in an area that has traditionally been under-resourced.

We have also provided funding of £100,000 to Rape Crisis Scotland to help it to develop its work, ensuring consistency of service across Scotland. During recent years we have developed close links with Rape Crisis Scotland and the new funding marks a significant investment that will make a real difference on the ground. We have also funded a feasibility study on the establishment of a rape and sexual abuse helpline and £200,000 has been set aside for its future establishment, depending on the study's conclusions. We expect to receive the feasibility report shortly.

In order to determine a more strategic approach to that broader work, the national group agreed to establish an expert committee to consider all the issues that might fall under the heading of violence against women. Although its precise remit is yet to be determined, the committee's role is likely to include agreeing a working definition of "violence against women"; gathering data on the nature and scope of violence against women; identifying gaps in policy, legislation and provision; and agreeing priorities for action. The establishment of that committee marks the commitment and determination of all the organisations and individuals involved to address the challenges ahead and I look forward to working with it during the coming months.

As a contribution to the process, we commissioned a comprehensive review of the literature on violence against women, which was completed in September and is available on the Executive website. From reading the literature review I think that it is very clear that the issues ahead of us are complex, are sometimes controversial and are not easy to solve.

One early priority for the expert committee will be to develop of a working definition of “violence against women”. Our starting point is likely to be the definition from the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which states:

“the term ‘violence against women’ means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.

We do not doubt that there will be much discussion on the working definition and on which aspects of women’s experience it should include. We are aware that there is not agreement on all issues and that different analyses and approaches are advocated on issues such as pornography, prostitution and lap dancing, but I hope that, as we develop our arguments on those issues, people do not lose sight of the direct experiences of women. We should not become obsessed with definitions at the cost of understanding how violence against women impacts on women’s lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): You have one minute.

Johann Lamont: I must therefore skip over the many initiatives that the Executive is taking in a wide range of fields, all of which I am sure would gather huge applause from all sides of the chamber.

In conclusion, we recognise the real difference in the way in which women experience violent crime in our communities, although that is not to belittle any victim of other forms of violent crime. It is clear that violence against women takes many forms. I have touched on some of those, but I readily acknowledge that there are others that I have not mentioned. I have set out some of what the Executive is doing and where it hopes to go in the future. I believe that setting our action in a wider context and developing a strategic approach will allow us to move positively towards creating a climate in Scotland in which it is acknowledged that all violence against women is unacceptable. It is the responsibility of us all to challenge the conditions that allow such crime to continue.

I look forward to today’s debate to mark the United Nations international day for the elimination of violence against women.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women on 25 November 2004; affirms its commitment to eradicating all forms of violence against women in Scotland; acknowledges the significant funding that has gone into domestic abuse initiatives over the last four years; welcomes the more recent work of the Scottish Executive in setting up the Violence Against Women Service Development Fund and supporting Rape

Crisis Scotland and the ten rape crisis centres throughout Scotland, and, noting the complexity of many of the issues involved, supports the Executive’s decision to set up an expert committee to support the development of a strategic approach to tackling these issues in future.

15:11

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I rise to speak to my amendment, but the SNP will also support the motion. I am not sure whether the minister will accept our amendment.

Johann Lamont *indicated agreement.*

Christine Grahame: I see the minister nodding and I thank her for the Executive’s support.

As the examples in the United Nations declaration make clear, violence against women can take many forms, including psychological, physical, sexual and financial. Such violence is rooted in and reinforces discrimination.

Women in poverty are the ones who find it most difficult to escape abusive circumstances and to exercise even the most basic human rights of freedom of movement and freedom of expression. Such women are trapped and treated as an underclass that is unable to obtain protection from society at large, whose very values often reinforce that societal violence. They are left unable even to access either a criminal justice system to redress the obvious wrongs that are done to them or an education system that would give them the means to articulate those wrongs.

In war, rape and sexual mutilation have been a weapon of terror throughout reported history. Today, the situation is no different, as women throughout many countries are the living victims of such brutality. The evidence of that is apparent in their wounds, both physical and emotional, in the children they have conceived and in the AIDS that they have contracted because of such violence, and in the consequent ostracism by their communities, by which they are made victims yet once more.

Let me turn to the domestic scene. During our previous debate on violence against women one year ago, the then Minister for Communities advised us that some 100,000 children were estimated to be affected by domestic violence. Such children are also innocent victims. Unfortunately, the fact that they are receptacles for the violence culture might—although I do not wish to play the amateur psychologist—turn them into victims themselves or, indeed, even perpetrators.

I found the most recent television ads that highlighted the sinister and pervasive threat of domestic violence to be most effective messages. However, I would like the minister to advise how the Executive monitors their effectiveness.

I note that the Executive intends to pilot a domestic abuse court, but I respectfully suggest that such cases might better be addressed in family law courts. The issue should be considered in the parliamentary debate that is due shortly on family law legislation, in which the definition of family needs to fit more appropriately with the practices of the past few decades.

I have a particular interest in the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Act 2001, which enacted a committee bill of the Justice 1 Committee. By attaching a power of arrest to common-law interdicts, the act ostensibly gave some protection to women, in particular those who were not married to their partner. However, I have seen the 2003 report on the operation of the act and I am afraid that it has not been very successful. The Executive has been the first to admit that. The report states:

"knowledge and awareness of the Act was variable. From our sample of 32 women victims of domestic violence 87% had *never* heard of the Act indicating a need for awareness raising. Of 8 who could have sought protection under the Act, only one was able to secure a PF interdict and 2 reported negative experiences."

Even the comments from professionals about the implications and use of the act are pretty threadbare.

I shall move on to something else that we need to address—it is for that reason that it is mentioned in the SNP amendment. The amendment focuses on the media and entertainment industry, which in many respects has much to answer for in the continuing culture of being violent to or violating women, where that is not only acceptable but titillating. There is hypocrisy in the screaming tabloid headlines about the indecencies to women caught up in war, when they are in juxtaposition to a near-naked female, who may be ogled in public on public transport in full view of children, young men and young women.

I recognise the work that Elaine Smith will be doing on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Committee in her report on pornography, which I think is long overdue. Violence against women and sex—often related and linked, though they should not be—are, regrettably, the mainstay of soft porn and the print press, and there is a whole issue of access to such material and to hard-core pornography, particularly now through the internet, which I suspect is even less policed by harassed parents than are the television and the video.

Although women in Scotland are free from the violence of war that I alluded to earlier, the violence of pornography is there for all to access—on the bus, in videos and magazines and on the web. It is there that young men and women are subjected to the influences that make them

devalue one another sexually, contaminating respect for one another as people, and that cannot be detached from violence, in all its forms, against women. I hear what the Deputy Minister for Communities has said, and she very kindly sent me a letter explaining about the group that she is setting up. I am glad to see that that group will be looking into the influence of pornography, because that must have an impact on some of the statistics that we have before us on rape, sexual assaults and other violent assaults on women.

The subject is vast and complex, and I have simply touched on some issues. However, I hope that some of the queries that I have raised will be addressed in the minister's summing-up speech, so that anniversaries of previous debates are not simply marked but mark progress and change. While I am on my feet, I also want to say that I recognise Johann Lamont's personal commitment to the issue and I know that we shall make progress.

I move amendment S2M-2059.2 to insert at end:

"and, in particular to explore the cultural reasons underlying the recent report that one in five young men and one in ten women thought that violence against women was acceptable and to examine the crucial role that the media and entertainments industry has in compounding such attitudes, and, furth of Scotland, abhors the increased use of violence against women as a weapon of war."

15:18

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

The Scottish Conservatives recognise and welcome the fact that, five years ago, the UN General Assembly designated 25 November as international day for the elimination of violence against women. It is a fixed date in the calendar, so it is not surprising that, in the debate on domestic abuse only three weeks ago, both the Minister for Communities and his deputy made reference to a forthcoming debate on violence against women. Malcolm Chisholm said:

"I will speak to my colleague the Minister for Parliamentary Business to ask for a debate before Christmas on the wider agenda of violence against women."

Johann Lamont said:

"I am optimistic that we will have a debate on that broader issue towards the end of the month."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2004; c 11600 and 11629.]

There is an issue here about the Executive's use of precious parliamentary debating time. Domestic abuse is a huge part of the overall debate on violence against women. It follows, therefore, that today there is bound to be a certain repetition of the points made and arguments proffered in the debate three weeks ago. There are two possible explanations as to why or how that could have happened. Either the Executive is being

manipulative, seeking to avoid being held to account on various contentious issues, or if, unbelievably, it did not realise that there would be a duplication, it is guilty of being feckless. Both scenarios are equally unacceptable.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Margaret Mitchell is making the case that the Executive is not making proper use of parliamentary time, but I beg to differ. Does the member accept that some of us will be talking about the global position of women, about the international position of women, about the many campaigns that are going on and about the oppression of women in many other countries, which it would not be appropriate to discuss in a debate on domestic abuse?

Margaret Mitchell: I accept that. However, there has already been duplication in the speeches so far, which adequately proves my point. Violence against women is reprehensible, whatever form it takes. As the minister said, 11 women died as the result of domestic abuse in 2002. That is a sobering and startling statistic. It is a matter of grave concern that, despite all the efforts to raise awareness of domestic abuse, statistics highlight an increasing trend of repeat victimisation. The 2002 statistics reveal that previous incidents had been recorded for 50 per cent of the victims in the 36,000 incidents that were reported. That indicates that many victims find themselves trapped in abusive circumstances.

Raising awareness is a key issue, which is why I find it baffling that the Executive failed to support the Conservative amendment at the debate on domestic abuse earlier this month. That amendment called on the Executive

“to continue to explore different means to raise awareness of the issue generally and to ensure that individuals who are trapped in abusive situations are aware of these support services to help them escape from their abusive circumstances.”

It was disappointing that, in her summing-up speech on that occasion, the Deputy Minister for Communities, who has spoken about domestic abuse on many occasions with passion and conviction, failed to explain why she and the Executive did not support our amendment, despite extra time having been allocated for the minister to provide such explanations. The fact that our amendment was gender neutral was referred to in that debate. I seek the minister's assurance that it was not rejected on that ground.

It is a matter of regret that the Scottish Parliament's process is such that the amendment lodged in my name for the debate, which, under the heading of “Violence Against Women”, grasped the opportunity to increase awareness of the equally serious issue of violence against men, was not selected, especially in view of the fact that

the latest homicide statistics, which were released yesterday, reveal that a staggering 93 out of 108 victims were male.

Elaine Smith: Will Margaret Mitchell take an intervention?

Margaret Mitchell: How much time do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer : You have six minutes altogether.

Margaret Mitchell: How much time do I have left?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Four minutes and 35 seconds off six minutes.

Margaret Mitchell: Okay—I will accept a quick intervention.

Elaine Smith: Does Margaret Mitchell not recognise that male violence against women is premised on inequality? There is a big picture here.

Margaret Mitchell: I realise that it is about inequality. We take cognisance of the fact that 90 per cent of victims are women. I find it appalling, however, that there is such a grudging recognition of the 10 per cent who are male victims, who also deserve our wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity—the founding principles on which the Parliament is supposed to stand. That is at a time when unease is being voiced about Rape Crisis Scotland's policy of providing support for female victims only. The Executive gives express support to that network in its motion and I call on the minister to address the issue by ensuring that male rape victims have access to equally good support services, bearing in mind the words of Martin Luther King that

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

15:23

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): It is right that we are debating this issue. It is an international day, and we should show our solidarity. The motion is good, in that it proposes setting up

“an expert committee to support the development of a strategic approach to tackling these issues in future.”

I hope that that expert committee will examine things widely. I also welcome the amendment, which I think is extremely constructive. If I may say so, it is one of the better efforts from the Scottish National Party.

Christine Grahame: Thank you.

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): He is such a charmer.

Donald Gorrie: No—I think that the amendment is good. It deserves support. It shows what the Opposition should do.

I will divide the subject into two halves: one half is women and one half is violence. On the subject of the position of women, we must somehow keep up the pressure on the minority of men who still think that women are inferior. There is still a serious strain of such thought that can sometimes be met in people—not people in the Parliament, but people working in other organisations. One sometimes finds men who clearly bully women and think that women are inferior. Their attitude is entirely unacceptable and we must change it.

As well as more violent behaviour, there is the polite discrimination—what might be called dinner-party discrimination—that pervades all forms of society and all ethnic groups, which we must challenge. If such discrimination is seen in a minority section of an ethnic group that believes, for whatever reason, that women are inferior, that can sometimes be a problem. We must say to such people, “You are free and you can conduct your religion and believe what you like, but everyone is equal in Britain and you must treat your women as your equals. If you don’t like that, you have the alternative.” That is difficult to say to them, but we must be prepared to say it. We must change people’s attitudes and stop children inheriting the wrong attitudes from their parents, which many of them do. Doing so will gradually help to build up a situation in which women are fully equal partners in all forms of our lives, which they should be and are in many cases, although they are still not always so.

We should examine all issues relating to violence together. I think that the minister said that we do not want to put knife crime in a pocket, crime against women in another pocket and so on. Many issues come together. Many problems are fuelled by alcohol, for example. We must press on that matter more vigorously. I hope that legislation on licensing will be brought forward, but everyone in society and the police must take issues relating to alcohol more seriously than we currently do. We must attack all aspects of the problem, whether it involves people using knives or hate crimes against groups, which involve women too.

I am talking about a different issue from that which my friend Mike Rumbles continually raises. Domestic violence should be seen as any violence within people’s houses. Such violence is usually against women, but it can often be violence by grandparents, cousins or large sons against small mothers, for example. It would be better to extend the range of considerations. Concentrating so far on partner violence has been good, as the issue has come on to the agenda and the police take it

much more seriously than they used to do, but we should deal with domestic violence all round.

We must seriously improve how we handle rape cases. I am not a lawyer and have no idea how that can be done, but the figures are pathetic. It is no wonder that people are still reluctant to report rapes, although reporting has increased a bit, as the minister said. There are practical things that we can do to improve how we deal with rape cases. We can give even more support to Scottish Women’s Aid than we currently do for women and their children when women are the subject of violence.

On prostitution, I support Margo MacDonald’s idea of tolerance zones, but a more fundamental issue is that we have—typically—got things wrong. The prostitutes are prosecuted instead of the men who patronise them. We need an anti-kerb-crawling bill, which would attack the issue in a far more sensible way.

I commend such ideas to the deputy minister, who is, I think, personally committed on the issue—I am sure that Mr Chisholm is, too. We need action, not words. If there is no improvement by the time we have a debate on the subject next year, we will all have failed. Let us really get something done.

15:29

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Today is the start of 16 days of international action against violence against women. Three weeks ago, we discussed the struggle in Scotland and the good work that is being done by the Executive. We discussed the work that is done by Women’s Aid and others to help the 10 per cent of women and the 100,000 children who face domestic abuse. We also discussed the work of organisations such as Rape Crisis Scotland in helping victims and survivors of sexual violence and the work of organisations such as Open Secret, in Falkirk, which supports survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

The problem does not stop at our borders. The United Nations has recently recognised that

“civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements”.

It states that the rape victim has become an emblematic image of women’s experience of war.

Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women stresses that

“the term ‘violence against women’ means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result

in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

According to the UN, gender-based violence against women is violence that is

"directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately."

Throughout the world, conflict zones and dictatorships create obstacles to women seeking to protect themselves and assert their rights. The political imbalance that excludes women and their children from power in their country also subjugates women and children in their homes. Domestic abuse occurs in all countries and within all social, economic, religious and cultural groups. Although some victims of domestic violence are male and although violence can occur in same-sex partnerships or be directed against parents or grandparents, the overwhelming burden of partner violence is borne by women—and their children—at the hands of men.

I congratulate Amnesty International on the series of reports that it is producing to highlight the global problem of violence against women. In addition to a report on the impact of war and conflict and a series of country case studies, Amnesty has a report on women, HIV and AIDS and human rights.

Women who live with violent partners face psychological trauma and physical injury. They also have a difficult time in protecting themselves from unwanted pregnancies or disease, including sexually transmitted infections. Because women are disempowered and lack resources such as drugs, they are vulnerable and unable to insist on measures such as the use of condoms to fight the spread of AIDS.

Stopping violence against women and protecting women's human rights go hand in hand. In order to take control of their lives, women need access to education and health services. They need rights to property and the right not to be someone else's property. They need to escape poverty and war.

In Scotland, we need to couple our strategy against domestic abuse within our country with a recognition of and a commitment to the role that we can play in the international struggle against violence against women. I am pleased that the Executive has introduced a bill to address female genital mutilation. That is a cultural tradition that women and children can well do without.

Since the advent of the Scottish Parliament, there has been a welcome focus on tackling violence against women. The emphasis is not just on tackling violence, but on helping the survivors of violence and abuse. The Executive funds Scottish Women's Aid and provides funding for

training. In the past three years, £10 million has been put into the refuge development programme and £4.5 million has been devoted to the implementation of other aspects of the national strategy. More than £1.5 million has been awarded to 21 projects over the next two years under the domestic abuse service development fund, and nearly £2 million will go to rape crisis centres.

We have made progress, but we must not be complacent. Tackling violence against women is a task of global proportions and we in Scotland must play our part in the global campaign.

15:34

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To talk of violence against women is not to deny the existence of violence against others. Indeed, failure to highlight violence against women—which makes up the largest part of the various discriminatory forms of violence—would be failure to support all victims of violence by showing indifference to the largest affected group. I say that as a man.

Violence against women is hardly new. The new king of a tribe of lions goes through a series of actions on taking over power in that group. There is the massacre of the young to destroy the previous gene stock, the fertilisation of the females to introduce his gene stock and, of course, the on-going suppression of the females in the group. In many ways, that is how humans have behaved over successive invasions: the Vikings, Genghis Khan and Hitler's Nazis followed the same course. In most of Scotland and much of the world we now know better. However, in significant areas of the world the culture has changed little from that of Genghis Khan—the model of the tribe of lions continues. That is why is important to make reference to a wider picture.

Modern technology has provided us with new ways of introducing our impressionable young people to distorting influences and views of the society in which they will take part. Computer games focus disproportionately on violence as entertainment. Violence admired and engaged with at second hand is the first step towards real engagement with violence. In many instances, violence is the response of the weak and inarticulate to those whom they see as even weaker and more subservient than they. Too often, women are seen as the weakest in our society. Many women—thankfully, a declining number—share that vision.

The 2000 Scottish crime survey had some interesting things to say. For example, it demonstrated that twice as many women as men experienced incidents of domestic violence each week. That reinforces the importance of talking

about women. However, in this context we are talking about violence, rather than crime. Forty-three per cent of incidents recorded by the police did not lead to the recording of an offence or a conviction. Many more incidents are not even recorded, because victims have comparatively low confidence that what they say will be taken seriously. They are victims each week of repeated violence and cannot see a way out of the cycle of despair. At the high-tariff end of the problem, to which Donald Gorrie referred, a tiny minority of prosecutions and rape charges lead to someone being banged up and locked away from the target of their violence.

I will comment on a couple of points that have been made. I say to Donald Gorrie and the Executive that there is one measure that has been tried against kerb crawling that does not need legislation. We might encourage the police, simply in the interests of good public order, to supervise tightly areas in which kerb crawling is likely to be an issue, to photograph the vehicles that are involved and to make the appropriate inquiries at the homes of the perpetrators. Social pressure is as effective as pressure directly from the criminal justice system. It has been applied elsewhere and appears to work.

Essentially, this debate focuses on women as victims. We must provide adequate support after the event and ensure that such events happen much less often. The numbers tell us why. I refer to the types of violent crime experienced by men and women in 1999. Among male victims, 38 per cent of violent crimes were committed by a stranger, 42 per cent were committed by an acquaintance and 5 per cent were domestic. However, for women, 64 per cent of violent crimes—two out of three—were domestic. Therefore, we can tell that those are abusive situations that are based on a relationship, whatever it may be. It is violence against women because they are women and it is the least acceptable kind of violence.

The good news is that the report also tells us that in the lower age groups, particularly the 25 to 44 group, we are seeing much more reporting than in older age groups. That is a good sign that women may be standing up for themselves, which is part of the problem, but only a tiny part. I support my colleague Christine Grahame's amendment.

15:40

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Given that we had an extensive debate on the issue of violence against women three weeks ago, I want to use some of my time to concentrate on male-against-male violence, particularly that of male rape. According to the Executive's national strategy to address domestic abuse,

"Domestic abuse ... is part of a range of behaviours constituting male abuse of power, and is linked to other forms of male violence."

However, the document "Preventing Domestic Abuse: A National Strategy" states that the prevention strategy's underlying principles will be

"informed by women, children and young people who have experienced and witnessed violence, and by research."

I fully support that approach, but could it not also include the experience of men who have been affected by male or, indeed, female violence?

In past debates, I have confirmed that I would wish to introduce a member's bill in order to look at male rape. I have not done so, precisely—

Pauline McNeill: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether you would rule on this point before we go much further. It is not that I do not support some of the points that I think that Mary Scanlon is about to make, but this is a debate about violence against women. I know that you allow flexibility, but if you give flexibility to such an extent in a debate that is headlined as being about violence against women, I will review my approach to debates in the future according to how much latitude I would expect to get from the Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This is obviously a difficult matter because Mrs Scanlon began by saying that she proposed to give some of her time to the issue of male-against-male violence. I judged from that that she intends to speak to the motion that is under debate. The point of order is relevant and valid, however, because of course an amendment on that point was specifically not selected. If members, in effect, speak to an amendment that has not been selected because of its lack of relevance, that could constitute a challenge to the authority of the Presiding Officer. Therefore, while appreciating that her subject matter is cognate, I encourage Mrs Scanlon to return quickly to the topic of the debate.

Mary Scanlon: I am happy to do that, Presiding Officer, but I noticed that the minister, in introducing the debate, clearly concentrated on male violence. In that respect, I hope that some of what I want to say—a small part of my speech—is, indeed, appropriate.

I have not introduced a member's bill because of the Solicitor General for Scotland's written answer to a parliamentary question from me, in which she said:

"In Scots law the crime of rape can only be committed against a female. Equivalent crimes of sexual violence against male victims are charged at common law as offences of indecent assault and/or sodomy. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service review will include examination of the prosecution of serious sexual offences

committed against male victims.”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 11 March 2004; S2W-6544.]

I was pleased to make an intervention in the minister's introductory speech and to hear her commitment to the review.

Rape is defined as intercourse against a person's will, so why should men be treated less equally than women in that respect?

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):

Given that the Tories submitted a gender-free amendment for the recent domestic abuse debate and wanted to talk about men, and that in this debate about violence against women they want to talk about men, can they tell us when they want to talk about violence against women? Do they ever want to do so, or are they in denial that it exists?

Mary Scanlon: I think that Carolyn Leckie should be aware that the term “gender-free” relates to men and women. However, after that rant, I will continue.

The other point that I wish to raise in the debate relates to the 50 per cent of recorded cases in which victims had previously recorded incidents, which indicates that victims find themselves trapped in abusive circumstances and that abusers are not addressing their behaviour or, indeed, getting the support needed to change their behaviour and to move away from physical abuse.

In our most recent debate on the subject, I mentioned that in some cases there might be a straightforward communication impairment, which could be helped by the professional input of a speech therapist. That would enable the person affected to state their case in a more reasoned and measured manner, instead of resorting to fists. We are all aware that there are many anger management courses and other types of support on offer.

When violence is recorded, it would surely be helpful for the victim and the abuser to be offered some help and support in coping with a situation that could lead to violence in future. I was pleased that the Executive's strategy includes the longer-term goal of the need to

“Resist demonising men who use violence. But challenge abusing men to accept responsibility for their behaviour.”

If we lock people up without providing rehabilitation, counselling or some other way of addressing their unacceptable behaviour, we will not address the problem in the long term. I hope that the experience of men and women who have used violence is listened to and that it informs future strategies.

My final point relates to Women's Aid refuges, which undoubtedly do a wonderful job by providing much-needed support and safety. However, a problem that affects many single women who are

in abusive situations, as well as women with families, is that once they are settled in a hostel, they find it difficult to move on to their own accommodation because of a local crisis in housing. That is a particular problem in Inverness at the moment and I imagine that the situation in other towns and cities is similar. My fear is that, in future, a concern about not being able to move on from a hostel or refuge may discourage women from leaving abusive partners.

I hope that the Executive will consider all forms of male violence and will ensure that the reasons that lead to that violent behaviour are examined and addressed appropriately.

15:47

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am pleased to speak in the debate, especially as today is the international day for the elimination of violence against women.

The words of the motion confirm the Executive's determination to eradicate, through funding and support schemes,

“all forms of violence against women in Scotland”.

I welcome the Executive's ambition in tackling the issue head on, but I would like it to do more.

In the motion, the Minister for Communities acknowledges that considerable funding has been made available over the past four years. That is largely due to the good work that is being done by many people to raise awareness of the issues that surround violence against women in all its forms. There is no better time than the international day for the elimination of violence against women on which to examine violence against women. Although it is right and proper that we should do so, we must go further than we are going at the moment and focus our attention on all victims of violence.

Last week, when we put this debate on the parliamentary timetable, I challenged the Minister for Parliamentary Business to schedule a debate that would allow us to widen our consideration of domestic violence issues. I have to say that the minister's response was more than disappointing. Instead of acknowledging the genuine need to help all victims of domestic violence, she seemed to be content to misunderstand what I was requesting.

I take the opportunity to state for the record, in unequivocal terms, that I recognise that domestic violence against women is by far the most prevalent form of domestic violence and that it needs to be tackled. The point that I have made consistently in our debates on violence against women is that we need to eradicate such violence and to support the female victims of it, but that we

will fail in our duty if we do not help all victims of violence, whether female or male. It was simply not acceptable for the Deputy Minister for Communities to imply in her speech that violence by women against men does not take place and is not a human rights issue, too; I thought that she implied that by the sin of omission, if nothing else. I believe that, once again, ministers have missed an opportunity with the motion that is before us today.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I am listening carefully to what the member is saying. Does he accept that the Minister for Communities, Malcolm Chisholm, recently concluded the short-life working group on childhood sexual abuse? The remit of the working group covered abuse that women and men suffered as children. A lot of work is being done to help all victims of sexual abuse; I mention in particular the work of the cross-party group on survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Today's debate is being held on the international day for the elimination of violence against women. We are talking about violence against women and we need to give the subject the cognisance it deserves. Like other members who have intervened in the debate, I ask the member to talk about the important subject that we are in the chamber to discuss.

Mike Rumbles: That is exactly what I am saying—the member should listen to what I am trying to say and not to what she thinks I am trying to say. My disappointment is with the motions that come before the Parliament time and again. I agree that it is appropriate for us to look at violence against women—of course it is—and I have said so. On the international day for the elimination of violence against women, we should recognise that fact.

However, if we are to be an all-inclusive Parliament, we must practise what we preach. The motions that come before us must be inclusive. The message that the Parliament and the Executive send out should be that we are committed to eradicating all forms of violence and that we want to show that we are for the victims of violence, whoever perpetrates that violence.

Although we are not able to debate it, I was glad to see Margaret Mitchell's amendment to the motion. I am disappointed that—so far—we cannot seem to get ministers to accept the need for inclusion in the motions that they put to the Parliament. I understand that the Presiding Officer has ruled that it was not appropriate to accept Margaret Mitchell's amendment. If it had been taken for debate, I for one would have voted for it—alas, we do not have the opportunity to do so.

Carolyn Leckie: Mike Rumbles is four minutes and 38 seconds into his speech; what tenets of wisdom does he have to address the issue of

violence against women? He says that he wants to talk about it, but he has not yet started.

Mike Rumbles: That is one of the most awful interventions I have ever heard. Carolyn Leckie is obviously not listening to what I am saying. I am trying to make the point that violence against women is an important issue that we must address but that we need also to be inclusive.

I hope that we will have the opportunity to debate the wider issues in a members' business debate; perhaps as soon as next week. I am disappointed that the subject might have to be debated in a members' business debate and not in an Executive debate. I hope that the Executive will take the next available opportunity to schedule an all-inclusive debate on the subject, in which we can send a clear message to everyone in Scotland that all violence, from whatever source it comes—male or female—is unacceptable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rumbles related his speech rather more skilfully to the motion for debate today. I ask members from here on in to restrict themselves to addressing the motion.

15:53

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I begin by declaring my interest as a member of the board of Routes Out of Prostitution, which is based in Glasgow.

Although women have achieved equality at many levels throughout the world, the world is still largely dominated by men—it is predominantly men who hold power in our globe. Unfortunately, Mike Rumbles's view, as expressed in the speech that he has just given us, is that the rest of us deny that men are victims, too—a point that I will come to later. The sad fact of life is that Mike Rumbles represents a minority of people who do not understand the context of the debate.

The context is that women are not equal to men and that men hold the power in the world. We have to understand the position of exploitation and power relationships in a world in which men are predominant—I think that most men would accept that that is the case. I say to Mike Rumbles that, if he continues to deny the role of men in the world in relation to women, he will continue to misunderstand the debate and we will not come to the right solutions. I will shortly move on to address the position of male victims of violence.

Women have demonstrated all kinds of bravery and imagination in making their contribution to dealing with the troubles of the world. I recently met Machsom Watch, a group of Israeli women who dedicate their time to watching over the human rights of Palestinians who encounter

crippling checkpoints when they make a simple journey to the doctor. Those brave women simply observe the treatment of the Palestinians and in doing so stand up for peace and humanity in a conflict dominated by men.

Violence, and the threat of it, takes many forms. Human trafficking is a worldwide problem. It is a form of violence against men, women and children, but it is primarily a crime committed by men against female adults and children. According to Home Office statistics, 800,000 people are trafficked annually. The trafficking of human beings is the third largest income earner—it generates \$7 million a year. One hundred and twenty thousand women and children are trafficked into western Europe every year. The nature of the crime makes it difficult to be accurate about the extent of the problem, but a rough estimate of the number of people who are trafficked into the United Kingdom is anything between 140 and 1,400 a year. The main countries of origin are Moldova, Thailand, Romania, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Trafficking takes place for marriage, for work and for forced prostitution. It is estimated that, in off-street prostitution in London, women are forced to serve 30 or 40 clients a day, and 79 per cent of prostitutes have experienced violence.

In Sweden, the sale of sexual services has been banned. It is interesting to note that there is proof that traffickers avoid going to Sweden, where the prosecutors can grant warrants to intercept communications and therefore can listen in, because of the treatment that they will get.

I sound a note of caution about Donald Gorrie's comments on tolerance zones. We must weigh up the violence against women that happens in prostitution and the exploitation of women by men. The Executive said in the partnership agreement that it will consider making kerb crawling an offence. However, there are pros and cons to such an approach and we must ensure that when we legislate in the interests of women to protect them from violence, we take steps that make them safe. Wherever sexual exploitation occurs there will be a market for trafficked women and children. Of course, 15 per cent of trafficked human beings are men—I do not dismiss that for a minute. There is an economic vested interest in almost all crime, but we must address the unequal position of women and children.

London has a very serious problem with human trafficking. Senior police officers in the Metropolitan police have expressed surprise that street prostitution in Glasgow remains largely unorganised by international crime networks. We must be alive to the prospect of what we might face in our own country.

It is because of the emerging world problem that I was particularly pleased that the Executive has supported a project on human trafficking to monitor what is going on in our own country. I call for the establishment of a place of safety for women who have been trafficked, because many of the women are bonded to their traffickers, which means that either they or their families will be threatened at their home in their country of origin. Therefore, the women cannot admit what they have been forced into, so we do not get the true picture. Nine women in my constituency—foreign nationals who were found in a sauna in Glasgow—were believed to have been trafficked, but I do not think that we got to the bottom of that case. It is important that when such cases are dealt with initially, they are treated not as immigration cases but as cases in which the women involved should be provided with a place of safety. I support Amnesty International's campaign.

I know that the Executive has still to make a decision on a proposal to set up a sexual assault referral centre in Glasgow, an intervention that is aimed at improving the response to rape. Councillor Irene Graham and Kath Gallagher, a support worker, are two women who have campaigned hard to win support for the proposal. In cases of rape and sexual assault, the centre could be a first point of contact for women who are raped or sexually assaulted. It could also be used for the storing of forensic samples and could act as a first point of contact where female police surgeons—of whom there is a severe shortage—are on hand.

I welcome this important debate. It is important that we are discussing violence against women across the globe. I commend the Executive's approach to women and its approach to the prevention of violence generally, which I do not believe that any Government has tackled as strongly in the past. I will continue to support the Executive on this matter.

16:00

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): I fully support this international day for the elimination of violence against women, but I hope that there will be a point in the not-too-distant future when the need for such a day no longer exists.

Like other members, I do not condone violence against any person, irrespective of gender, but we cannot escape the uncomfortable fact that violence against women prevails and is part of an overwhelming and endemic problem in our society. It is very much an equality issue; it is about attitudes towards women and the power inequalities between men and women. Despite initiatives from the Executive, the problem remains

that far too many people tolerate and perpetrate violence and abuse against women. I fully support Christine Grahame's amendment, the figures within which are horrifying.

It is vital that the Parliament sends the message that any violence against women will not be tolerated and must be eradicated. I am therefore concerned that the recent report on hate crimes recommended that hate crime legislation should not specifically cover women. Many women's groups throughout Scotland are extremely disappointed with that position. Does the Executive agree that gender-based hate crimes should constitute a vital part of that legislation? I recognise that hate crime legislation alone will not end men's violence against women, but it would serve as a powerful tool in addressing and changing attitudes. The key point is that violence and abuse against women is embedded in all aspects of our society and it is up to each one of us to dismantle it in every way that we can. It would be fitting if the Executive committed itself to including women in hate crime legislation on this special day.

We must also recognise the plight of women who are being trafficked into Scotland for the purposes of prostitution and work in the sex industry. Trafficking is a highly organised international crime. It is estimated that between 120,000 and 300,000 women and girls are trafficked to and within Europe every year. Even more alarming is the fact that trafficking is believed to be the fastest-growing industry in central and eastern Europe. We need to determine the number of trafficked women and girls in Scotland. They must have access to a full range of assistance, protection and support. As yet, there is no specific service in Scotland to help those women.

Pauline McNeill: I have a point of information. In my speech, I referred to an Executive-funded project in Glasgow, which seeks to establish the true picture of women who are being trafficked—that might apply just to the Glasgow area, but I am sure that the minister can clarify that. I would have thought that Shiona Baird would welcome that project, if she knows about it.

Shiona Baird: I was going to refer to it. I wondered whether Pauline McNeill was referring to the same project that I am thinking about. We know that money was allocated in March but, as yet, we have not heard how that money will be rolled out or what is happening with the services in the pilot project in Glasgow. I agree that the project is worth while; indeed, I lodged a motion before the money came forward, although I do not take any credit for the provision of that money.

It is important that we raise awareness of the problem and provide specialist training for

agencies that come into contact with trafficked women. I note with interest that the Executive is setting up an expert committee, which I hope will include an expert on trafficking. I would like to hear the minister's response to that point.

Much progress has been made on tackling violence against women, but we need much more positive action so that we no longer have to have such debates every year.

16:04

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): We recently had a debate on domestic abuse and the Tories would have us cut into this debate because they feel that the subject was covered in that one. I say to the Tories, including Mike Rumbles, that this debate has international dimensions; it concerns all women and all of society and requires further and special debating time.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Rosie Kane: No, I have just started. Mike Rumbles had six minutes and he wasted them.

We could discuss violence against women every day and still not cover the length, breadth and height of the issue. We should discuss it every day, as it occurs globally every minute of every day. Given that today is the international day for the elimination of violence against women, it is right that we should consider the issues from a global perspective to begin to find global and local solutions.

During the debate on domestic abuse, we heard that abuse against women includes kicking, slapping, pushing and burning. I am sure that, like me, many members remember Cathy Peattie's moving and relevant speech in which she pinpointed perfectly the reality and effects of emotional abuse. Most speakers in that debate did not fail to congratulate the Executive on much of the work that it has done on the issue. Today, we have an opportunity to go a wee bit further because we can think and talk about all women and all forms of violence against them—in other words, anything that harms women. The debate must be welcomed by all.

Pauline McNeill and Shiona Baird mentioned human trade and slave markets, which are phrases that should have fallen into the history books but which, sadly, have not. The victims of that male-run activity fall into all sorts of dangerous labour, including forced prostitution and bonded labour, which can look as innocent as being an au pair or child minder in some of the smarter parts of the country. As we speak, trafficked women and girls from all backgrounds

are being placed at risk in every way in so-called saunas and the like up and down the country.

Women are abusively shipped like goods across the planet to experience further and prolonged abuse. Globally, our sisters are void of rights and have their lives put at risk, day in, day out. Without doubt, their physical, emotional and mental well-being is compromised. Self-esteem is knocked out of them and a sense of self-worth is but a distant dream. Deceit, violence and coercion are used to begin the journey and the eventual outcome is the stuff of nightmares. As Pauline McNeill said, women become dependent on their traffickers; they cannot escape because they have no travel documents, no access to money, no status and no rights. The issue is global, but it is not distant. Trafficked women and girls are being used in this country and in this city.

I mentioned a global solution. Why not think big, given that women make up more than half the world's population and are therefore the dominant gender in terms of numbers? We live longer; we are more likely to survive premature birth; we have more stamina; we are more likely to survive an insult to our health; we are less likely to be miscarried; and, oh boy, can we multitask. Women are without doubt the stronger sex, so why are we more likely to suffer abuse? The answer is that, despite our numbers and strength, we do not use that strength to dominate. How can we begin to change the situation? There is no panacea, but that does not mean that we should stand still. Christine Grahame's amendment rightly points to the statistic that one in five young men and one in 10 young women think that violence against women is acceptable. When we change that, we will start to change the world. Therefore, we must start working with children, as, I think, Donald Gorrie mentioned.

We must do something. In the UK, traffickers face a range of penalties under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, but no legislation provides for the support and protection of people who are trafficked. Such legislation would not be a panacea, but will the minister say whether we could consider introducing such a bill, as that would allow us to show the way and to send out a clear message, as well as offer practical support and hope?

Today we remember all our sisters in Scotland and throughout the world and all the women who are victims of war in Iraq and in the rest of the world.

16:10

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): This welcome debate allows us to focus on and explore some of the prejudices and problems

that women face and that manifest themselves as violence against women and children. As Cathy Peattie, Pauline McNeill and others have pointed out, the poverty, oppression, inequality and suffering of women permeate the globe, which is why we need an international day and days of action.

Wars such as that in Iraq, which are fought not for freedom and democracy but to advance the interests of global capital, impact most severely on women and children. Around the world and at home, women suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth and power. No matter whether we are talking about stoning women to death for alleged adultery, female genital mutilation, rape, trafficking or domestic abuse, violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon.

As for the situation in Scotland, I commend the Scottish Executive for its obvious commitment to tackling violence against women and for initiating this debate. I particularly welcome its intention to set up an expert group to look at the issue strategically. Many problems, including violence, that women face in our society must be tackled in a unified manner as part of a comprehensive approach towards challenging gender discrimination.

As Rosie Kane suggested, part of the solution lies in changing attitudes that are supported and encouraged by social structures and cultural messages portraying women's needs and rights as less important than men's. Women are still disadvantaged in many areas of their lives, as the minister pointed out. They earn less than men and they are more likely to live in poverty. Moreover, they are held back from leadership positions in society not through lack of ability but because they have to meet home and caring responsibilities while holding down paid employment—in other words, the double work day. That kind of structural inequality at social, cultural and political levels gives men the advantage over women and can create the conditions for violence.

I, of course, sympathise with any man who faces domestic abuse. However, some colleagues who continually raise that issue during debates on violence against women are failing to see the big picture. Male violence against women is premised on women's inequality and subordination in our society and across the globe.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Elaine Smith: I am sorry; I do not have the time.

The continuum of male violence against women and children includes domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, prostitution and pornography. As Christine Grahame has pointed out, I will be

looking into that last issue for the Equal Opportunities Committee.

Although the evidence of harm to women who have experienced male violence has been well documented, the underlying connection between all forms of male violence against women has not been properly explored. As a result, I believe that there is a clear need for the Scottish Executive to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the whole continuum of male violence against women. I am pleased that, having rightly put so much effort into tackling domestic abuse, the Executive is now examining the wider aspects of violence against women and children. I look forward to following the expert committee's work.

We need extensive research that considers male violence against women in the context of a widespread manifestation of gender discrimination, demonstrates the evidence of harm and establishes links between different forms of violence. That information should then be used to help to combat all forms of gender discrimination, to produce cohesive social policy that tackles the impact of male violence across all areas of social and public life and to provide enhanced legal protection against male violence, including protection against the harm caused by prostitution and pornography. Taking such action will help us to meet the ultimate aim of eliminating violence against women and children.

The voluntary and statutory sectors in Scotland now have considerable experience of delivering high-quality support services to those who have experienced rape and sexual assault. There is also a growing recognition that agencies have to work together to be effective. As Pauline McNeill pointed out, the Glasgow violence against women partnership has presented a multi-agency proposal for a pilot rape and sexual assault referral centre that would bring forensic, health and support services together in one location. I encourage the minister and the new expert committee to give early consideration to that welcome proposal in their discussions with representatives of other ministerial portfolios.

Attacking injustice and winning reform have been an integral part of the long struggle for women's emancipation and the raising of social consciousness. We should not forget that it is women who have led that struggle over the years. Achieving genuine liberation for women depends on rejecting a social order in which women are systematically undermined by the pervasiveness of all forms of male violence. However, we must also acknowledge that female oppression, poverty and inequality are directly linked to capitalism and economic exploitation. The eradication of class and labour exploitation and the embrace of true socialism are an essential prerequisite for the

emancipation of women at home and around the world. I will conclude with the words of Lucy Gair Wilkinson, which were written at the turn of the previous century and are still relevant today. She wrote:

"It is to Socialism that women must look for their freedom; & Socialism can only be achieved by a united working class. Let the women workers of today unite with their brother wage-slaves to put an end to the suffering & subjection in which silent generations of the women of the past have lived & died."

16:16

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the Executive's motion and its on-going commitment to the eradication of domestic violence. I also agree with the SNP amendment, two points in which I want to address. Point 1 is that research has found that one in five young men and one in 10 young women believe that violence against women is acceptable in some cases. We should all bear that horrifying statistic in mind.

Point 2 is the recognition that violence against women is an international issue, as Cathy Peattie eloquently outlined. Violence against women is not confined to any particular political or economic system, but is a phenomenon that cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. Indeed, women's role in the world is based on a fundamental belief in societies of the non-importance of women compared with men. Indeed, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women acknowledges and confirms the basic tenet that

"violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men."

The use of women as a weapon of war, in either internal or international struggles, is a monstrous manifestation of that unequal power relationship and of gender violence. There are far too many examples, but I will cite just a few. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there has been systematic rape and torture of at least 40,000 women and girls during the past six years of civil conflict. In Darfur in Sudan, girls as young as eight are among the victims of mass rape and women as old as 80 have been taken hostage and used as sex slaves. It is estimated that, during the genocide in Rwanda, up to 0.5 million women were subject to rape, including gang rape, sexual torture and mutilation. The cross-party international development group of the Scottish Parliament was privileged to hear recently from a Rwandan lady who told us of her experiences and of the staggering facts about HIV and AIDS in her country—seven out of 10 of the abused women are now suffering from that condition. A recent

Amnesty report states that, although we are 10 years on from the Rwandan genocide, prosecutions have been few and far between. That is an indictment of not just that country, but us all.

However, the issue is not all about Africa, a distant continent. Closer to home, in eastern Europe, the world witnessed the same kind of violence towards women as a weapon of war. Similarly, we continue to see trafficking, as Pauline McNeill, Shiona Baird and Rosie Kane mentioned. Indeed, at times trafficking is, sadly, perpetrated by those who are expected to protect the women. The SNP supports all initiatives to address the issue and to support the victims.

The on-going effects of mass violence are beyond the imagination of any of us. No matter what happens to women anywhere in the world, they have to get on with life; they have to cook, clean and raise the children, even where they are stigmatised by their societies because of circumstances that are way beyond their control.

I have seen some of the results for women who have had to live with such violence. I have friends in East Timor who suffered rape and sterilisation by external aggressors. In Peru, I was privileged to meet some of the victims of the civil war—community activists who were violated both by insurgents and by Government forces during the struggle simply because they were trying to improve the lot of ordinary people, as women do all over the world.

Cathy Peattie is right to say that Scotland should be playing a part in the global campaign to stop violence against women wherever it occurs. However, we can do that with any force and credibility only if we recognise and deal with our own culture of violence against women, in which one in five young men and one in 10 young women believe that violence against women is acceptable.

Elaine Smith and I are involved in a Tanzanian project with the British Council. The women MPs from Tanzania whom we meet are absolutely astounded when we talk to them about domestic violence in Scotland. They are amazed to learn that, in a country that they see as being democratic and forward thinking—Scotland's condition is something that they aspire to—people suffer from domestic violence to a degree that is not that far removed from the degree to which people in Tanzania suffer from it. We should be amazed as well and we should be doing everything that we can to support the Executive in what it is trying to do. I have no doubt about the sincerity of the Executive in relation to this struggle and I confirm my whole-hearted support, as well as that of my party, for it in that regard.

16:21

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I am glad to be able to be the second Scottish Socialist Party speaker in the debate, as it is not often that two SSP members are allowed to speak in one debate. On the other hand, it is perhaps disappointing that I have been able to speak, as it shows how undersubscribed the debate has been.

The debate is about violence against women internationally. The idea that a debate on domestic abuse covers the issue of violence against women is a display of unbelievable ignorance. However, I will move on rather than waste time on that issue.

We need to consider what is happening in our society in terms of the role of the media and the shift towards the normalisation of the exploitation of women. Every day, there are snapshots on the front pages of the tabloids of headless women—their identities are removed—who are pictured from the back, wearing thongs, so that they are identified only by their bottoms. It is normal to find in newspapers photographs—stolen snapshots—taken up women's skirts as they get in and out of cars. Is it any wonder that attitudes of men towards women and towards violence and rape have shifted to a point at which many people think that it is okay to hit women and force sex on them?

That has happened because there is big money in shifting attitudes and in prostitution, trafficking and sex industries. Even the use of the word "industry" normalises the exploitation of women so that the profits can get bigger and bigger. That is what our society is predicated on. Capitalism thrives on and needs the exploitation of women. Prostitution and pornography are seen as just another market for big business and profits to thrive on.

I agree with Elaine Smith that we need to overthrow capitalism in order to liberate women. However, that would not be the end of the story, because patriarchy would still exist. Patriarchy and discrimination exist in the trade union movement and even within socialist organisations and parties, as I am sure all of us who have taken part in them know. Men are a problem, capitalism or no capitalism, and we need to sort them. [*Laughter.*] Seriously.

The push to normalise the exploitation of women concerns not only the images in tabloid newspapers. It is now commonplace for stag nights to involve lap dancing and prostitution. Women—even the prospective brides—are made to feel prudish if they challenge such behaviour. Well, I challenge such behaviour, because it is abuse and violence and it is unacceptable.

According to the figures, only 6 per cent of reported rapes are prosecuted and a tiny

percentage of those result in a conviction. That is despite a 300 per cent increase in the number of cases reported. Moreover, the figures ignore the many thousands more women who might have been the victim of rape when they were drunk or drugged and so do not have a hope in hell of securing a conviction and do not consider going to the police. Let me make it absolutely clear: when a woman does not give explicit and express consent, or when she is not capable of giving explicit and express consent, that is rape. It should be seen as rape and men should be charged with rape in those circumstances. Unfortunately, in too many cases, that is not what happens.

Juanita Berry has courageously written a detailed diary of what happened to her following a rape. In one extract, she explains her despair about the people who perpetrated that rape and about the society around her that let her down. She writes:

"I feel nauseous and apprehensive all the time for no apparent reason. My head feels so full there's so much going through my mind I can't keep up with it all and it's making me feel sick and scared. I feel like I want to run around the room screaming. There's a big scream in the pit of my stomach that I want to let go. My throat feels like it's constricted."

There are far too many women with a big scream in the pit of their stomachs and we let them down at every turn.

The commodification of women allows such things to happen to them; it is all linked. We have to have a serious debate about the role of pornography. Lots of research shows that many of the women in pornography are very young; they are advertised as being barely legal and have been groomed by abuse to participate in pornography. Let us not kid ourselves that there is a consensual and equal relationship in pornography and that there are loads of women out there who want to volunteer to spread themselves over Barbie quilts looking like teenagers. That is not the case. Pornography is predicated on abuse and we have to start to deal with that.

We cannot have a debate about violence against women without talking about the biggest incident of violence that is being perpetrated against women and children in the world today—the war in Iraq. Just the other night, the bodies of 73 women and children were found buried in Fallujah. That is a slaughter and a disgrace. It is the biggest abuse and rape of women and children in the world today and it is being perpetrated in our name by our Government, in conjunction with the big bully in Washington, George Bush. It is unacceptable. The war should be stopped and the troops should be brought home.

16:28

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I hear what Carolyn Leckie said about men being a problem. Some people might expect me to agree with that. I do not necessarily agree, but I did wonder if she had any particular man in mind when she made that comment.

I am pleased that the Parliament is marking the UN international day for the elimination of violence against women with this debate. I am even more pleased that since the creation of the Parliament, we have focused on this important issue and its different aspects on several occasions. More important, the Scottish Executive has responded with greater resources to tackle some of those issues. The minister mentioned a few of them in her speech.

The issue is clearly one of gender inequality. Pauline McNeill, Elaine Smith and many other speakers set it in that context. In her very passionate contribution, Cathy Peattie expressed it well when she said that violence does affect other people, but it affects women disproportionately. Domestic violence affects more women than it does anybody else. That is not to deny that there is violence against men, or indeed that there is violence in same-sex relationships, which is another issue that people will not speak up about. Mary Scanlon was right to mention that male rape is an issue, and I support what she said.

Violence is all about power, but domestic violence is always an abuse of power. Most of the time, it is about the power of men over women, but it can also be the abuse of power by a parent over a child or by a grown-up child over an elderly parent or it can be against disabled people. There are many forms of abuse. It can be against men by women or against men by other men or, indeed, against women by women. There are many ways in which such abuse pervades our society, but it is right that we focus on violence against women on this day.

When people think of violence against women, they often think of horrendous domestic abuse, but colleagues have ably demonstrated that the issue is, unfortunately, about a great deal more than that. On prostitution, I share Donald Gorrie's support for tolerance zones and I supported Margo MacDonald's bill on that subject. When the bill was being considered, it became apparent that prostitutes encountered less violence in the tolerance zone because it was much easier to police the area and to keep an eye on what was going on. Whether we like it or not, that was in some ways effective. Police officers said that when prostitution was restricted to a tolerance zone, rather than spread across the city, they could keep a better handle on trafficking and on

the age of the women who were involved. The trafficking situation has now reached epidemic proportions, which was not the case at that time.

Elaine Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Smith: No. I have a lot to get through.

I agree that we should not charge women who use their bodies to try either to make a living to support their families or to support a drug habit. We should prosecute the men who prey on them.

The pervasive impact of video games and the internet, highlighted by Christine Grahame and Stewart Stevenson, is, as Carolyn Leckie said in her powerful statement against pornography, all about money. It is about men making money out of women.

Trafficking is also an issue, as Pauline McNeill and Shiona Baird rightly highlighted in what were good contributions. Each year, roughly 2 million girls between five and 15 are trafficked, sold or coerced into prostitution. We can all do something about tackling that, here in Edinburgh and in Glasgow, as well as in Lothian and Borders and across the world.

Violence against women is a major cause of death and disability. A World Bank report estimated that, among women of reproductive age, such violence was as serious a cause of death and incapacity as cancer. With each conflict across the world, we hear the inevitable stories of the rape and abuse of women as a weapon of war. The consequences of that abuse continue; as Linda Fabiani pointed out, for example, 70 per cent of Rwandan victims of rape now have HIV. In recent conflicts, 70 per cent of casualties have been non-combatants, who have been mostly women and children.

Violence against women not only breaks their bones but can break their souls. It means not only the fist raised in anger, but the voice raised to belittle and demean. Abuse knows many guises, from physical or sexual abuse to much more insidious psychological damage. Often, the threat of such actions by men against women is enough to harm the woman and her children and enough to impede her opportunities.

Recently, Mike Pringle and I visited the Alva Street drug treatment and testing order centre and several other criminal justice schemes in Edinburgh. When asked what problems women faced, every professional we spoke to said, "Men." The first couple of times that I heard that response, I laughed because I thought that it was a joke. However, when the same answer kept on cropping up everywhere, I realised that it was not funny. At the drug treatment and testing order centre, we were told that men's chances of

successfully completing the programme were enhanced if they had a partner, but that the situation is totally different for women. The project found that women were less successful if they had male partners, because the male partners did not want them to succeed. The male partners did not want them off drugs, because while the women were on drugs the men could control them, and control them into prostitution.

Men can control women in a number of ways, but economic factors play a major part. If a woman thinks that she cannot afford to leave and cannot afford to support her children, if she has no job, no training and nowhere to go, she is more likely to stay, which is what abusers are counting on. There are still thousands of women who suffer in silence, afraid to come out and tell the truth, partly because of reprisals, but partly because of shame and stigma, which is what abusers are counting on. There are still more women who are subjected to sexual attack or abuse who look at the statistics and see a Scottish justice system in which only 6 per cent of rape cases lead to conviction and decide not to report their abuse, which is what abusers are counting on.

There is a whole range of ways in which we can tackle the issue, here in Scotland, in Europe and across the wider world. I have been pleased to hear from many of the contributions and from the tone of this debate, for the most part, that we are equally committed to ending violence against women.

16:36

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): This has been an interesting debate with a number of varied contributions, some measured, some intemperate, some eminently sensible, some less so. When she opened the debate, after the predictable complaints about general inequality, the Deputy Minister for Communities had a sideswipe at the Conservatives about our attitude to the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill. I shall clarify the matter for her yet again; our objections were not to the context of the bill, but to the fact that the Executive was seeking powers that it already had. That was the problem.

However, taking what is perhaps an uncharacteristically consensual approach, I would like to paraphrase what the Deputy Minister for Communities said at the conclusion of her speech: that violence against women is deplorable and that we must all work to change attitudes. Of course, she is entirely correct, and no one should doubt that there is anything other than complete unanimity around the Parliament on that issue.

As I said, there have been some other contributions that are certainly worthy of mention.

Christine Grahame dealt with the international aspect of violence against women. Cathy Peattie and other members also took up that issue and they were perfectly correct to do so. Some of the situations that exist in the world are unspeakable, and those who highlighted them did this debate a service.

Donald Gorrie very sensibly highlighted the fact that there are troubles within some of our own communities that we have failed to recognise, and that this would be a much more honest debate were we to recognise the fact that certain sections of our society have an attitude towards women that is at best ambivalent. He also dealt with the question of tolerance zones and, at the same time, mentioned a kerb crawling bill. I have to say that there seemed to be some inconsistency in those arguments, but I fully accept that the points are arguable nonetheless.

Stewart Stevenson began his speech with something with which we would entirely agree. He did not disregard violence against men, and that was absolutely appropriate. He also dealt eloquently with the international dimension of the problems that the debate addresses. He also highlighted a problem, however, and it is a problem that the Scottish Executive must address. As he said, 43 per cent of incidents go unreported, and they go unreported because there is now a lack of confidence in the Executive's policing and justice systems. When I hear the Executive trumpeting the fact that Glasgow now has a domestic abuse court and that people who have been subjected to domestic violence—particularly women—can expect that their case will be dealt with within four months of the incident happening, I have to say that that may be good as far as it goes, but it does not really go very far. We are talking about summary justice, after all, and those cases should be resolved much more timeously. The reason that they are not being resolved much more timeously is that the prosecution system in some parts of Scotland today is in a state of unrelenting chaos. When justice is delayed, justice is denied. In no case is that more apposite than in that of domestic violence—which does largely relate to men's violence against women.

Mike Rumbles, in a speech that I found myself agreeing with in large measure, pointed out—to general acceptance, which I was pleased about—that there is a variation when it comes to the question of violence. Undeniably, women are the majority of victims. However, we must not disregard one important aspect: that violence against other sections of society is not unknown—that men are sometimes the victims.

Christine Grahame: I do not think that that is the point. Does Bill Aitken not accept that this is not the time or the place to introduce that debate?

There may be another time and place for that, but not during a debate on the international day for the elimination of violence against women. That is the point that we want to make. There was an issue of abuse in introducing that aspect to speeches, which did the Conservatives no service and no favours.

Bill Aitken: Far be it from me to rise to the defence of Mr Rumbles—I am tempted to say that he is big enough, and very much ugly enough, to look after himself—but I do not agree with Christine Grahame. Mr Rumbles was perfectly correct to mention that. One of the encouraging aspects of the debate is that the mood has changed since domestic violence was debated three weeks ago. Even when we debated the business motion last week, there was an acknowledgement around the chamber that there is a problem.

I keep coming back to imbalance. I would not for one moment wish you, Presiding Officer, or your colleagues to think that Margaret Mitchell's amendment was attempting to find a way round the motion. We accept that the Presiding Officers rejected the amendment; we accept that that was your decision to make. In her speech, Margaret Mitchell highlighted one of the problems of the debate: that there would inevitably be a degree of repetition unless further material was introduced. That is why I sought last week to curtail this debate; not to prevent the matter from being discussed, but in order that international violence could be addressed in a way that allowed us to move on to other things that we should have been doing.

I do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of those who are on the opposite side of that argument. Members all believe profoundly in equality, but when they seek to make any section or group more equal than another, that inevitably makes those others less equal. It is disturbing that the standing orders of the Parliament allowed for the rejection of an amendment on the basis that it was gender neutral. That is regrettable.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Aitken: I am in my last minute. We will not seek to divide the chamber this evening—unless Kenny MacAskill upsets us even more than usual—because we recognise that what is being proposed is constructive. On that note, I will finish.

16:43

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I will say at the outset that the SNP's amendment is meant to add to the Executive motion, not detract from it. I can only reiterate what Christine Grahame and Linda Fabiani said: that we will

support the Executive motion. There are three particular points in our amendment. One is on the cultural problem that we face, as was perhaps epitomised by Mr Aitken's comments of a few moments ago. We must address that cultural problem and the fact that people fail to recognise it. As other members mentioned, we also have to address problems relating to the media and the influence of pornography on the mores and culture that permeate our society.

Mike Rumbles *rose—*

Mr MacAskill: Not at the moment. We must recognise the international aspects of the situation, and that subject was eloquently espoused by Cathy Peattie and by my colleague Linda Fabiani.

We fully support the Executive on this. The Deputy Minister for Communities was perhaps short of time and therefore missed out on what we might perceive as the self-congratulatory part of the Executive speech, which sometimes places us in a quandary when it comes to supporting the Executive. We were spared that, however, and we fully support not just the Executive's tenor and tone, but everything in the minister's speech.

The Minister was correct to point out that the basis of the problem is inequality and the abuse of power. Other members have testified to that. She also made it clear that we must deal with two particular aspects of the matter. We must deal with the victims of crime and we must challenge what causes the problem in the first place. That there are individual and social aspects to the matter is clear, and individual responsibility must be taken by those who perpetrate violence. There must be zero tolerance, as there can be no excuse for an assault, whether we are talking about a slap and a gesture or whatever, as opposed to a serious assault. All assaults are unacceptable, as is violence that involves insidious humiliation. That is equally bad and damaging not only to the victims, but to the victims' families, which suffer and are, to some extent, the non-combatants—other members talked about them in a different sense. The minister was correct to point out such things. She was also right to point out that much of the violence is steeped in poverty and straitened circumstances, although we are aware that the problem permeates all strata of society and that domestic violence is as likely to be found in the house of the law lord as in that of the labourer. We must accept that fact.

Members who argued for gender equality did no service to the debate—in fact, they undermined its whole purpose. In 20 years of working as a matrimonial lawyer, much of which involved domestic violence cases, I never came across one case that involved an abused husband. I accept that there is such abuse, but such cases are a

minority and we must not get the two types of case mixed up.

Mike Rumbles: I am glad that the member accepts that such cases exist, but does he agree that gender discrimination cannot be defeated by going down the road of gender discrimination?

Mr MacAskill: Pauline McNeill, Marilyn Livingstone and Christine Grahame have already eloquently made many of the points that need to be made. The fact is that we are here for a purpose. Some chamber debates are not about legislative initiatives, but are simply symbolic or are about addressing cultural mores. Earlier this month, we all observed one minute's silence in the chamber because it was the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. The community in Scotland and the British Isles and throughout many of the western democratic countries and beyond recognises that we must pay tribute to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. We should also recognise the wrongs and iniquities of war on such occasions.

Exactly the same applies to this debate. Such debates are taking place not only in this chamber, but in legislatures and jurisdictions elsewhere internationally. The problem that we are debating is significant in this country, but transcends it. We are having a symbolic debate. However, the difference with violence against women is that it is cultural, institutionalised and systemic in many cases. There is violence against male partners in relationships, but it is not institutionalised. Violence against anybody is unacceptable and intolerable, but it is wrong to suggest that the situation of a battered husband is the same as that of a battered wife. We do not see sexual assaults being used as a method of war—which Cathy Peattie and Linda Fabiani talked about—in such cases.

Members should have learned the lesson that has been given by the Presiding Officers—to their credit. The proposed amendment would not have added, but would have detracted from the debate. Seeking to bring the matter into the debate again undermined the ethos of what the chamber is trying to do. The United Nations has expressed what humanity is trying to do. We should halt such violence and ensure that victims do not suffer. As the minister said, we should not only address the problems and individual instances, but attack the mores and cultures that create the problems. Until some members take a long, hard look, we will have to debate the subject *ad infinitum*. The problem is that they must recognise that such violence is not the same as the slapping of a husband by an irate wife. We are talking about a systematic and cultural problem. In many instances, it is institutionalised. That has been testified to in policies being carried out in the

Congo, Rwanda and in eastern and central Europe. That is why we must have this debate.

I have suddenly become conscious of the time, and want to make three key points to summarise. We must recognise that the problem is international, rather than simply a national one, and that we must take actions as individuals and as a Parliament. Other members have testified that the problem is a historical as well as a contemporary one, which is why we must be ever watchful.

Members have accepted and testified to the fact that we have made improvements. Of course we have moved on: women have the right to vote and are no longer seen as chattels to be disposed of with no right even to their child upon separation, divorce or whatever else; however, there are still cultural problems and areas of power inequality that we need to address. I take issue with the idea that we need to go as far as Elaine Smith or Carolyn Leckie would wish, but I accept the fact that a distance has to be travelled to make this a better world, not just for women, but for all humanity.

We have to recognise that the issue is cultural as well as legislative. Not everything can be dealt with by law; we have to take that on board. Nevertheless, the Parliament has the opportunity to send out a clear message that we view violence against women as unacceptable; that we will legislate where we can; and that we will try to ensure that, in our society and our culture, violence against women is intolerable and will be driven out. I just hope that some members will take cognisance of that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind people in the public gallery that it is not appropriate to applaud.

16:51

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): I am proud of the fact that we, in the Scottish Parliament, are playing our small part in tackling a massive global issue. The United Nations has designated today and 25 November every year as the international day for the elimination of violence against women. It is, therefore, regrettable that arguments were made in the debate against having the debate at all.

We are having two debates because we wanted to deal at the beginning of the month with the large issue of domestic abuse, around which there has been a lot of activity, and because, as many members have pointed out, there is a much wider agenda of violence against women that it was important for us to address today. Elaine Smith welcomed our intention to set up an expert group to look strategically at the issue. One purpose of

the debate, among several, was to get the opinions of members so that they can be fed into that important piece of strategic work.

The wider objection that came from the Conservative party and Mike Rumbles related to the fact that there is also violence against men. However, as Stewart Stevenson said, to talk of violence against women is not to ignore violence against men. It is very important that we focus on the specific issue. Cathy Jamieson has been leading an initiative relating to knife culture this week—that is a specific issue to focus on. Likewise, it is absolutely right that we focus specifically on the gendered nature of violence against women. That is something that Mike Rumbles fundamentally ignores in making the points that he continually makes on the issue. As Elaine Smith said, it is important for us to see the big picture.

Mike Rumbles: I accept that it is a gender issue. Does the minister accept that domestic violence is not exclusively a gender-based issue?

Malcolm Chisholm: No one is saying that it is; we are looking at patterns of behaviour. The nature and the scale of women's violence against men, when it occurs, are entirely different and do not take anything away from the fundamentally gendered nature of domestic abuse and violence against women in general.

I will accept the SNP's amendment. I welcome the amendment and the various points that are made in it. The cultural aspect of violence against women has been picked up in various speeches. For example, Carolyn Leckie talked about the normalisation of violence against women in the media, which is an important dimension. Unless we address the broader cultural and social determinants of violence against women, we cannot deal with the issue.

Rosie Kane highlighted the importance of prevention. Our agenda—which came originally from agendas that were created by women's organisations long before the Scottish Parliament existed—is based around the three Ps of prevention, protection and provision. As Rosie Kane said, we must start with children. There are various initiatives that help, such as the respect campaign that is run by the Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust, which is used in schools. That must be a key part of our agenda.

Along with Shiona Baird and Pauline McNeill, Rosie Kane also majored on the issue of human trafficking, which is fundamentally a crime that is committed by men against women and children. I want to mention two initiatives to address that. The Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Act 2004 contains provision to make trafficking for the purposes of exploitation a

criminal offence. The commencement order was made earlier this month, and the new offences will come into force in Scotland on 1 December, incurring a maximum penalty of 14 years. There is also a project in Glasgow, funded by the violence against women fund, to develop work on the issue of trafficking for the purposes of prostitution and to ensure that appropriate services are in place for individual women. That is one of several projects that are funded by the violence against women fund.

Pauline McNeill and Elaine Smith mentioned the proposal for a rape and sexual assault centre in Glasgow. Officials from the Health, Justice and Development Departments have met project members to explore how that proposal can be progressed. I viewed the proposal very positively when I was the Minister for Health and Community Care and will do the same as the Minister for Communities.

Part of the purpose of today's debate is to open up the wider agenda around issues of violence against women. Donald Gorrie and Pauline McNeill talked about prostitution from different perspectives. As members know, an expert group on prostitution is considering the issues related to that and its report will be submitted to the Minister for Justice shortly.

As part of an impassioned speech on the international struggle against violence against women, Cathy Peattie spoke about female genital mutilation. As members know, at the end of October we introduced to the Parliament the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Bill to strengthen the existing legal protection against female genital mutilation.

Carolyn Leckie, Donald Gorrie and Mary Scanlon talked about rape and the problems that exist in that area with the law. We have asked the Scottish Law Commission to undertake a review of the law relating to rape and other serious sexual offences and to make recommendations. For Mary Scanlon's interest, I point out that the review will include male-against-male rape. The Crown Office is also conducting a review of its investigation and prosecution of rape and serious sexual assaults.

Carolyn Leckie and Elaine Smith raised the important issue of pornography. I agree that we need a serious debate about that issue. I also agree with Carolyn Leckie that pornography is predicated on abuse and I look forward to the Equal Opportunities Committee's consideration of the matter.

Christine Grahame raised several issues in her speech, including that of domestic abuse courts. I was pleased to launch such a court in Glasgow in October. The member suggested that the issue might better be dealt with by family law courts. I

hesitate to get into a dispute with a lawyer, but the basic point is that domestic abuse and violence against women is a criminal offence and should therefore be dealt with by a criminal court, rather than a civil court. That is a key message for us.

Christine Grahame also rightly reminded us of the use of rape as a weapon of war. We all share the horror and revulsion that she feels at stories of the systematic use of rape in war throughout the world. These are war crimes and crimes against humanity that are rightly outlawed under domestic and international law. I am sure that the Parliament joins me in deploring their occurrence.

There is no one in the chair to tell me how much longer I have, so I will continue. Christine Grahame asked whether people knew about the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Act 2001. An evaluation of that issue was carried out, as a result of which the Executive wrote to more than 180 organisations this August to remind them of the remedies that are available under Scots law to protect against abuse. The act has also been publicised in other ways. There has been progress, but I accept fully that much more must be done.

Christine Grahame also asked about the evaluation of advertising campaigns, which shows that the adverts result in greater public awareness. The member recognised that point in the previous debate on this issue, when she pointed out that there were far more calls to the domestic abuse helpline following the advertisements.

I remind those in the Parliament who, unfortunately, expressed concerns about today's debate that violence against women is but one type of violence in our society. Margaret Mitchell mentioned Scotland's homicide figures. Of course the figures that were published yesterday are too high, although there has been a recent welcome fall. Too many Scots are still being injured or killed at the hands of young men with knives, in particular. As the Minister for Justice said yesterday:

"too many young men carry a knife ... perhaps because they think it makes them look hard or in the mistaken belief that this will give them some form of protection."

The Executive is turning its attention to that issue. Earlier this week, the First Minister outlined a range of new proposals to tackle the problem. The new measures that the Executive will develop in further detail as part of a wider strategy to tackle violence will mark a major step towards ending the problem. Such targeted approaches to specific issues are the right way forward.

In the same way, tackling the specific gendered nature of violence against women is the right way forward, if we are serious about challenging the occurrence of such violence.

Work to develop a strategy on violence against women is in its early stages and I am pleased that the Parliament has had an opportunity today to give its input to the debate. Work will progress under the banner of the national group to address violence against women and I am sure that the Parliament will maintain its commitment to eliminate violence against women in Scotland and will continue to support work in that direction.

I thank the many magnificent speakers we have had in what has been a splendid debate.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We should come now to decision time, but I regret to inform members that we have a slight problem with the electronic voting system. I propose to suspend the meeting for three minutes in an attempt to allow the system to be rebooted.

17:00

Meeting suspended.

17:07

On resuming—

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. In relation to this morning's debate, I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Ross Finnie is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alex Fergusson falls.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-2056.4, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2056, in the name of Shiona Baird, on supermarkets and the Scottish food chain, 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)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)

Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-2056.1, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2056, in the name of Shiona Baird, on supermarkets and the Scottish food chain, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (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)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 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)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)

Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (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)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 82, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S2M-2056.2, in the name of Alex Fergusson, is pre-empted.

The third question is, that motion S2M-2056, in the name of Shiona Baird, on supermarkets and the Scottish food chain, 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)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (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)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 28, Abstentions 20.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament, while recognising that competition matters, including those relating to supermarkets and the food sector, are reserved to the UK Parliament, notes that

the Office of Fair Trading is currently carrying out an independent audit of the Supermarket Code of Practice; agrees with the Executive's objective, as set out in *A Partnership for a Better Scotland: A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture and Scottish Food and Drink Strategy*, of supporting Scotland's food and drinks industry to build on its reputation for high quality and its strong export record and to ensure that more Scottish produce is processed in Scotland; supports the Executive's funding of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society which assists farmer co-ops, and welcomes the implementation of the *Organic Action Plan* and the *Eating for Health* action plan.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S2M-2059.2, in the name of Christine Grahame, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2059, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on violence against women, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S2M-2059, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on violence against women, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament supports the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women on 25 November 2004; affirms its commitment to eradicating all forms of violence against women in Scotland; acknowledges the significant funding that has gone into domestic abuse initiatives over the last four years; welcomes the more recent work of the Scottish Executive in setting up the Violence Against Women Service Development Fund and supporting Rape Crisis Scotland and the ten rape crisis centres throughout Scotland, and, noting the complexity of many of the issues involved, supports the Executive's decision to set up an expert committee to support the development of a strategic approach to tackling these issues in future and, in particular to explore the cultural reasons underlying the recent report that one in five young men and one in ten women thought that violence against women was acceptable and to examine the crucial role that the media and entertainments industry has in compounding such attitudes, and, furth of Scotland, abhors the increased use of violence against women as a weapon of war.

Debating in Schools

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-1998, in the name of Brian Monteith, on encouraging school debating. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the great benefits that school debating can offer to students; believes that debate develops powers of argument, increases understanding, boosts critical thinking and promotes engagement with society; considers that students who take part in debating show stronger communication skills, raised self-esteem, are better at working in teams, become more articulate and objective and are likely to be better equipped to become active citizens; believes that the opportunity to take part in debate can have a real impact on the life-chances of young people, particularly of those from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds; supports the work of the English-Speaking Union (ESU), with schools throughout Scotland, in promoting and organising debate; notes that its National Juniors Debating Competition has attracted more than eighty entries from schools across the country, and welcomes the innovative new debating outreach programme that the ESU is launching in January 2005 in conjunction with North Lanarkshire Council.

17:12

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): Before I get into the meat of my speech, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Bureau for selecting my motion for debate this evening. I also want to thank all the members who signed up in support of my motion. I also support the sentiments that Richard Lochhead expressed in his amendment to the motion. However, for technical reasons, I was unable to incorporate the text of his amendment into my motion.

I intend to concentrate on the English-Speaking Union and its role in debating in Scotland, so as to leave room for members to talk about other organisations that are involved in debating and to pass on their own anecdotes, of which I am sure there will be a number.

I will start with a quotation:

"I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong."

Those words were spoken by Mahatma Gandhi. Members might be surprised that such an aggressive, in-your-face debater as me would choose to start the debate by quoting the great man, but I believe that one of the fundamental pillars of democracy is the ability to debate, to argue one's point, to defend one's position and to try and persuade others of it.

It is difficult to talk about politics today without talking about voter apathy, especially voter apathy

among younger voters. I am sure that all members in the chamber agree that it is important to encourage younger people to participate in the democratic process. We want an electorate that is informed and interested; one that holds us to account. We want an electorate that is involved; one that feels part of the democratic process.

Debating develops powers of argument, increases understanding, boosts critical thinking and, most important, promotes engagement with society. Students who take part in debating show stronger communication skills and raised self-esteem, and are better at working in teams. They are often more articulate, more objective and more likely to be better equipped to be active citizens. Debate has been shown to have a positive effect on literacy standards in schools. Those are attributes that we can all aspire to for Scotland's young people.

For many years, the English-Speaking Union has run a range of debating and public speaking competitions for schools in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom. This year, three competitions for secondary schools are being run in Scotland. The competitions have attracted entries from more than 70 schools and more than 400 young people are taking part. However, only a minority of schools are involved and most pupils will not be able to experience debating and public speaking. I recall that when I was at Portobello High School it was difficult to become involved in debating: there was sporadically a debating team, which I, for one, did not take part in.

This Parliament should support the ESU's efforts to develop a programme that concentrates on Scottish schools that have traditionally lacked access to debate. The four finalists in the ESU juniors competition final last year, which I attended as a judge, were all state schools that had, on their way to the finals, defeated some notable independent schools that had more of a tradition of producing teams and taking part in debating competitions.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):

Brian Monteith points out that the debating champions were pupils from state schools. Does that account for the fact that no members of the Labour Party or the Scottish Socialist Party are present for the debate? Are they absent because they are afraid of Brian Monteith's debating skills or because they believe that they have perfected their debating skills to the extent that they have no need to attend the debate?

Mr Monteith: That is an interesting observation. I will leave members to judge whether my superior debating skills have frightened them away or whether some other attraction accounts for their absence.

I must press on rather than try to score points. I will leave that to other members—although I may not want to keep that habit.

We must provide opportunities for students to build skills and experience in order to raise the levels of self-confidence and social engagement among young people from disadvantaged communities. We often talk in this Parliament about trying to raise Scotland's self-confidence so that Scotland is a more outgoing, self-confident nation. Debating is inherently part of the communication of that self-confidence.

The ESU's programme addresses directly the recommendations in the discussion paper "Education for Citizenship in Scotland", which was endorsed by a number of Scottish Executive ministers, including the First Minister. It supports the four key learning outcomes: knowledge and understanding; skills and competencies; values and dispositions; creativity and enterprise.

The ESU's programme aims to provide young people from all backgrounds with the opportunity for structured debate, both within and without the classroom. The ESU aims to work with at least 75 per cent of Scottish schools over three years and to develop a range of in-lesson resources and teaching materials for the use of teachers, debate mentors and pupils, to support subjects and courses across the curriculum.

ESU Scotland needs funding of some £280,000 over three years to design and implement the programme, which it hopes to introduce from the start of the 2005-06 school year. The Executive is always introducing or funding new initiatives: this is one that I believe would bring real benefits. All I will say to the minister is that it should be given careful consideration.

Turnout at the 1992 general election was nearly 78 per cent, but turnout at the 2001 general election was just under 60 per cent. That was the lowest voter turnout since universal adult suffrage began. MORI suggested that the low turnout was particularly pronounced among young people—only 39 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds cast their vote.

Turnout for elections to this Parliament has been even worse. Only 49 per cent of registered voters turned out in last year's Scottish Parliament elections. That was down from 58 per cent in 1999. Fewer than half of those in Scotland who were able to vote did so. For the sake of democracy—which we sometimes take for granted, but which many countries desperately aspire to—we must do more.

In 1999, five MSPs under the age of 30 were elected to this Parliament. In 2003, only one member under 30 was elected. If we want to have a vibrant, young Parliament, as well as vibrant

debates, we should consider having more debates in schools. We must aspire to inspire our young people. We must ensure that they have an interest in the future. We must ensure that they understand that it is a future in which they have a stake. By encouraging debate in schools, we encourage young people to start questioning those who represent them; we encourage them to hold us to account; we encourage them to get involved and be part of the democratic process.

The ESU hopes to hold the final of its debating competition here in the Scottish Parliament. It has already attracted sponsorship for competitions from organisations such as Asda. I hope that it will be possible to signal the start of a concerted effort to encourage and increase debating in schools and to help develop the MSPs of tomorrow.

17:21

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I too support the efforts of the ESU and anyone else who promotes debating skills in schools. Like you, Presiding Officer, I was a schoolteacher in a previous life. Once, when I looked at my timetable at the beginning of the new term, I saw that Friday was dedicated to a double period of class 3C—35-plus of them, full of testosterone, weekend thoughts and hostility. I thought, what would I do with 3C for 80 minutes on a Friday afternoon? Desperation bred the invention of the debating afternoon.

What started out as a rescue package for me became the highlight of the week for those children. It became the carrot that ensured they did their exercises during the week. We had our little ups and downs, of course. When I introduced the debating afternoon I made it a golden rule that I would chair everything, because I had to keep control of proceedings, and I knew that they would be up to mischief and propose topics that might embarrass me. However, as I am sure the Presiding Officer is aware, I could embarrass them before they could embarrass me. I told them so, they believed it, and we progressed quite happily.

Those afternoons became quite a star, with the result that, quite unexpectedly, my other classes said, "When are we getting a debate, Miss Grahame?" Miss Grahame found herself having to debate, and it became part of my schedule to have debating periods for all classes. From that grew something for first year, who were of mixed ability. They were not quite up to debating, so I thought, "I'll wean them on to it." Instead of debating, we had afternoon talks. I am moving slightly from the topic of debate, but it is all to do with children gaining confidence, particularly those who are not good at writing.

I remember one afternoon when into the classroom came a slow worm, a ferret and a brick. They were the subject matters of the talks to be given by my pupils. The slow worm was passed around the classroom—first to me. I had to pretend that I was not frightened of it. I hated it but, being the true teacher that I was, I handled it with bravura and passed it round the class. We had a lesson from the pupil about his slow worm. Then the girl brought in her ferret, which I refused to handle. The ferret was entertaining in itself, and we had a long talk all about it and how to care for it.

But all eyes were on Brian and his brick. What could he do with a brick that would surpass the slow worm and the ferret? Brian, who was not known for being articulate, came up to the front with his hammer and his brick. I said, "What are you going to do, Brian?" He paused—his delivery was slow—and replied, "Ah'm gonna cut it in half, miss." "You are?" All eyes were now on Brian, his brick and the hammer.

So Brian slowly chipped away at the brick with the sharp end of the hammer, and then paused—for he was a bit of a dramatist—with his hammer in the air. He tapped it and, sure enough, the brick fell apart in two halves. There were tiny little crumbs of brick on the floor. The applause was spontaneous. He was top of the class. We then found out that he had followed his brickie father for days. In simple words he said, "And that is how you halve a brick." That was the whole point. The ferret watched the whole proceedings quite happily and probably learned how to do it too.

The point is that through using oral communication, which many children are denied in the classroom, they can star and shine. After that, I made a point, when assessing pupils, of giving a substantial number of marks to people based on their oral contribution, whether in talks or debates—in memory of Brian and his brick who, as members will realise, I remember to this day.

17:25

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

I congratulate Brian Monteith on securing this important debate. This is the first occasion on which I have agreed with absolutely everything he said—and it will probably be the only one because it is not likely to be repeated.

There is nothing more important for kids, young people and, indeed, adults to develop than the skill and ability to think, speak and argue on their feet. We in the Liberal Democrats pride ourselves on having democratic procedures for the selection of parliamentary candidates. Prospective candidates produce a focused election leaflet with an address, but we do not know whether they have written it. I

have been to several hustings in selections for parliamentary candidates—for the Scottish Parliament and for the European Parliament—at which people have gone in with a clear idea about who they will vote for and have then voted differently.

The Parliament should do its utmost to encourage the development of this important communication skill in schools, because it is greatly underrated. Brian Monteith was absolutely right to emphasise the importance of the skill. It is important not only for debating, but in everyday life at work or at home—and even in arguments between husband and wife. I am glad that we have a husband and wife partnership in the chamber who can confirm the importance of developing the skill—I see them nodding. I would love to be a fly on the wall in the Ewing household at times. The development of the communication skill also increases self-confidence.

I praise the work and role of the English-Speaking Union. I understand that it organises three separate competitions at school level, one of which, the national juniors debating competition, is held exclusively in Scotland. About 72 schools participate, which is only 15 per cent. I read with great interest about the pilot project in North Lanarkshire, which seems to be well developed. Workshops are held with the aim of getting kids to learn debating and arguing skills and a competition is held at the end. I hope that the project will be developed and spread out to the rest of Scotland and that the Executive will support that financially.

When I was a member in another place, I wanted to start a school debating competition up in north Wales, where my constituency was. I wrote to the noted journalist, Robert Harris of *The Observer*, who organised *The Observer's* mace debating competition. I received a delightful handwritten letter in reply inviting me to go along and see the competition in action. He asked me along to a final at Westminster School in London, but he did not tell me that he had put me down as a judge with him, Ludovic Kennedy and Quintin Hogg. It was an extremely intimidating experience, but it was followed by a fluid, alcohol reception and an extremely good dinner. I remember that event with great affection and I learnt a lot from the experience.

I am glad to say that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branch in the Parliament is in the process of selecting two delegates from Scotland to go to the Commonwealth Youth Parliament in Queensland next April. Margaret Ewing and I are on the executive of the branch and we will sift through the applications next week. I hope that other members will come along to hear the finalists and perhaps

even help us to judge, when we hold debates in a committee room to choose the two Scottish representatives—that would make the process more democratic.

Last night, I attended a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organisation's reception and annual general meeting. A young speaker there—I wish that I could remember her name because it should go into the *Official Report*—spoke at the end, after Susan Deacon. I should have warned Susan that I intended to refer to her, but I think that that young speaker was actually better than her—she was only 17 and she was absolutely terrific. She had notes in her hand, but she did not refer to them. I said to her, "Why on earth did you have them? You're great." She is a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament, which is an organisation with which we in this Parliament do not interact nearly enough. It is obvious that talented young people are members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and we should support and encourage them. Out of that, I hope that a national competition may grow, supported by the Parliament.

17:30

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I remember with much affection my days at the University of Aberdeen debater and our visits to many other universities including those in St Andrews, Edinburgh and Glasgow. All those universities have kept up a strong debating tradition for as long as I have been acquainted with them. I pay tribute to the English-Speaking Union for its work and to the universities and many teachers in schools throughout Scotland who have contributed to maintaining the tradition of debating over the past 50 years. I also remember the days of John Smith and Donald Dewar at the University of Glasgow and the extraordinary contribution that the Glasgow debater made, and continues to make, to political life in Scotland.

The advantage of debating at school is not simply that it produces young politicians. It has many advantages for all pupils who get involved; for example, the way in which debating is practised in universities and schools makes it as much of an exercise in active listening as an exercise in speaking. It is important that that skill is being developed through the way in which schools have pursued the structure of debates.

Debating is also great fun and allows pupils to develop composure and self-confidence within a formal structure. If members want to see how people can have great fun within formal structures, they should go to University of St Andrews debates, which have perfected the notion of how to have fun in debating. Universities such as St Andrews should be commended for their part in

encouraging debating. Over the years—I do not know whether it is happening this year—the University of Edinburgh has offered the services of its senior debaters to schools throughout Edinburgh and the Lothians to help pupils with their debating skills. It deserves a great deal of praise for that.

I echo the call for support to be given to the ESU. I would hate to put an absolute figure on such support, because if we are going to give some money to that organisation we should also explore whether the Executive could provide some minor financial support to encourage other avenues of activity to keep going or to get going. I believe that such a small investment in a subject of such immense value to Scotland would mean a very great return for the educational development of young people.

17:33

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate my colleague Brian Monteith on securing this important debate. In his motion and opening speech, he highlighted the benefits that debating can offer pupils. I also add my support to the positive points that members have made about debating in schools and its impact on students' confidence and their intellectual and social skills. With fewer schools offering pupils the opportunity to participate in formal debates, I particularly welcome the ESU's activities and its national debating competition in Scotland.

That said, I want to concentrate on the forthcoming North Lanarkshire debates outreach programme. In September 2004, ESU Scotland reached an agreement with North Lanarkshire Council to run a three-month outreach programme from January to March next year that will be aimed at secondary schools in the council area. There will be a training day for teachers and three full-day workshops for participating schools, at which pupils will have the opportunity to watch a demonstration debate. They will then take part in various exercises including analysing and thinking up arguments for and against a motion before they have a properly structured debate.

North Lanarkshire Council is contributing £5,000 to the cost of the project, which will pay for a temporary project co-ordinator. I am delighted that only yesterday the Scottish Executive announced that it will fund the project to the tune of £2,500, which is certainly welcome.

Already 10 of 26 North Lanarkshire schools have signed up for the programme. I hope that this debate and coverage of the initiative in the local press will highlight and raise awareness of the project and encourage other schools to consider applying to take part. I particularly welcome the

fact that the project is targeted at pupils in the secondary 1 to 3 category, because among pupils of that age there is usually still spontaneity and a lack of self-consciousness that can be built on so that they develop skills that they can use throughout their lives. The initiative is terrific and I wish it and all the participants every possible success.

17:36

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I too congratulate Brian Monteith on his motion. I am sure that if the Labour members had known that he was going to make a decent speech for once in his life they would have turned up in huge numbers. Given Brian Monteith's opening remarks, I will take great pleasure in rubbing in the fact that I was one of the five members who were under the age of 30 when they were elected in 1999.

It is fair to say that the Scots are not the most confident people in the world and perhaps encouraging people to debate is one way of boosting confidence. When we speak to people about being a politician, many say that they hate the thought of having to stand up and speak in public or debate in forums such as the Scottish Parliament. I realise that the inability to do so has not stopped some people getting elected—

Christine Grahame: Or speaking here.

Richard Lochhead: That is right. However, we can all identify with that. The people of Scotland are not that confident. I remember hearing a presentation from a civil servant a few months ago about a project on Scottish confidence that the Executive had undertaken. I was surprised that the project had never really been aired in public, because the presentation, which was based on really deep research, was fascinating. It showed a European league table of young people and their level of confidence. Scots were pretty far down; incidentally, the Greeks topped the table with the most confident young people.

We have a lot of work to do. It is important that we encourage people at as young an age as possible to express themselves and speak in public. My wife told me that in some nurseries, children are being encouraged to talk about their favourite toy, just to get them talking in front of other people. In primary 6, children are asked to choose a topic on which to conduct a debate in front of the class. We want to encourage those sorts of activities.

We know that there are many advantages to encouraging debating in schools, many of which Brian Monteith outlined, such as increasing young people's confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to work as a team, improving their

communication and presentation skills and critical thinking and enabling them to understand the power of argument and both sides of an argument. It also serves the citizenship agenda that is coming into classrooms, as it gives young people the opportunity to research debate topics, learn about how their society and country works and learn about social and political issues.

For those reasons, the English-Speaking Union's initiative in North Lanarkshire should be supported. If it is successful, I hope that it can be spread throughout the country. I understand that the minister is putting cash towards the project, which we welcome. I have written to Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to see whether they are interested in following that example.

My parliamentary assistant, Mark McDonald, is a former president of the Scottish Students Debating Council and has a successful debating background. He went to a state school, but it is worth noting that only one of the five-member school team that will be representing Scotland in the world debating championships this year is from a state school and last year none of the team members was from a state school. I hope that the minister will address that important point. It is clear that there is a huge gap between the culture in the independent private schools and that in the state sector. If we are to boost the confidence of children throughout Scotland we will have to address that issue in the state sector. The question relates not only to the cultural issue, but to the funding issue. Many state schools do not have the cash to send teams to competitions elsewhere. Perhaps the minister could address that too.

It is appropriate that we are debating debating in the chamber because the Parliament has a role to play on the issue. Since 1999, 24,000 children have visited the Scottish Parliament to watch the debates and take advantage of our education service. There are nearly 800,000 children in Scotland, so we have a long way to go before they have all visited us. However, it is in all our interests to get as many children as possible through our doors to let them see how things work. If they visit, I hope that they go and try debating in their towns and schools. We can help to boost people's confidence in Scotland.

17:40

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): This has been an excellent afternoon for democracy. In the previous debate, an intelligent amendment from the SNP was intelligently accepted by the coalition powers that be, which is rare and welcome. Following that, we had an intelligent

motion and speech from a Tory. Today has shown that we all have our good points.

I congratulate Brian Monteith on securing this debate. I also congratulate the English-Speaking Union on the work that it has done to promote debating. Further, I congratulate North Lanarkshire Council on its enlightened attitude to this matter. I have congratulated North Lanarkshire Council several times recently, which is quite worrying, in a way. Seriously, though, its efforts are to be welcomed.

We have all benefited from learning about debating. I learned a lot about it at school. I did not go in for university debating because, on the one or two occasions on which I went along, I found the debates to be entirely full of chancers who were trying to work out whether they could have a better career in the Tory party or the Labour Party—none of them considered the Liberal Democrats because that was in the 1950s, when we did not exist. Instead of running for office, I stuck to running. Of course, I have failed to attain office, so perhaps I should have done more debating and less running.

I learned some lessons from school debating. For example, I was once offended when some former pupils who were at university came back to debate at our school as big guests and spent all of their time rubbishing the other side instead of coming up with constructive ideas of their own. I said, "That is not for me." I suppose that I learned a negative lesson that day. I learned another negative lesson on another occasion. The master in charge of the school debating society was an extremely charming and nice man but totally incompetent administratively, which meant that none of his arrangements ever worked. Because of that, some of my colleagues and I moved a vote of no confidence in him, which caused him to resign. However, the masters and teachers had solidarity with each other and none would take his place, so we had humbly to crawl back to him and ask him back again. From that, I learned that one should never have a coup unless one has a plan B. I have never organised a coup since, so that was a useful lesson.

As others have said, Scots often lack self-confidence and I think that debating can give them that confidence and help develop articulacy. The stand up, speak up and shut up lesson is valuable.

I think that we should encourage debating in primary schools. It might be a bit of a generalisation but—based on my limited experience of speaking to children who visit the Parliament—I find that primary school children are more articulate and ask much more intelligent questions than the secondary school pupils do. It is a commonplace observation that, somehow, our young people—especially the young males—lose

the plot in their first couple of years at secondary school. If we can get them harnessed in primary school, we would do them and us a lot of good.

I look forward to living long enough to see some of those young people entering this Parliament, debating with great skill and being less negative and party-politically hostile than we, regrettably, are. It might be possible for us thereby to arrive at a genuine democracy wherein people, not political parties, run the country.

17:44

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): I congratulate Brian Monteith on obtaining this debate and thank him for his opening remarks. I also thank members around the chamber for their remarks. There is a broad consensus on the value of debating, and that is immensely welcome. I enjoyed some of the reminiscences, and I am relieved that Donald Gorrie is not plotting another coup—that is of some comfort to me.

As members rightly said, many important benefits can be attributed to debating, including improved powers of argument, critical thinking, communication skills, self-esteem and team working. I suppose that those benefits could be encapsulated under the heading "active citizenship". I entirely agree that debating makes an important contribution to the development of those general skills and competencies in children and young people and that those skills and competencies are an important part of Scottish education.

Clearly, the curriculum has an important part to play and, as we announced on 1 November, there will be changes to the curriculum, with a three-to-18 curriculum for the first time. I am grateful for the support of parties throughout the Parliament for many of the ideas that are contained in the curriculum review and "ambitious, excellent schools". Learning and Teaching Scotland has developed materials to support teachers in equipping children from three to 18 with appropriate skills. Members will be familiar with some of the materials that are available on personal and social development, religious and moral education and social subjects, which promote thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life.

I agree with the point that was made about how intense and active the questioning can be when members go to primary schools. As Donald Gorrie said, there is a tail-off in secondary schools, and that is one of the reasons why we are looking to free up the curriculum and provide more space in it for activities such as debating.

Mr Raffan: I agree with what the minister says, but will he assure us that the Executive will actively intervene to drive school debating forward? It gave a generous contribution to North Lanarkshire Council, but is it prepared to make similar contributions to other local authorities in Scotland and actively to encourage debating, perhaps not least by holding a competition here in the Parliament?

Euan Robson: On the latter point, a competition in the Parliament is more a matter for the parliamentary authorities. I will move on to the North Lanarkshire pilot in a moment.

I briefly mention pupil councils, because they are an important development and debates go on within them. In such councils we want pupils to have involvement in decision making; in coming to a decision one needs debating skills, and school councils provide a good focus for such skills.

Robin Harper: There is a crucial point to be added. Pupils can have all the debating skills in the world, but if school councils do not have budgets so that they can take real decisions, all that pupils will learn is that democracy does not work, because nothing will happen after their debates.

Euan Robson: That is an important point, and that is why in our proposals for extending devolved school management we say to head teachers and teachers that they are free to make decisions on the allocation of budgets. We envisage an important role for school councils and I appreciate that the decisions that they take must be followed through.

It is not only in the curriculum that there are chances for young people to develop. They can develop skills and confidence in extracurricular activity and, as members know, we have allocated funding to local authorities under the study support programme since 1999—this year, we committed £12 million. We also fund the Scottish study support network, which is based at the University of Strathclyde and which shares good practice and innovation. We have commissioned an evaluation of the study support programme, which will explore the range and impact of activities that take place in our schools. In taking from this debate the importance of debating skills, I will look to see how they feature in that evaluation, which is due to report in March 2005.

As members will know, the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 changed the focus from processes to outcomes. Indeed, to use the four phrases in the curriculum review, the purpose of the curriculum is to make young people "successful learners", "confident individuals", "responsible citizens" and "effective contributors". Given the fit with each of those categories,

debating and allied skills have a clear role in the curriculum of the future.

As Robin Harper mentioned, active listening is a skill that is complementary to debating and, as Richard Lochhead pointed out, the ability to hear and understand the other person's point of view is important if one is to present one's own arguments in a way that will convince the other person of one's particular view.

Richard Lochhead also put his finger on an important point about participation, which I will consider carefully. There is some encouraging evidence of greater participation in debating by the state school sector, but there is some way to go. I hope that the curriculum developments, and the initiatives such as the one in North Lanarkshire—which I will come to in a moment—will stimulate greater activity.

On the Scottish Youth Parliament, which Keith Raffan mentioned, I think that we need a refresh. We are in discussion with the Scottish Youth Parliament about a number of ways in which we could, as it were, raise the game. The Scottish Youth Parliament has made a good start, but all sorts of things are required in order to bring it on a stage further. I look forward to further discussion on that.

Mr Raffan: I am sure that the minister did not mean to be condescending when he said that we need to refresh the Scottish Youth Parliament. From the performances that I have seen, I think that some of its members could refresh us.

Euan Robson: My intention was not to be condescending about the quality of the Scottish Youth Parliament's work but to say that the organisational side needs some refreshing. We need to consider how we can help with that and how we engage with it. We have engaged to an extent but not as much as we should have done.

Next year will provide some important opportunities for the involvement of young people in major events. Young people will come to Edinburgh to attend the J8 summit, which will precede the G8 summit. I hope that that will provide an opportunity to encourage young people to present their views to G8 leaders in some way, shape or form.

Scotland will also host the important world youth congress next year, which will be attended by about 600 delegates from, I think, 120 or more countries around the world. The delegates will not simply come to one central point but will go around Scotland. They will share their experiences by working on individual projects, which local authorities and other organisations are developing.

Debate and discussion form an important part of the world youth congress. I was lucky enough to

have had the opportunity to go to Morocco to accept the flag—it is actually a conch shell rather than a flag—to bring it back to Scotland. The next congress thereafter will be in Beijing. The important point about the congress is that it will allow young people to engage in debate on a world stage with young people from 120 countries. That important initiative will require some major effort.

Robin Harper: I draw the minister's attention to the Scottish children's parliament, which is a wonderful development. It has a lovely model that involves 20 little children's parliaments around the country. We had an impressive presentation here on the Scottish children's parliament about six weeks ago.

Euan Robson: I am aware of that work. We need to understand further what has been happening with it and to take it on further if we can.

I welcome the English-Speaking Union's work with local authorities, which I have been fully aware of since meeting the organisation's Scottish director last March. Indeed, Jedburgh Grammar School in my constituency reached the second round of the ESU competition in 2003-04. Like other members, I am also aware that organisations other than the ESU promote debating and I am grateful for their work. My elder daughter participated in a debating competition, so I know that many organisations are involved.

Margaret Mitchell rightly mentioned the ESU North Lanarkshire outreach programme. We are waiting to see what happens with that important development. We were pleased to have been able to help with it, not just yesterday but a while ago. We shall take the lessons from what happens in North Lanarkshire and look carefully at how that programme—and young people's debating skills—has been developed across the whole council area.

Developments are also taking place in other areas. In Fife, for example, Madras College in St Andrews, Bell Baxter Academy in Cupar and Waid Academy in Anstruther are running competitions. There is an annual conference on international issues, which is attended by young people from most of the 26 secondary schools in North Lanarkshire, and lots of activities are going on in connection with debating and debating competitions. All of those developments are welcome. They contribute to the confidence of young people throughout Scotland, and we need to ensure the confidence of our young people in the future. When we look ahead, we see how many fewer young people there will be in a few years' time. The figures and demographic trends are quite alarming and we need to equip our young people, through the education system and

through out-of-hours activities, with all the skills that they will need. Debating is one of the skills that will lead to greater confidence in future.

I reiterate our support for the work of the English-Speaking Union and I welcome the outreach work in North Lanarkshire. I look forward to seeing the results of that work in due course and to hearing about its progress and about how we can develop things thereafter.

Meeting closed at 17:57.

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