

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 2 December 2004

Session 2

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2004.

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

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by Astron.

CONTENTS

Thursday 2 December 2004

Debates

Col.

AQUACULTURE	12475
<i>Motion moved—[Lewis Macdonald].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Rob Gibson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mr Ted Brocklebank].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Robin Harper].</i>	
The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald)	12475
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	12480
Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	12484
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)	12487
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)	12491
Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)	12493
Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)	12496
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	12497
Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	12500
Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	12503
John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)	12505
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)	12506
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	12508
Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)	12510
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	12513
Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	12514
George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)	12517
Mr Brocklebank	12519
Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)	12521
Lewis Macdonald	12524
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	12528
QUESTION TIME	12540
EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT	12563
<i>Motion moved—[Mr Tom McCabe].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alasdair Morgan].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mr Brian Monteith].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Tommy Sheridan].</i>	
The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe)	12563
Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP)	12568
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	12571
Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)	12573
Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)	12575
Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	12578
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)	12580
Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)	12583
Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)	12585
Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)	12587
Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)	12589
Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)	12591
Tommy Sheridan	12593
Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)	12595
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	12598
Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)	12600
The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott)	12602
BUSINESS MOTION	12607
<i>Motion moved—[Ms Margaret Curran]—and agreed to.</i>	
DECISION TIME	12608
DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES	12622

Motion debated—[Mike Rumbles].

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)	12622
Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)	12624
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	12626
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	12627
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	12629
Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)	12630
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)	12631
John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)	12633
The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm).....	12634

Oral Answers

Col.

FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	12528
Cabinet (Meetings)	12528
Parole Board for Scotland	12534
Prime Minister (Meetings).....	12530
Public Sector Jobs (Cuts)	12536
Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)	12533
Sectarianism	12537
QUESTION TIME	
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE	12540
EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE, TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT	12540
Foreign Languages (Primary Schools)	12542
Marine National Parks	12545
Modern Languages.....	12544
Schools (Class Sizes).....	12540
VisitScotland (Marketing Strategy)	12546
FINANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES	12547
Domestic Abuse (Prevention)	12548
Housing (Local Authorities)	12551
Housing Support Services	12555
Land-value Taxation	12547
Local Authority Services (One-stop Shops)	12553
Local Government Finance Review	12554
Scottish Borders	12550
GENERAL QUESTIONS	12556
Drugs (Legislation)	12560
Health Services Funding (Grampian)	12556
Racism.....	12562
Road Safety	12558
Strategic Road Projects Review	12561

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 2 December 2004

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

Aquaculture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The first item of business today is a debate on motion S2M-2096, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on a sustainable aquaculture industry, and three amendments to the motion.

09:30

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): It is something over a year since the previous debate in this chamber on Scottish aquaculture. Since then, much has happened, and this is a good moment at which to pause, reflect and look ahead.

Everyone in the chamber recognises the importance of shellfish farming and cultivation to Scotland, which are worth about £500 million a year to the Scottish economy and employ up to 10,000 people in part-time and full-time jobs on the farms and in processing and other support services such as transport and feed supply. The industry is particularly vital to some of our more remote rural areas, especially in the Western Isles and the northern isles and on the western and northern coasts, where communities are sustained by the income generated by aquaculture. Aquaculture is, therefore, not only a fisheries matter but one that lies at the heart of our rural development aspirations.

Despite the difficult conditions under which the industry has been labouring over the past 15 months, progress is being made on a number of fronts. In three areas in particular, the Executive, the industry and other key stakeholders have been working together to make that progress: the pursuit of trade-defence measures; the efforts to improve future competitiveness; and the implementation of the strategic framework for Scottish aquaculture.

Any observer of the aquaculture industry, particularly the salmon sector, will be aware of the pressure that the industry has been under in recent times. One of those pressures has come from the difficulty in attracting investment from banks. One of the reasons why banks are reluctant to invest in the industry is because of the continuing low prices, which means that there is a lack of potential to make a profit. That, in turn, is due in large part to the increasing over-supply to the European market.

The European Commission directorate-general trade is convinced of the case that we have made of there being unfair trade and is committed to aiding our industry to counter that threat. We have gone down the trade-defence route to seek safeguards precisely because of that and have worked closely with our colleagues in the United Kingdom Government and with the industry in pursuing that case. Following representations last year from many of the small and medium-sized enterprises operating in Scotland, those efforts have carried us forward. As I said, we were persuaded to act because of the dire market conditions that resulted in sustained losses for many companies over a period of months.

We recognise the fact that the European market is out of balance for reasons relating to importation and significant and continuing over-supply from Norway and other salmon-producing countries. We have therefore had no option other than to raise our concerns with the UK Government and, in turn—in partnership with the UK Government—with the Commission.

It has taken time to produce results in that regard and many obstacles have had to be overcome. We were delighted in August this year when provisional safeguard measures were secured. However, as those measures near the end of their terms—they will fall in a few days time—it has become clear that they have not done enough to lift market prices and give the industry the boost that it needs. There has also been some resistance to long-term safeguard measures from a number of member states

In spite of that, negotiations for a lasting safeguard solution continue. I am pleased to be able to report that there is a good prospect of our being able to achieve a workable solution, based on definitive proposals, which the Commission is drawing up, to safeguard and protect the Scottish industry from cheap imports. That will include a Commission investigation of Norwegian production costs, in which some of my department's officials will be involved. The measures will lead to a European agreement to put in place a minimum import price that will be sufficient to sustain the Scottish industry and will last for four years.

It is right that we have taken those measures and that we recognise the significance of the industry to the Scottish economy. I am delighted with the support that we have received from UK ministers, who also recognise the significance of the industry to the Scottish economy. Clearly, Norway and other producers, such as Ireland, also regard farmed salmon as being important to their economies. It is right that we do the same and take serious measures to find solutions to the problems that the industry faces.

We have taken those steps in response to the economic pressure that the industry has been under but also because of a recognition that, given a level playing field and the opportunity to compete fairly, Scottish farmed salmon can compete with salmon that is farmed anywhere else in the world. By putting in place the measures that I have discussed, we will achieve a sustainable aquaculture industry in Scotland.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Could the minister clarify what timescale he expects for the implementation of the measures that he discussed? With every week that goes by, many businesses bleed yet more cash. They can survive the current market conditions for only a finite amount of time.

Lewis Macdonald: That is a reasonable question. The temporary, provisional, safeguard provisions are likely to fall on 5 December. We anticipate that proposals resulting from the investigation into costs in Norway will come back to the Commission by 20 January. Therefore, we expect measures to be in place by around February 2005. That will be early enough to make a significant difference to many producers in Scotland.

Of course, our energies have not been devoted only to trade defence and safeguard measures, important though we recognise those to be. We have also begun taking steps to improve the competitiveness of all parts of the aquaculture industry, working with large and small businesses.

On streamlining regulation, we have made a clear commitment to review the burden of regulation on aquaculture. We have done that in partnership with the industry, which regards that as a priority. We need transparent procedures and we need consents to be processed speedily and at minimal cost. We also need to be smart about how new regulatory requirements are implemented and enforced.

Let me emphasise that none of that need reduce the effectiveness of regulation. Many of the regulations are in place for good reasons, such as the protection of the environment, and we will continue to maintain that regulatory framework. In the past few days, however, we have appointed new officials to work with the industry specifically on ways in which the regulatory regime can be reduced and streamlined.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the industry receive anything in exchange for the £1.7 million that it has paid to the Crown Estate commission in relation to that body's 2003 report? Is it not time that that money was returned to the industry, which receives little or no benefit from it at the moment?

Lewis Macdonald: We need to put the matter into perspective. The industry will confirm that Crown Estate rentals account for about 1 per cent of its costs. Therefore, there is a requirement for a degree of proportionality.

The most important matter in relation to changing the regulatory framework with regard to the Crown Estate is the improvement of the planning process and the need to bring aquaculture within the local authority planning process. That work is on-going. The required documents concerning the strategic planning policy and the planning guidelines are out to consultation and we expect them to come into force around this time next year. When that happens, we believe that it will greatly improve the regulatory framework within which the aquaculture industry operates.

We are also looking at the scope for improving the siting of fish farms. There are a lot of very small farms scattered around the coast and, although that is not a bad thing in itself, we can make the industry operate more efficiently by bringing sites together and by relocating them where that is appropriate, thereby improving the position with regard to treatment of sea lice, for example. A number of initiatives are seeking to achieve that efficiency. There are also a number of examples of partnership working in the industry where fish farmers have rationalised their procedures and come together to reduce the burden on them all.

Quite a lot is happening already and we intend that more should be done. We believe that the strategic framework for Scottish aquaculture is the right framework within which that work can proceed. In order to continue with that work, we have put in place a working group that brings together many of the key stakeholders in the industry and which is working to put in place some of the things that we have identified as important for achieving our objectives.

Among the achievements of the working group in carrying forward the strategic framework are the creation of the new Scottish aquaculture research forum; the advancement of local authority planning controls; the development of exports action plans; and the preparation of work in the fields of training and skills. The development of the first ever farmed fish welfare code will be welcomed by many and will shortly be put out to consultation.

It is clear that some of those action points are moving forward faster than others. We make no apology for that because we are working to bring the industry with us and are seeking to achieve a consensus in the sector so that people agree on where they want to go. We can work together to achieve that. I believe that the story so far is very positive.

We have always to be alert to threats and challenges to the industry. Members will be aware that a fortnight ago, there was a suspicion that there might be infectious salmon anaemia on a farm in the Western Isles. I hope that members are also aware of the measures that we have taken to ensure that that situation was dealt with quickly and efficiently in a way that prevented the spread of the problem. Controls have been placed on the farm in question to restrict the movement of stock. The company has acted very quickly to address the problem and we are well prepared for any further developments. I hope that the measures taken and the controls applied will succeed in containing any infection should an outbreak of the disease be confirmed. We will maintain the utmost vigilance through the next few weeks. That is a good example of how the industry has responded to the challenge and recognised the need to be seen to act—and to act effectively—in partnership with the Executive.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): On the subject of the health of the product, is the minister aware of the international proposals that are being circulated by the Codex committee on food additives and contaminants that would raise the current acceptable levels of radionuclides to such a degree that most shellfish from the Solway firth would be unsaleable? Given that there is a fledgling aquaculture industry in the Solway firth, will the minister defend the Food Standards Agency's position that those proposals are based on false science? Will he assure the chamber that he will defend robustly the FSA's position on those tolerance levels?

Lewis Macdonald: I agree with the principle that any decision on such matters should be based on sound science. Of course, we look to the Food Standards Agency as our authority and adviser on that matter. We have a clear commitment to preserving the health of Scottish aquaculture products and to getting the message across to the marketplace that this is a safe, healthy and high-quality form of food. We are working with the industry and succeeding in projecting that message into markets both in continental Europe and in these islands. We will continue to work on that in the period ahead.

It is critical to the future success and sustainability of the industry that there is an end to the kind of scare stories that we heard some time ago. Frankly, those scare stories appeared to be designed to undermine the sustainability of the Scottish aquaculture sector; we want no more of that. We want to work with the industry to project the message that it produces healthy and nutritious food and we want to work with the communities that depend on the jobs within that industry.

We continue to view the sustainable development of Scottish aquaculture as an achievable and desirable end.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): A lot of positive things are being said today but, as George Lyon mentioned earlier, there are people out there who are under real pressure. Will the minister just go that extra half mile and approach the Scottish banks to make sure that they clearly understand the changed proposition that is aquaculture in Scotland?

Lewis Macdonald: I deliberately began my remarks on trade defence with a reference to the banks and investment. Jim Mather's point is pertinent; it is critical that the banks understand the position of the industry and the measures that Government is taking to improve that position. I hope that the message goes out from the chamber today that Parliament fully supports the measures that we are taking to secure a sustainable future for Scottish aquaculture.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive commitment, as set out in *A Partnership for a Better Scotland*, to support a sustainable aquaculture industry, through the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture and other measures, including trade defence and a review of the regulatory procedures and associated costs and of the scope for improved access to veterinary medicines, all of which are designed to protect and improve employment and investment opportunities in many parts of the Highlands and Islands, including many of our most remote rural and island communities.

09:46

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The minister's first update on the strategic framework for aquaculture and other measures is welcomed by the Scottish National Party. However, we consider that setting out a timetable for the adoption and application of a framework for spatial planning of marine and coastal resources, including fish farming, is now a top priority. That would allow the aquaculture framework to fit into the planned strategic environmental assessment of Scotland's coastlines that was announced by the Deputy First Minister Jim Wallace on 23 November 2004. If we are to avoid the unwanted accusations of bad neighbourly behaviour being levelled by some of those who oppose fish farming, and if we are to square the interests of conservation, fishers, the military and all other users of our inshore waters, it makes sense to speed up the delivery of spatial planning processes as the key to sustainability.

Let us take the aquaculture framework plans as our example. In 2002, Shetland Islands Council won an award for its new regime for the aquaculture industry. It has created a new,

planning-led marine development control regime using new technology to aid policy and implementation and successfully combines land and sea-based map data. This country requires such building blocks within a spatial plan.

Two years previously, the judges of the Scottish awards for quality planning commended the Loch Eriboll plan that was prepared by a team from Highland Council. What use are such plans unless the inhibitors to sustainable development are removed? Loch Eriboll has a number of oyster and mussel operations and although a number of leases have been granted, they have not been taken up. National planning guidelines insist that a potential superquarry could exploit the shores of the loch. Every would-be shellfish lessee is warned of the possibility of such a superquarry and its impact. In effect, development of those ultra-clean waters is blighted by national decree, no matter how unlikely the development of the superquarry. A coastal strategy must remove such threats.

Existing shellfish producers in the area complain of other inhibitors to development. The Scottish Executive could take urgent action to ease the costs of transporting shellfish to markets from remote Highland mainland and island producers because next-day delivery is a must. In his autumn statement today, the chancellor is going to be talking about the cost of fuel, which is central to the success of much of the industry. What input does the minister have on that subject? Ministers could intervene with the Royal Mail to ensure that parcel force collects in small communities such as Tongue and Durness. Ministers could ensure that ScotRail reinstates the red star parcel service on the far north, Kyle and Oban railway lines so that small packets of shellfish could be carried that way. Small producers are the backbone of a sustainable industry and they are the most disadvantaged when it comes to finding economic alternatives. If the Scottish Executive's support for our sustainable, diverse and competitive aquaculture industry is to be believed, those and many other inhibitors have to be eliminated.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):

Will the member concede that the ministerial focus on dedicating efforts to dealing with the Norwegian blight that is the dumping of cheap imports on European Union markets is and should remain the priority?

Rob Gibson: It is a priority that I will address in a minute. I am talking about some of the priorities of small producers now. I wonder whether Mr Morrison deals with all the fish farms in his constituency in the Western Isles, including the ones that are owned by Norwegians as well as those owned by Scots. We will be interested to hear about that if he speaks in the debate later.

Producers such as those in Loch Eriboll and the Kyle of Tongue have some of the cleanest waters in the country, but the Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers sees the key areas through which it can make progress as being quality and standards III and the Water Services etc (Scotland) Bill.

The producers do not hear the Executive talking about putting in place schemes that will deal with the underpowered forms of sewage treatment that exist at Tarbert on Loch Fyne or about the problems in Loch Harport in Skye. The minister could use elements of the Scottish Executive's powers to intervene and ensure that shellfish waters are the cleanest that we can possibly have. During the consultation on Q and S III and the Water Services etc (Scotland) Bill, only Argyll and Bute Council suggested that shellfish production was one of the key reasons for cleaning up the water supply. What is the Executive going to do about that?

The complexity of making a regulatory framework effective is self-evident. However, removing other obstacles to progress would help. A one-stop shop must be put in place and my colleagues will speak about how we think that should happen.

I mention the Crown Estate commission, which Fergus Ewing also mentioned in his earlier intervention on the minister. Only constitutional medicine will remove the parasitical growth of that organisation, and we have to have the guts to take action. Winnie Ewing, councillors in the Highlands and I have been talking about that for the past 10 to 20 years and we are still waiting for something to happen. Of course we welcome the shifting of the commission's planning powers, but its tax powers have to be removed as well.

The role of the Scottish aquaculture research forum could be far greater if it were better funded. I notice that the body that will improve Scottish confidence and well-being is to get £750,000 from the Executive, whereas the £100,000 that is being given to the research forum will cover the costs of two salaries. We need to make a genuine commitment to that—

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry, I must make progress.

Fish farming has come a long way in the past 20 years, but it has a long way to go if it is to access sustainable fish oil and sources for feed. We all agree that it needs to be backed by momentum in Scotland to create a stable market and that it must produce healthy food for home and export markets alike. A jingoistic debate about the relative quality of Norwegian, Chilean and Scottish farmed salmon will not help that process.

The Government's proposals must be shown to be delivering a framework that sets the highest standards that we can achieve. Scottish Quality Salmon has gained credibility through the Label Rouge designation in France, but that is a niche market. In any case, consumers in France see smoked salmon from Ireland, Norway and Scotland on the shelves, and they buy a lot of Norwegian salmon as well as other products.

George Lyon: The member is more than seven minutes into his speech and he has not yet addressed the fundamental point that we are here to discuss today, which is the economic sustainability of the industry. Does the member have anything to say on behalf of the Scottish National Party on that important matter?

Rob Gibson: I am trying to point out that many aspects of the industry need to be sustainable. The smallest producers of all, which I mentioned earlier, are a part of that, but George Lyon seems to ignore them.

The dumping of Norwegian salmon in the EU has to be tackled. We heard the minister say that the current provisions will run out. The Norwegian product is not generally inferior, but because the competition legislation that affects Scottish and Irish producers is tighter, we have to take a much more detailed approach when putting new regulations in place. People buy salmon around Christmas so having new regulations in place by February is far too late in the game for this year.

Lewis Macdonald: Will Mr Gibson confirm that he understands the point that, in order for an effective and definitive safeguard to be put in place, there needs to be a process that identifies the real costs to the Norwegian industry of producing fish that the Norwegians are selling at what appear to be loss-making prices? That is why the Commission has to take a number of weeks to establish the evidence base before taking further action.

Rob Gibson: Let us face it—the problem is that the Commission should have started a bit sooner.

Praise is due to individual fish-farm businesses such as Loch Duart Ltd and Salar Smokehouse Ltd, which has won a UK food manufacturers excellence award and is one of Rick Stein's food heroes. We welcome the successful partnership to drive up the standards that make for sustainable businesses between Waitrose and Aquascot Ltd from Alness and the processors and small independent fish farms that use traceability, which is demanded by customers.

The SNP is particularly concerned that a sustainable, diverse and competitive aquaculture industry will succeed only when all aspects of marine activity are synchronised. We are well aware of the time that it has taken and the

complexity that is involved in making progress. However, the Scottish Government has to heed the sustainability imperative and adopt the holistic approach that will be required sooner rather than later and which the SNP amendment spells out.

I move amendment S2M-2096.2, to insert at end:

"and agrees to set out a timetable for the adoption and application of a framework for spatial planning of marine and coastal resources, including fish farming, taking advantage where appropriate of the planned strategic environmental assessment of Scotland's coastline announced by the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning on 24 November 2004, and calls for a regulatory one-stop shop."

09:56

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Although Scotland's aquaculture industry is diverse and extremely valuable, I will concentrate my remarks on farmed salmon because, as we have heard, it makes a massive contribution to the Scottish economy.

Few involved in the industry will forget 9 January last year, when scientists from six research centres in the United States claimed to have found carcinogenic toxins in farmed British and European salmon and warned consumers to reduce their intake of Scottish farmed salmon to three portions a year on health grounds. There could be few more damaging allegations about a foodstuff, especially one so vital to the economic health of Scotland and of the Highlands in particular, where the industry provides some 5,000 or 6,000 jobs and around £2 million a week in wages alone.

Within a month it was reported that Scottish farmed salmon sales had slumped by 80 per cent as European shoppers switched to salmon from North America and New Zealand and catastrophe appeared to loom. However, the industry's most prestigious brand, Scottish Quality Salmon, hit back, arguing that the study misused the risk assessment guidelines provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency and citing the health benefits of farmed salmon as reported in more than 5,000 scientific studies worldwide.

The Food Standards Agency added its support and pointed out that the dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls found in the study were within the safety levels set by the World Health Organisation. Eventually, the American report was exposed as biased and unfounded. It was biased because it was funded by the Philadelphia-based Pew Charitable Trusts, a green pressure group with a somewhat questionable history, and the scientists in the laboratories involved did not specifically test farmed salmon.

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Does the member agree that the industry did not dispute the findings on the levels of pollutants, but disputed the conclusion of the study, which found that, although each pollutant was within acceptable levels, there was a potential cocktail effect? Does he agree that the jury is still out on that one?

Mr Brocklebank: The member is trying to squirm her way round the results that came out. However, the industry suggests that the scientific basis on which the study was carried out was seriously flawed.

The good news, however, is that United Kingdom consumers have ignored the scare stories, and the number of salmon meals eaten is up by 20 per cent year on year. The final seal of approval, I guess, is the current television advertising campaign for Sainsbury's led by chef Jamie Oliver, who sings the praises of Scottish salmon.

Although much of what Lewis Macdonald said earlier was welcome—and I agree with large parts of his speech—I wish that I could report that the Scottish Executive played a major part in the fightback for Scottish salmon. The truth is that its response was cumbersome and tentative. It took five months to set up a healthy eating campaign with the industry and the proposed new communications strategy, supposedly meant to educate the consumer and combat adverse publicity, will not be in place until the end of 2005. As ever with this Executive, that will be too little, too late.

Likewise, the industry has continually complained about the massive over-regulation that it labours under. As we have heard, Scottish Quality Salmon has won the coveted Label Rouge award for culinary excellence and quality control, yet it toils under no fewer than 10 statutory bodies, 63 pieces of legislation and 43 European Community directives. We have heard that the Scottish industry faces the fiercest competition from countries such as Norway and Chile, whose industries work under far fewer regulations. Despite Lewis Macdonald's stated concerns and efforts to stabilise prices in his negotiations with the European Union, it appears that very little has been achieved.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Mr Brocklebank accept that the correct way to address regulation, the promotion of the product and the other issues that he has mentioned is to do so in collaboration with the industry? That is precisely what the Executive has been doing.

Mr Brocklebank: I, too, talk to the industry and I get a feeling of tremendous unease from it that things are taking so long while it is bleeding away.

We are talking about an industry that has the potential to be massively lucrative, but which is starting to die as a result of the delays that we have heard about.

No one is more conscious than Scottish salmon producers are of the need to ensure adequate environmental protection, and of course we are aware of the serious news from 19 November of a possible case of disease on the west coast. However, the industry's pleas for a one-stop-shop-type regulatory body to slash through the red tape and ensure that all the various environmental protection agencies and statutes are handled by one body appear to have been put on the back burner. The new aquaculture bill will not even begin its passage through the Parliament until autumn next year. To be honest, many salmon farmers in the Highlands and Shetland in particular will not be in business by then.

Meanwhile, the Executive has failed to meet 14 of the 55 centralised objectives that it set for the industry, and a further 12 objectives are on-going. That is another example of the Executive failing to meet its own targets. When will the Executive recognise that the industry needs urgent reductions in the number of rules and the amount of red tape and fewer centralised objectives?

Lewis Macdonald: I return to the point that I made earlier. Does Mr Brocklebank accept that those targets have been set in collaboration with the industry and that many of the on-going targets are ones for which the lead body is not the Executive, but the industry, the trade association or other partners? Together, we will get the industry to change in effective and sustainable ways precisely by taking such an approach rather than by being driven by a target timetable.

Mr Brocklebank: How does the minister respond to the fact that we are considering an industry in crisis? We cannot go on talking for ever. That strong point is being made by the industry even as we speak.

I have said previously in the chamber that having no fewer than eight bodies that oversee the industry is a nonsense. So far, only 0.02 per cent of the Scottish coastline has been developed for fish farming. Instead of applications going to eight separate bodies, they should be dealt with speedily and effectively, as they are in Norway.

As a result, surely the time is long overdue for UK powers over aquacultural policy to be transferred to the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department in Edinburgh. Given that 90 per cent of UK aquaculture is Scottish, that aquaculture has a vital role to play in producing employment in the remoter parts of Scotland and that farmed salmon accounts for 50 per cent of all Scottish food exports, surely the logic of

devolution suggests that such an important Scottish business should be governed from Scotland. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is the lead body when the EC considers matters that have a critical impact on Scottish aquaculture, and the UK fisheries minister will lead the forthcoming Brussels negotiations, with a Scottish minister—Ross Finnie—bringing up the rear, so to speak. However, 70 per cent of the fishing industry is based in Scotland.

The current revision of the fish health directive is a classic example. DEFRA is simply not as well briefed as Scottish ministers are on that issue—or on many other issues that affect aquaculture. In the UK, the critical impact of that revision will largely affect a Scottish business. The time is surely ripe for SEERAD to take the lead.

We have a great opportunity to take advantage of the demand for a healthy, nutritious and sustainable seafood industry with the continuation of thousands of jobs in the places in which they are needed. What is sadly lacking so far is imaginative and resourceful leadership from the Scottish Executive, backed by the speedy implementation of an aquaculture act that frees rather than stifles initiative and unshackles the bureaucratic straitjacket that is putting the future of so many Scottish seafood companies at risk.

I move amendment S2M-2096.3, to insert at end:

"but questions the timetable and scope of the proposed Aquaculture bill; further notes that the Executive has still failed to meet 14 targets it set out in the Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture, and laments that it has taken it six years to set up a review into the current regulatory framework with a view to lightening the burden of regulation that threatens to choke the industry."

10:04

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I welcome the tacit admission in the title of the Executive's motion that we have a long way to go before sustainability in aquaculture is achieved in Scotland. Mass escapes, sea lice, pollution from cages, inappropriately sited farms, the ever-present possibility of pollution from veterinary medicines when mistakes are made and the spread of diseases through overstocking are still with us. Scotland's rivers are losing the salmon and sea trout for which they have been renowned for centuries. The Fisheries Research Services report on wild salmon and sea trout catches for 2003 shows the lowest-ever recorded total, although conditions are not nearly so bad on the east coast, where there are no salmon farms, as they are on the west coast

Fergus Ewing: Is Robin Harper aware of the evidence that was presented to the Rural Affairs Committee in the first session of Parliament during

that committee's scrutiny of the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Bill? That evidence showed that decline in wild salmon and trout stocks began long before the inception of fish farming.

Robin Harper: I am well aware of that. However, it is—if one compares what has happened on the west coast with what has happened on the east coast, and if one considers the prevalence of and damage caused by sea lice—abundantly clear that one cannot believe for a minute that fish farms off the west coast have no effect on the environment or on salmon and sea trout. That is not a tenable proposition.

Monitoring and regulation of sea lice still leave much to be desired. It is impossible for us to develop a properly regulated and sustainable sea-lice management strategy when the industry and the area management groups operate in almost complete secrecy, under the guise of commercial confidentiality. Companies here tell us nothing, but the same companies operating in Norway and Ireland give monthly reports on sea-lice infestation in order to assist and facilitate control and the timing of chemical treatments.

As I have said, thousands of salmon have escaped this year. In Norway, the tidal and sea conditions that are likely to affect cages are codified into a five-tier site-classification system that is based on wave heights, current, wind speeds and so on. Cages must meet stringent construction standards in order to guarantee that they can withstand the conditions in which they will be moored. We have no such stringency in Scottish regulation; in fact, there is a proposal from the fish farmers that they be allowed even larger cages. I am talking about cages of 20,000 tonnes. Without higher construction standards, there will simply be an increase in the likelihood of mass escapes from sea cages. I will give an example of how raising construction standards can work. In the Trondelag area of Norway, there were five years in which there were no escapes after all sea cages were strengthened. I am sorry, but I have to say that more stringent regulation is needed in many areas.

Three years ago, when the Executive produced its first aquaculture strategy, I observed that there seemed to be no commitment to strengthening or—more important—to implementing locational guidelines within a fixed timescale. My concern can be imagined when I learned this week that the Crown Estate has identified 139 marine sites on the west coast of Scotland that may be inappropriately sited. After consultation of Scottish Natural Heritage, the list was reduced to about 60 sites that should probably be moved to reduce sea-bed pollution and enhance the marine environment. Five years of responsibility for the

safety of the marine environment has resulted in precisely nothing happening in relation to locational guidelines. That surely makes a mockery of the system.

The Executive's response is scarcely believable. There seems to be a proposition that when all the sites are transferred from the Crown Estate to local authorities—it is not yet clear whether sufficient preparation has been made for that—they will receive deemed consent, unless a new environmental impact assessment has been completed, which indicates that a farm must be moved. It appears that if the Executive accepts the proposals that I have mentioned, the 60 inappropriately sited farms could continue to operate for another 30 years. I invite the minister to comment on that in summing up.

George Lyon: Last week we heard the Greens championing the interests of farmers in their fight against supermarkets and in respect of their need for a sustainable future. So far in this morning's debate, I have heard nothing of that tenor from Robin Harper. Does the Scottish Green Party agree with the leading Green activist Don Staniford, who has called for closure of cages in Scotland and for 10,000 people in our communities to be thrown out of their jobs, or does it reject that view?

Robin Harper: I reject that view. Don Staniford does not speak for the Scottish Green Party. Eleanor Scott speaks for the party in the north of Scotland and I speak for it in the chamber.

I have not mentioned the Executive's commitment to defending the industry, which includes shellfish farming. Of course I commend the Executive for doing what it can to defend the industry. I am, however, concerned about what it is defending, which is the quality of the industry; that is why I am speaking about that in this morning's debate. I am sure that George Lyon will understand that position.

Fergus Ewing: Does Robin Harper agree that Scottish farmed salmon should be available for purchase by consumers in Scottish retail outlets? Yes or no?

Robin Harper: As far as I know, we have never suggested that Scottish farmed salmon should not be available for purchase. As the member knows, our concern is that the Food Standards Agency has issued guidance on eating salmon, but we have yet to see the science on which the guidance was based explained in a way that everyone can understand. Until the FSA produces the science from its own research, we will refrain from commenting on the situation. That is the position that we believe we should hold. Fergus Ewing knows perfectly well that we always uphold the precautionary principle when making statements

on such—[*Interruption.*] The member is interrupting me from a sedentary position. He has asked his question and I am answering it.

Lewis Macdonald: I want to be clear about what Robin Harper is saying. In response to Fergus Ewing, he seemed to say that he did not know what the position was. The member has lodged an amendment that says that we need to do more towards having a sustainable aquaculture industry. Clearly, we will have no sustainable industry if no one buys the fish.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should take no more interventions as he is now over time.

Robin Harper: I will answer the question briefly. We are refraining from offering advice on the quantity of salmon that people should eat, for the simple reason that we do not believe that the FSA has given us the full scientific evidence for its assertions on that. We are dealing with a variable and we are not prepared to back what the FSA says until we receive further information from it. We will maintain that position until the FSA responds.

It is a matter of great concern that the Executive has worked for between two and three years on criteria for relocation, but seems to have come up with no answers, despite the fact that those answers are staring it in the face. The Executive's record so far seems to be about hand wringing, sitting on thumbs and ineffectiveness—it has been all talk and no action. There has been no action on locational guidelines or environmental impact assessments, which are still being carried out by the industry. Surely EIAs should be performed by properly funded independent assessors.

There has been no action on diversifying medical treatments. We are in the ridiculous situation that licences can be granted for new fish farms before any pronouncement has been made on whether a wide variety of medicines can be used on the sites. There has also been no action on fish escapes. Throughout this inaction, our precious wild salmon and sea trout stocks are being damaged and diminished year on year. The dispassionate observer could be forgiven for coming to the conclusion that the Executive has no concern for wild fish stocks.

I move amendment S2M-2096.1, to leave out from "commitment" to end and insert:

"stated commitment to a sustainable aquaculture industry; welcomes and endorses the aim of the Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture to establish "a sustainable, diverse, competitive and economically viable aquaculture industry"; further welcomes the Executive's commitment to a review of regulatory procedures and associated costs; notes that the wording of the title of the motion, through the use of the word "towards", acknowledges that the industry is currently not sustainable,

and calls on the Executive, following its review, to develop a regulatory framework and overarching statutory code of practice that will include statutory duties and greater transparency for area management groups, codification of sea cage containment standards, statutory sea lice monitoring and reporting, provisions in respect of wild salmon and sea trout lochs, no relaxation of present constraints on the use of veterinary medicines, properly-financed transfer of powers from the Crown Estate to local authorities, proper support for all aquaculture activities and implementation of locational guidelines and optimum stocking levels in addition to working within the carrying capacity of the environment both locally and nationally and throughout the supply chain."

10:16

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): There is no doubt about the importance of aquaculture to Scotland and the Scottish economy. As others have said, the industry contributes half by value of our total food exports, is worth £500 million to the Scottish economy and supports not only thousands of jobs all told, but vital jobs on the west coast and in the islands that sustain fragile local economies and keep communities alive. It is therefore not surprising that both Parliament and the Executive have devoted considerable attention to the industry, both in the first four years and in this session. The 2003 partnership agreement reiterates our commitment to

"support the growth of an aquaculture industry in salmon, other fin-fish and shellfish that is sustainable, diverse and competitive."

When I prepared for this debate, it was an interesting exercise for me to reread the Transport and the Environment Committee's two reports on its aquaculture inquiry and to realise how much progress has been made since they were published in 2002. The ministerial working group for aquaculture began its work at about the same time and produced the strategic framework for Scottish aquaculture at the end of March 2003. Many of the committee's recommendations were picked up in the priority actions that were identified in appendix 3 to the strategy. The revised appendix 3 that was published in November this year outlines progress and resets the priorities for action.

A number of the original actions have been completed, but the main message that I take from the comments on progress in the November 2004 appendix 3 is that it takes time properly to get disparate stakeholders together to tackle complex issues. It is not possible or sensible to wade in, slashing à la Brocklebank. Everyone agreed that it is important to establish how much impact regulatory costs have on the industry, but it has taken two attempts to get right the tender to do the work. A fundamental requirement in developing an integrated regulatory framework that takes assimilative and environmental capacities into

account is to establish how to work those out, which has proved to be even more complicated than was anticipated. However, it is great that difficult and complex tasks are being taken on and dealt with. We now have a Scottish aquaculture research forum that can identify where work needs to be done to ensure that policy decisions are based soundly on good information.

Rob Gibson: Will the member share with us her view on whether the forum is properly funded to carry out the task that she has outlined for it?

Nora Radcliffe: There is a distinction between funding to identify gaps and funding to fill the gaps by commissioning the required research. The amount that has been allocated is not the final story. It is funding that opens the door to what will follow, on a good base.

A draft Scottish planning policy for marine aquaculture is out for consultation. As the minister said, the farmed fish welfare code is imminent. A study of the regulatory costs of the industry is under way and the transfer of planning authority from the Crown Estate to local authorities is being implemented. Relocation of fish farms that are badly sited is a long-standing issue. A list of possible candidates is under consideration and proposals will be made by the summer.

The industry has been working internally on a code of practice for the past 18 months, but I was told yesterday that a draft will be published for comment in mid-December. After a reasonable period of consultation of two to three months, the code will be finalised and will come into force. The code has had a long gestation, but that has ensured its support throughout the industry. The code has, I am told, been strengthened in successive drafts. We will soon see both how stringent it is and, as time goes on, whether a voluntary code will work or whether it needs statutory force.

A great deal is being done in Scotland to deliver a healthy and sustainable aquaculture industry, but it is an industry that operates in a fiercely competitive global arena in which the playing field is far from level. In recent years, our producers have had to withstand a flood of Norwegian salmon coming on to the market at prices that represent a significant loss to Norway's producers. The EU salmon producers group sent us all a press release that highlights its analysis of the data on production costs and selling prices that were published by the Norwegian directorate of fisheries. It demonstrates that Norwegian producers have just had their third year of losses of the order of £100 million per annum. The EUSPG postulates that Norway is embarking on a deliberate policy of destroying the competition to gain near-monopoly of the market. The Executive and the United Kingdom Government have made

strenuous efforts in Brussels to win trade-defence measures against Norwegian dumping. It is vital for the industry to get prices to sustainable levels and to get some stability back in the market. I say, "Roll on, February."

Price stability at a realistic level is the most urgent requirement for the industry, but it faces a longer-term challenge on the issue of how few veterinary medicines are available to it. Pharmaceutical companies must apply separately in each member state of the EU for marketing authorisations, and face annual costs to keep medicines licensed. Reform of the system to allow pan-European consents would remove the disincentive for companies to license their products in all the different countries or to bring new products on to the market. Our fish farmers having access to only two different medicines to control sea lice could be a recipe for disaster if resistance among salmon to either or both develops, and does not allow for prudential rotation. With an enlarged EU, the argument for pan-European procedures has become even stronger and must be pushed until it is won.

Aquaculture has come a long way from its experimental beginnings in the 1960s to the major industry it is today. However, if it is to continue to grow and prosper, we must achieve equitable trading practices, get planning and regulation right, ensure that the environmental impact of fish farming is not causing damage and persuade lots of people to adopt a far healthier diet that includes eating oily fish and choosing quality Scottish produce. The Executive is actively pursuing all of the above, and people are increasingly coming together to work to their mutual benefit. Different sectors of the farmed fish industry, wild-fish interests, tourism providers, training colleges, environmental bodies, research scientists, retailers, consumers, local authorities, regulatory bodies and politicians all have parts to play in maintaining and developing this vital industry. We can and will do that. I support the motion.

10:23

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):

This is an appropriate time to have a debate on our important aquaculture industry. As the minister said, it is almost a year since Parliament last debated the subject. I am encouraged by much of what Lewis Macdonald said in his opening remarks and I thank Allan Wilson for his significant efforts on behalf of my constituents in the Western Isles, and people outwith the Western Isles, prior to the Bosman-type transfer that he and Lewis Macdonald went through. I note that Allan Wilson has recently been described in some quarters as "reprehensible", but I happily put on record that my experience of Allan Wilson—certainly in the

context of aquaculture—is that he is far from reprehensible. I also put on record my thanks to Douglas Alexander at the Department of Trade and Industry. I know that he and Lewis Macdonald have energetically tackled the great issues and challenges that face the industry. I was delighted to learn that the EU DG trade is now convinced of the Executive's and the Government's case for trade-defence measures. That will be welcomed throughout the industry.

We can never overstate the importance of aquaculture to the socioeconomic well-being of many parts of Scotland. Farmed salmon represents about 40 per cent of all Scottish food exports, and aquaculture makes ideal use of our natural resources and offers the prospect of stable, long-term and highly skilled jobs, not only in primary production but in processing and in a multitude of upstream and downstream businesses. It was for that reason that, 25 years ago, the then Highlands and Islands Development Board and the local authority—Comhairle nan Eilean Siar—took the positive approach of encouraging the development of aquaculture, and salmon farming in particular. They recognised the benefits that it could bring to areas such as the Western Isles; that recognition has been well-rewarded.

In his opening speech, Lewis Macdonald rightly focused on an area of concern—the commercial performance of the industry—and on an element that has fast resulted in a serious decline, which is the dumping of Norwegian salmon on the EU market. The Norwegian industry, which is three to four times the size of our industry, has continued to expand while, by its own reckoning, losing some £300 million in the process. The recently published figures about the debt that the industry is carrying explodes and dismisses the myth that the Norwegian industry is far more competitive than the Scottish one. That is a myth, and has now been exposed as being just that.

The Scottish industry has suffered horribly as a result of the disastrously low and entirely unsustainable prices of salmon from Norway. There have been closures, receiverships and bankruptcies—if Tavish Scott were here, he would be able to share with us some of the very sad stories emanating from his constituency in Shetland. Sadly, most of Scotland's salmon industry is unbankable, so I welcome the minister's reference to the role that the banks will play in aquaculture once we rid ourselves of the Norwegian dumping blight.

I acknowledge what the Executive ministerial team, in conjunction with the DTI and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with the full backing of the Prime Minister, have been doing in that regard. Efforts are focused on the Norwegian blight and

on the blatant subsidisation of Norway's industry at the expense of our world-class product. The indigenous industry is extremely appreciative of that unstinting support and commitment. We all look forward to a positive outcome, either in the shape of a secure and sustainable safeguard measure, or through the implementation of an effective anti-dumping duty.

Members have mentioned scare stories, and we know that since its first days 25 or 30 years ago aquaculture has had to endure a barrage of abuse and a constant stream of scare stories. Ted Brocklebank dealt comprehensively with the latest scare story that emanated from Philadelphia, when the Pew Charitable Trusts produced a so-called scientific study. That report has been denigrated by the Food Standards Agency, the European Commission and the World Health Organisation, yet—incredibly—a ramshackle organisation that masquerades as a political party continues to uphold and adhere to the nonsense that was contained in that report. We have had to endure the rantings of those who specialise in such underhand and low-level politics. They have been joined by Duncan McLaren of Friends of the Earth Scotland. People who specialise in this type of low-level politics have no understanding of the consequences of what they say. It is worth putting on record that the main scientist involved in the paper that was sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts has visited Scotland and apologised for that paper. He has recanted, but we have heard no such apology from the Green party or from Friends of the Earth.

Robin Harper: When that research was released, I was very careful not to endorse—to the press, in public, or anywhere else for that matter—the conclusions that the Pew Charitable Trusts drew from the research and put in the public domain. At no point did I endorse those conclusions.

Mr Morrison: That was an interesting intervention, but we have yet to hear the Green party say that it supports fish farming. Fergus Ewing intervened on Robin Harper on that very issue. The Green party consistently undermines and denigrates that important industry, but we have yet to hear what it actually believes in.

We know that this intrinsically highly successful and locally based industry needs working capital to regain its position as a major positive contributor to the economy of Scotland and of the Highlands and Islands, in particular. I support the motion, and I wish the minister well in his efforts to liaise closely with the industry. I know that he and the ministerial team will do their utmost to support the industry.

10:30

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): West Lochaber, in the constituency that I represent, depends to a great extent on fish farming; it has since the inception of the industry. There is consensus on the objectives for the industry among all parties, except the Greens—I am genuinely sad that we cannot unite behind a considerable Scottish success story.

Eleanor Scott: Will the member take an intervention?

Robin Harper *rose*—

Fergus Ewing: I will take both members, if they want.

Robin Harper: If Fergus Ewing's attention span had lasted for the length of my speech, he would have heard me say that we want improvements in fish farming. That is hardly a condemnation of fish farming, nor is it to say that we do not want it. Surely the member accepts that we remain critical of present practice and that that is the issue on which we are concentrating.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should stick to one intervention just now, Mr Ewing.

Fergus Ewing: What Mr Harper says is not the same as Mr Ruskell's comments in last week's debate on supermarkets, when he said that he did not know whether we should allow salmon to be sold in shops and that he reserved his judgment on the issue. I agree with the Green party and Mr Harper in one respect; the industry is not sustainable. However, it will certainly not be sustainable if it cannot sell its products in the shops, which is what Mr Ruskell could not bring himself to state last week.

Robin Harper takes a slightly different view this week; indeed, he seemed to take two different views in his speech. He argued that salmon could perhaps be sold in the shops, but he was not prepared to say whether anyone should eat it. No—eating it is too risky because that secretive organisation, the FSA, which I presume operates like the mafia in Sicily, is unwilling to share all its dark secrets with the Green party.

Like the FSA, the Food and Drug Administration in the United States of America immediately rubbished the Pew-funded research. It would behove the Green party to admit the principle that activist-funded research is commonly carried out to a far lower standard than other research, and that its claims are invariably promoted in the press and not subject to independent peer review or published in scientific journals. I was going to deal with the issue later because I want to discuss really important issues—rather than the Green party—but it is not good enough for Robin Harper to say simply that he did not endorse the Pew

research; he must join the rest of us and state that it has been discredited. I hope that Dr Scott will clarify the issue later, if possible.

I turn to issues that are more pressing than the various policies of the Green party are on what is an important Scottish industry. I was concerned when the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development mentioned that some EU member states are opposed to the necessary measure of the introduction of a minimum price for imported salmon. The SNP hopes that the efforts to which Alasdair Morrison and the minister referred are successful. Those efforts are rather overdue and have been called for for a long time, but we must look forwards rather than backwards. I hope that the efforts are successful, although we must always remember Rob Gibson's point that a substantial proportion of the industry in Scotland is Norwegian owned.

The introduction of a minimum import price is necessary. We read that Norway has been subsidising its industry by perhaps as much as £100 million a year. If the factual investigations to which the minister referred corroborate that, I hope that our approach will allow the introduction of the necessary measures, because we may otherwise lose even more businesses and jobs in areas that can ill afford to lose them.

The Crown Estate commission receives about £1.7 million a year in rent from the sea bed, a large proportion of which comes from fish farming, which receives little in return. I have had lengthy correspondence and meetings with the CEC on the issue and, to be fair, it has reduced the rent from previous levels, largely because of pressure from Parliament. Rather than make the issue a party-political one, if the minister and members of other parties simply acknowledge that the industry can ill afford that burden, that might result in a further reduction of rent by the Crown Estate commission.

Last week, after I had given Mr Ruskell the opportunity to explain Green party policy, I had an excellent lunch in the fine restaurant in this establishment, which comprised a smoked salmon starter and salmon fillet for the main course. The Food Standards Agency recently published advice that most people would benefit from a ninefold increase in their intake of oily fish, which surely presents a huge potential market in our country for the industry. Let us hope that every party in Parliament will get behind that aim and support a great Scottish industry.

10:36

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Fergus Ewing might enlighten us later as to whether he had salmon mousse for pudding

during the meal that he mentioned—I am sure that he would consider that.

My first thought on the debate is about the nature of opposition. As an Opposition party in the Parliament, we are diametrically opposed to much of what the Executive does. However, that has never been our purpose when we discuss aquaculture. I impress upon the Executive the fact that we fully support the views that it has expressed on the issue. I commend the work of former minister John Home Robertson, who has vigorously defended the aquaculture industry in the Parliament over the years, and of Allan Wilson, in his time as the minister who defended aquaculture in the Parliament. I also commend Alasdair Morrison, who always takes the opportunity to defend vigorously the interests of the salmon farming industry, which has a base in his constituency. So that my list is not completely dominated by Labour Party members, I commend Fergus Ewing for his work in defending the salmon farming industry's interests.

Not everything in the garden is rosy. As we heard from the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development at the outset of the debate, the aquaculture industry in Scotland, particularly salmon farming, continues to have major economic problems. I welcome the minister's announcement that the European Union will conduct an inquiry into the cost of production in Norway, with the aim of ensuring that we have some kind of level playing field on which to develop the market for salmon. The issue of Norwegian dumping of salmon on to our market has been the centrepiece of just about every debate that we have had on the subject. I believe in fair and free markets, but when such activity takes place, a healthy and wholesome industry that has much to deliver in improved eating and economic benefits must be protected from unfair competition.

There is much that we can do. The Executive motion and the minister acknowledge that there is a problem with regulation. We do not suggest that regulation should be cut away completely; we know that the environmental impact of salmon farming is causing increasing problems that must be dealt with. However, the minister's promise to streamline regulation, if it is achieved properly and quickly, could deliver major benefits for the industry. We support that move in principle. The regulatory burden is an identified problem for the aquaculture industry and we must accept it and deal with it.

The crossover impact of fish farming has been mentioned in previous debates on the subject, but it has not yet been mentioned in this one. We have not addressed the issue of how farmed fish are fed or the fact that our successful industry is based on

a requirement to maintain a largely industrial fishery that operates in the North sea and the north Atlantic. We have an insoluble problem in that respect, which we must try to address and to which we must find solutions in the longer term. As long as there is demand for the use of fish-based feed on fish farms, we will have to find ways in which to mitigate the problems that are associated with the industrial fishery.

Robin Harper: Is the member aware of the fish-feed regime that is now used in Loch Duart? The fish farm there is using a mix of vegetable feed and fish-oil feed, thus reducing the contamination that comes from the marine-based fish feed and producing healthier salmon.

Alex Johnstone: Although I am aware that progress is being made in that area, I am not aware of the example.

At the root of the problem is the fact that immature cod, amongst other fish, is being taken as bycatch and processed into the feed that is used on many salmon farms, not only in Scotland but beyond. We have to cut down that cross-contamination within the industry to defend other fisheries' interests. As the Conservatives have suggested before, the minister needs to address the problem of the industrial fishery as well as to tackle the other issues with which we have a problem.

I am disappointed that the Green party is still in a cleft stick on the issue of the Pew report. It is unfortunate that Robin Harper, even after having been pressed repeatedly on the subject, will go only so far as to say that he does not endorse the report's conclusions. When he was given the opportunity to dissociate himself from the report, he failed to do so. Although he appears to want to keep an open mind on the subject, he could go further than that. Before the debate comes to an end, I ask Robin Harper or his colleagues to take that further step.

Finally, the opinion that has been expressed in certain quarters is not entirely based on the facts in relation to the demands that the Crown Estate makes on the industry. Perhaps that opinion is based on an anti-union or even an anti-monarchy concept. If so, the basis is wrong, as such concepts are foreign to the nature of the Crown Estate as it is presently formed. We must remember that the Crown Estate does positive work in this area. As Robin Harper mentioned, it has done considerable work on the effective siting of fish farms. The Crown Estate might place a cost on the industry, but there is a positive return—the situation is not all negative.

The Conservatives will support the Executive motion today, but we ask the Executive to support our amendment, too. We believe that the

Executive is doing the right thing but not quickly enough.

10:43

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am sorry not to have appeared on Alex Johnstone's roll of honour as one of the supporters of aquaculture. I have spoken in its favour in the chamber more times than I have had hot dinners.

Alex Johnstone: Salmon dinners?

Maureen Macmillan: Indeed—and salmon mousse to follow as well.

In the region that I represent, especially in the remote areas of the west Highlands and the Western Isles and Northern Isles, the aquaculture industry puts £100 million into local pay packets. I am totally committed to its survival—indeed, I hope to see it grow.

As I said, I have spent the past five years in the Parliament engaging with the industry, first as the reporter to the European Committee on the economic impact of infectious salmon anaemia and then as joint reporter, with Robin Harper, for the former Transport and the Environment Committee's inquiry into the environmental impact of the industry. I was also a member of the ministerial working group on aquaculture that developed the strategic framework for the industry; that framework could be used by any industry as a model for the promotion of sustainable development.

The situation that Green party members and others seek cannot be delivered instantly. Research needs to be commissioned and everyone needs to be kept on board. At times, stakeholders can become impatient about the fact that other stakeholders seem to be taking time to develop their ideas. It is not just the industry that can become impatient; other stakeholders can become impatient with the industry.

No industry has undergone as much scrutiny as aquaculture has. Of any aquaculture industry in the world, our industry in Scotland is more alert to the need to marry social and economic development with environmental concerns and constraints. We know that we cannot have a first-class product without having a first-class environment. The industry knows that and is committed to achieving it. I believe that we are world leaders, and I condemn anyone who asserts otherwise. Scottish farmed salmon is a health-giving fish, which the FSA extols as an essential ingredient of a good diet. I firmly believe that those who say otherwise are either misguided, mischievous or have ulterior commercial motives.

In saying that, I do not mean to say that all the problems have been resolved with regard to the impact of salmon farming on the environment. As Robin Harper pointed out in a depressing speech, concerns remain regarding the level of escapes. Sea trout and wild salmon interests feel that sea lice treatment is not focused enough on the period of time between the late winter and early spring, when the treatment has the maximum effect on sea lice numbers. Those stakeholders are also concerned to see progress being made on the relocation of fish farms that are inappropriately located at present. The industry will need economic help to do that, perhaps by the securing of larger farms in new sites in compensation for the sites that businesses have to give up.

Is the Executive pursuing at European Community level the perceived double standards that the EC has over the sea lice treatment and other fish medicines that are used in Scotland and Norway? I am told that, because Norway maintains that it is merely testing medicines—whereas, in fact, it is using them universally—it can comply with EC regulations. That means that Norway can sell its fish to EC countries. We need a level playing field in that respect as well as on price. As Nora Radcliffe said, we should move swiftly to pan-European authorisation. Our continued reliance on only two treatments for sea lice could lead to the sea lice becoming immune to those medicines.

It is becoming apparent that a growing edginess is felt by some stakeholders because the industry code of practice that is required under the strategic framework has not as yet appeared. Those who are not part of the industry feel that the code of practice has not appeared because it is in the process of being watered down. I hope that the opposite is the case and that the code is being tightened so that our salmon is farmed at the highest of standards. I believe that the industry is committed to rigorous quality control. The industry has assured me that the delay is caused by a tightening up of the code of practice.

The major problem that the industry faces is the low price of salmon and the strain that that places on it. We have seen the demise of well-respected Scottish-owned businesses because of cash-flow problems. I wish that the Scottish banks would do much more to support our industry, and I hope that they will do so in the light of the minister's announcement today.

If the industry can get over its present difficulties, it has a good future. As other members have said, the difficulties are caused by gross overproduction in Norway and the consequential dumping of Norwegian fish on the European market. As Norway is being abetted by EC member states such as Denmark because of its

fish-processing interest, it will not be plain sailing to get together the alliances that we need to win our case in Europe. I commend the Executive and the DTI for their hard work in building the alliances in Europe that will help us to have restrictions imposed on Norwegian salmon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): One minute.

Maureen Macmillan: In common with Alasdair Morrison, I want to make particular mention of Douglas Alexander. Highlands and Islands Enterprise was extremely impressed with Douglas Alexander's knowledge of the industry and commitment to it, following a meeting that he held with HIE. In a sense, we should not be surprised to hear that, given that Calum MacDonald and Brian Wilson have been bending Douglas Alexander's ear on the subject for some time.

As has been mentioned in the debate, the fact that Norwegian and Dutch firms own a high proportion of the Scottish industry puts an enormous strain on us. That means not only that the industry cannot speak with one voice on the import restrictions, but that market collapse in Norway would impact on the viability of Scottish-based Norwegian-owned businesses. Although that would be a painful process, it is one that we may just have to thole, as Scottish aquaculture businesses are grasping at the chance to capture the quality market.

In Shetland, the Johnson family business, Johnson Seafarms Ltd—which I visited with Ben Bradshaw, the UK fisheries minister this summer—has ingeniously interested city of London investors in its cod farming project. The city gents made the trip to Vidlen in Shetland to inspect their new stock. As Rob Gibson mentioned, Aquascot in Alness is adding value to its products by using the best raw materials and has captured market outlets such as Waitrose. We have excellent smoked salmon and, as far as I am concerned, the hot smoked product from Uist is the top of the charts. Scottish farmed salmon has protected geographical indication status and, for the past 12 years, it has held the French Government's label rouge award.

Despite that, we still have to fight every inch of the way to have the supermarkets pay a premium for Scottish salmon. We also have to educate the public here and abroad that Scottish salmon is worth the extra shilling. That can be done only if we work together to promote Scottish salmon, if the environmental regulations are sound and fair—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must finish now.

Maureen Macmillan: And, crucially, if they are quickly decided and implemented.

10:50

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

Although we have lingering concerns about the momentum of the strategic framework, we totally share the objectives of helping the aquaculture industry to become more sustainable, diverse and competitive. We welcome much of what the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development said this morning. We can see that, in spite of the continuing difficulty with accessing finance in the independent sector, the Scottish salmon industry has invested significant time and capital in addressing the framework's priorities. I have been hearing persuasive claims from some quarters that many of the action targets that have been set out in the framework are now well advanced. We welcome the additional review of the regulatory framework, which must result in simplification of the system and a reduction in the current bureaucratic burden.

We all know that the aquaculture industry is not without its problems. To an extent, the industry remains divided, with multinational businesses, all of whose headquarters are outside Scotland, controlling 80 per cent of the Scottish fin-fish industry. Such businesses are growing more and more of their fish where the political, economic and regulatory climates suit them best. Apparently, that does not include Scotland, where salmon production is falling while the multinationals compensate by maintaining and increasing their tonnage elsewhere, particularly off Norway and Chile.

Fish farming, which is one of Scotland's crucial primary resources, is characterised by a latent potential for growth that is matched by few other sectors of industry. That fact must drive the debate. We face a forecast reduction of some 550,000 in the number of economically active people in Scotland by 2043. In the period until then, we can expect the city regions to grow further, placing more downward pressure on rural and remote areas. We must, therefore, do everything that we can now to protect and grow key industries such as aquaculture, which is well suited to our environment and has the propensity to flourish and diversify, confounding the statisticians and their future economic and population trends. Such is the urgency of the threat that I have just described that we need to make even closer common cause with this crucial industry and to join those who work in it as they face the issues that confront them. Today's announcement helps.

The industry is partly multinational and partly independent. A common interest might be lacking on all matters. However, I welcome the trade-defence measures that the minister mentioned in his speech and the steps that that will entail. I

would be two-faced if I were to complain about Norway using its independence and its oil-fund revenues to help remote and rural communities, but that has resulted in oversupply and the dumping of salmon at excessively aggressive prices. That has caused damage to our industry, as was eloquently covered by Alasdair Morrison. I welcome the new proposals in that light.

I urge the minister to fulfil fully his trade-defence plans by meeting his Norwegian opposite number in search of a better way forward—one that is compliant, ethical, sustainable, expansionist and likely to create far higher levels of demand—for this global industry. I hope that the minister will explain to our Norwegian friends that, in the modern global economy, predatory monopolistic behaviour brings with it some very material downsides and risks. In the longer term, such behaviour is invariably destructive. Ultimately it fails, not just from an EU or world trade perspective but because consumers are only too well aware of what happens to quality and service under monopoly conditions.

George Lyon: A couple of years ago, some colleagues went to Norway to discuss the issue in some depth. It was clear from the meeting with the Norwegian fisheries minister that his objective was to quadruple the output of the fish-farming sector in Norway, given the fact that Norway is utterly reliant on oil—it is virtually the only industry that is currently sustainable—and the current high value of the Norwegian currency. How do we square that against ensuring that the Norwegians do not use predatory pricing to access what is, after all, one of the biggest markets in the world? It is difficult to reconcile that, given the objectives that the Norwegians have set themselves.

Jim Mather: Some direct action has been taken this time. There is the possibility of our minister going to the table with a big European Commission stick. That might get the Norwegians' attention. Today's announcements will help to create conditions in which open and fair competition, with a level playing field, are much more the order of the day. That will allow the industry to concentrate its efforts on building demand and augmenting the generic product by offering a wider range of products, from high-quality mass-produced food to traceable premium products and other added-value variants from a vast array of quality-committed suppliers and food outlets.

There is now a positive aspect to Scottish aquaculture, which is augmenting itself and diversifying into new species farming. That is a break in the clouds, especially given the fact that it is in the hands of the few surviving independents in the sector, while the multinationals are doing their new species work in Norway, where they

seem to have concluded that things are better for them. In my opinion, we need to help the independents to move forward in every way that we can. Specifically, we should make an overture to the banks, so that they understand that the propositions that are forthcoming from the aquaculture sector, particularly the independent part of it and the part that is looking into new species, are new and valid and are well worth their backing.

I support the amendment in Rob Gibson's name.

10:56

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): As many members have said this morning, aquaculture, in all its forms, is one of the most important economic activities in rural Scotland. It helps sustain much-needed employment in those fragile areas. The farmed salmon industry is under pressure, and has been for some time; I have no doubt that that will continue into the future. Scottish fish farmers can compete, provided that they are competing on a level playing field. However, that does not seem to be the situation at present. The Scottish Executive must ensure that imports are monitored so as to combat dumping, to which several members have referred. If dumping is discovered, quick and effective action must be taken to stamp it out.

Although I believe that fin-fish farming has a future, with appropriate support, I recognise that there are limits to its development if the environment is not to be damaged. That is why I believe that we need to develop the shellfish-farming industry, which has much less impact on the environment because the shellfish take their food from the sea and there is no contaminating input into the water as is the case with fin-fish farming.

The shellfish industry faces one very large barrier to success: the regulations that are applied to ensure that shellfish with high levels of algal toxins do not reach the market. Those regulations, which have been in force for quite some time, appear to be completely over the top to the extent that they have, in effect, prevented the supply to the market of whole scallops in shell. In other words, a quality Scottish product has been blocked from the market. Of course, no shellfish farmer would want for one moment to harm their customers, but the regulations are so over the top that high levels of toxins in parts of the scallop that no one ever eats mean that the whole scallop cannot be sold. Scallop farmers lose out because they cannot get the premium price; hotels and the catering industry lose out because they cannot serve the premium product; and tourists, on whom we depend so much, lose out because they cannot enjoy the best-quality scallops.

The Manx Government has found a solution to the problem by providing a state-run laboratory, which tests batches of scallops for the industry. That might sound expensive but, given that 60 per cent of the Food Standards Agency Scotland's budget is spent on monitoring toxin levels offshore, I argue that doing the end-product testing onshore would be a better use of Government money and would help the industry to get safe products to market.

The test for scallops should be a test of the product as it is for sale and not, as is currently the case, of the whole animal. An agreement must be reached between the industry and the regulators to allow market testing of scallops as they are presented for sale; if such an agreement is not reached, the industry will be in extreme difficulty. The Executive should consider ways in which to produce an industry testing standard and supply the equipment to enable the industry to perform the testing.

We have heard quite a bit of criticism of our Norwegian cousins, who are trying to develop their fish-farming industry, and about the dumping that takes place not only in the UK but on the continent. It is always a source of amazement to me that 80 per cent of the fish-farming industry in Scotland is already owned by our Norwegian cousins. I cannot understand how that has been allowed to happen. We are critical of the Norwegians at the same time as they are taking on 80 per cent of our salmon farming industry. However, that is a debate for another day.

I call on the minister to address the issue of the testing regime and rules. No one argues that corners should be cut with regard to safety but, unless the issue is addressed, an industry that could bring many jobs to rural Scotland will falter and so deprive those rural communities of much-needed economic prosperity.

11:01

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): We have heard from other members about the great importance of the aquaculture industry, especially to remote and rural areas of Scotland—the very areas in which we in the Executive face the greatest challenges in fulfilling our goal of achieving economic growth. An aquaculture industry that is not only safeguarded and sustainable but thriving and growing must be a key priority for the Executive if our ambitions for economic growth are to benefit Scotland as a whole and if every area is to reap the rewards of the increased prosperity that is our goal.

The industry is of course important for the north-east, as farmed fish are supplied to fish processors throughout the region. It is vital that

there is confidence among the public about the impact of the aquaculture industry on the environment and about the product itself. Although that confidence has been knocked at times, it remains the case that consumers see the produce of the Scottish aquaculture industry as quality produce. I believe that the strategic framework for aquaculture is vital in ensuring that that remains the case. The fact that there is now more research, more efficient regulation, more progress and more support for the industry in general is key to creating confidence and gaining what we hope will be an expanding consumer base.

We are already making significant progress through the strategic framework. I did not recognise the description of the framework in the Conservative amendment as lacking in progress, because 23 targets have been achieved, significant progress has been made on the rest and there is a commitment to future action on other targets. Crucially, that has all been achieved through collaboration with the industry, which I believe is more important than timescale.

We have heard that the establishment of the Scottish aquaculture research forum is another step forward in commissioning research and advancing education relating to aquaculture for the public benefit. The extension of planning controls will ensure that marine fish farms are subject to a more effective, transparent and democratic system of regulation led by local authorities—not over-regulation, as the Tories imply about everything in every debate, but the kind of regulation that will create the confidence in the industry that is necessary for it to prosper.

The Executive is not only working to create the conditions here in Scotland that will enable the aquaculture industry to thrive; yet again, we are benefiting from effective partnership working between our Executive and the UK Government, which is resulting in joint efforts being made in Europe to create fairer market conditions for our aquaculture industry.

The motion highlights the issue of trade defence. The UK Government is taking a robust line to ensure that the European Union takes action through a definitive safeguard measure, with the threat of using anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures in the event of agreement not being reached with Norway on those issues.

Those efforts for our aquaculture industry are greatly bolstered because they are being advanced through the strength of the UK's negotiating position in Europe. We benefit from the influence that that brings, which would be rubbed off by the SNP—with the Tories there would be even less chance of success, because we would not be in Europe at all.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Is the member suggesting that if Lewis Macdonald had the powers to negotiate in Europe with the Norwegians and others he would be incapable of doing so?

Richard Baker: Our negotiating as part of the major UK bloc makes our position stronger.

It is important to dwell on the point that we should have success in the negotiations. It is vital for our aquaculture industry that our efforts are successful. The industry deserves fairness and a level playing field, and success in the negotiations is essential for the sustainability of Scotland's smaller indigenous aquaculture businesses.

Sustainability is the key word. With the strategic framework, the Executive is tackling each of the key areas that are essential to a sustainable aquaculture industry and addressing the issue of the industry's future economic prosperity, one aspect of which is having a level playing field in the market. Another aspect is ensuring that consumers continue to view the product as being of the highest quality and that it is promoted successfully as such. That will require effective management of the aquaculture industry so that it is environmentally sustainable and generates consumer confidence.

The strategy acknowledges the industry's huge social importance. If we are to talk about creating economic prosperity for all and closing the opportunity gap in every part of our country, we must acknowledge the importance of the aquaculture industry to our more vulnerable rural areas. It is even more important in such areas than it is in Scotland overall, because the economic impact of jobs that are created there is huge.

The Executive motion talks about working towards a sustainable aquaculture industry through its strategic framework. It really is tackling every aspect of that—economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and, crucially, the positive social impact on rural communities in Scotland. Through the strategy, the Executive is showing the right commitment to the industry and showing that it acknowledges the crucial role of aquaculture in bringing economic growth to every part of Scotland. I commend the motion in the minister's name.

11:07

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I welcome this debate, which is on a subject that is important to many communities in Scotland. Fish farms are vital for many rural areas that have few other options. In my constituency, they provide the high-quality raw material that processors in Fraserburgh and Peterhead convert

to the products that we see with so much pleasure on our supermarket shelves. My face lights up when I go home at the weekend and open the fridge to find that my wife has been to Downie's to get one of its fish pies, which are like Scotch pies, except that they are filled with fish. They are just wonderful for the palate but even better for the health of the people who eat them. I welcome the presence of salmon on our Parliament menus, as does my colleague Fergus Ewing. It is just a shame that today coley, rather than salmon, is on the menu.

I worked as a water bailiff when I was a student in 1968—one of the many industries of which I have experience. Even then, on the east coast, the catches of salmon had dropped catastrophically, long before any interaction with our salmon farms could have been of influence.

Robin Harper: That is the case, but do we kick a man when he is down? Do we say that stocks have dropped to the point at which it does not matter what we do, because they are going to disappear anyway, or do we do everything that we can to conserve them?

Stewart Stevenson: Of course we have to conserve the stocks. There is no division in the Parliament about that; the division is about the means and the influences that are affecting adversely or beneficially our ability to do so. There is no substantial proven link between the escapes from fish farms and the depletion of the natural stock. I would be interested to hear of academic studies that show different. I will say more about the academic world later, but I wish to make an important point in which to anchor much of what I am going to say: our salmon is safe. In fact, I am probably at greater risk from the contaminants that reside on the skin of the slice of lemon that sits on top of my smoked salmon than I am from the salmon.

The way in which the media deal with science illustrates the problem. To get into the press, a scientific story has to be about something new. It has to contain an element of conflict, otherwise it is just a good-news story and will get a few column inches inside. It has to have an element of public interest, with a threat or a malign influence.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member agree that the bad-news story about salmon became news only when it found a supporter in the Parliament?

Stewart Stevenson: I agree that that certainly gave legs to a story that should have died on the first day.

I ask members to think about some of the stories that get into the press. The Raelian cult claimed to have cloned humans and the story went on for two weeks. There is a wonderful website that has been—I hesitate to use the vernacular, so I will

not—criticising our salmon industry. On another page, it claims that a seafood diet is

“A Sure Cure for Rheumatoid Arthritis”.

It says:

“No one needs to suffer from arthritis ... In three months of the daily seafood diet, you'll be rid of your arthritis.”

That is a ludicrous claim, although I would love to believe that it was true.

Of course, many environmental groups are anything but environmental. For example, the United States Postal Service has shown that Greenpeace and the Sierra Club account for nearly half of the 4 million kilograms of tossed-out junk mail that environmental groups distribute each year.

In the brief time that remains, I turn to the report that was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The report starts with a clue to the poverty of its scientific method. In the abstract, it says:

“the potential human ... risks of farmed salmon consumption have not been examined rigorously.”

That is its claim, but none of the 32 references that it provides goes back more than three years. As a piece of reference research, the report is condemned out of its own mouth on that point alone. Had it been properly refereed, that sort of thing would have been flushed out and dealt with. Even that paper has to concede that

“Individual contaminant concentrations in farmed and wild salmon do not exceed U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) action or tolerance levels”.

The key thing is that the paper does not compare farmed salmon with other foodstuffs. The reality is that it is basically much the same, although, yes, there is a problem with polychlorinated biphenyls, which has to be addressed.

I have confidence in the industry to the extent that I ate the food that a fish farm was feeding to its fish when the Environment and Rural Development Committee visited Lochaber—Jamie McGrigor will attest to that. My trust in the industry goes beyond just eating the fish.

11:13

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): There are not many fish farms in the land-locked central Scotland region, so people would be forgiven for wondering what my qualifications are for speaking in this debate. First, I like salmon. There are more vegetarians in the Scottish Socialist Party group than in the Green group, but I am not one of them. Not many salmon have escaped my plate. I have to question Fergus Ewing, who talked about increasing our salmon intake ninefold. Given that he eats two per day, is he seriously suggesting that people should eat 18

fish per day? That is a pretty extreme public health message and, if he was here, I would ask him to retract it.

I much prefer wild salmon but I eat plenty of the farmed stuff. I visited British Columbia a few times and the preference for wild salmon there offers us some lessons if we want a sustainable salmon farming industry. My other qualification is that I have forwarded a few e-mails about aquaculture from friends in Vancouver to Mary Spowart in our research department and she read them for me. I also visited the aquaculture lab at the University of Stirling, which was informative.

The SSP does not oppose fish farming but we believe that we need a truly sustainable, locally owned and locally controlled industry. It is clear that there are dangers, which can be summarised as the use of intensive farming methods to maximise profits without sufficient regard for the environment. There have been incidents of the illegal use of toxic chemicals. In October 2000, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate found the banned toxic chemical ivermectin in four samples of farmed salmon. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency needs more resources to inspect and regulate the industry and enforce the bans.

There has been a decline in the number of wild salmon. I accept the points that have been made, but it would be bad to ignore the fact that wild salmon stocks went down by 39 per cent in just one year—between 1998 and 1999—and the decline was drastically sharper on the east coast than on the west coast. The number of escapes has increased fourfold in the past three years and escaped fish account for 22 per cent of the so-called wild catch. In 2000, waste discharged from fish farms was twice the annual sewage discharged by the entire Scottish population.

I get the impression from some folk that to dare to raise those questions is to want to throw people out of jobs, but that is simply not the case; it is about sustaining those jobs.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Carolyn Leckie: On you go. Do not make it too hard, though.

Stewart Stevenson: I am basically in sympathy with what the member is saying, but I ask her to give us the reference for her claim about sewage, because I do not think that it is sustainable.

Carolyn Leckie: It is Mary Spowart in our research department.

We should get the economic benefits into perspective. There are no more jobs in salmon farming now than there were 10 years ago, but output has increased fivefold. Many workers are

paid the minimum wage and have short-term contracts. I would like that to change, with more jobs, especially more permanent jobs and more well-paid jobs. Surely those would be the truly sustainable jobs that rural communities need. We should not go down the route that has been taken in other food industries: intensive farming, solely for the purpose of intensive profits. The expansion of salmon farming has hit angling and shellfish returns in an as yet unquantifiable measure. The industry could be better, more local, more accountable and far less damaging to the environment.

In British Columbia, despite the fact that the aquaculture industry has for many years had much greater regard for the environment, the dominant culture is that farmed salmon is inferior to wild salmon. Restaurants stake their entire reputations on the integrity of the wildness of their fish. Scotland should note that example if it is to avoid farmed fish being discredited. British Columbia has a bad reputation for farmed fish despite the fact that aquaculture has not introduced any exotic diseases to the waters there. Atlantic salmon that are lost from farms in British Columbia are not capable of breeding with wild Pacific salmon. Farmed Pacific salmon are capable of interbreeding, but the impact on the gene pool is dwarfed by the 500 million Pacific salmon that are released from fish hatcheries every year. The number of escapes is proportionately far lower than in Scotland and releases from hatcheries outnumber farm escapes by a ratio of 15,000 to 1. Canadian farms practise fallowing, which allows the sea bed to recover. Most important, fish farms throughout Canada have unanimously adopted a policy of no genetic modification. We should most definitely follow that example.

In conclusion, a number of recommendations need to be implemented. The Executive has an aspirational strategy, but as with all strategies we must be cautious. We need to see action and evidence that that action has taken place. We seek a reduction in the stocking densities on farms; a ban on the use of toxic chemicals; year-long fallowing periods to allow the sea bed time to recover; minimum separation distances of 10km between farms; a ban on salmon farms near salmon rivers; imposed fines for fish escapes; a freeze on GM farmed fish and GM fish feed; more testing of farmed fish for contaminants; compulsory labelling of farmed fish; a review of fish-farm licences; a public register of farms; an increase in the use of environmental impact assessments; and a moratorium on any expansion of sea cage fish farming. Those are our policies; they are not just an attack and I hope that they find some support.

11:20

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I apologise for missing the opening speeches and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak.

I declare an interest in that, in the early 1970s, I was one of the pioneers of cage farming technology, albeit in fresh water for rainbow trout. In those days, fish farming was an exciting new industry that promised to bring employment and prosperity to remote regions of the Highlands and Islands. Indeed, salmon farming blossomed, but it became a high-tech industry that was financed by big business. It has had its ups and downs, its supporters and opponents, but it is still an important employer and it produces one of Scotland's largest and most recognised quality food exports. Therefore, the Scottish Executive must do more to help the climate in which the industry can flourish. It can do that by listening to the industry's pleas and to those that have been made in the Parliament. We want an aquaculture framework that allows the industry to be competitive. The industry needs less bureaucratic regulation and one active, useful body, rather than the eight bodies that currently oversee it. It needs a quicker processing system for applications for medicines to control diseases and parasites, such as sea lice.

I hear what Robin Harper says about wild salmon and sea trout, which are enormously important to Scotland, as is the wild-fish angling industry, but I take issue with him if he is saying that the Scottish fish-farm industry is being irresponsible. Things have changed. Scottish Quality Salmon has done a great deal to develop a code of practice and better husbandry. Its policy of fallowing, coupled with the use of medicines such as Slice, has had remarkable results. Has Robin Harper spoken to the scientists of the fishery trusts, who have been working with salmon farmers under area management agreements? If not, he should do so, because he would learn that there have recently been notable improvements in the runs of salmon and sea trout in many areas on the west coast thanks to the scientists' work and co-operation from fish farmers, who, with the scientists, are finding a way of breaking the sea lice cycle that has been damaging wild fish and, of course, farmed fish.

Sea lice are a major pestilence to the fish-farming industry and eradication of the problem is just as important to the industry as it is to wild-fish interests. It is vital that the industry, which injects more than £100 million a year into local pay packets in rural Scotland, should be encouraged in a way that allows it to prosper in sustainable co-existence with angling and shellfish interests. There are not many job opportunities in the

Highlands and Islands, so if we wish to promote integrated rural development in our remoter areas, we must recognise that fin-fish farming and shellfish farming are remarkably important industries.

Robin Harper: Does Jamie McGrigor agree that the figure for the total number of sea trout is the worst ever? I have not spoken to the people involved in the AMAs, which are secret, but I would be interested to see the results from the rivers in which there have been improvements.

Mr McGrigor: I have been to several meetings of the fishery trusts that have been set up in Argyll, Lochaber and the Western Isles. They are all working together with fish farmers to provide a product so that people in rural Scotland can continue to have the jobs that Robin Harper's party seems to want to do away with. I cannot understand his position when he talks about knocking back an industry that is vital for remote rural areas and that enables people to continue to live in rural areas and work at something that will provide a culture for the future.

We Conservatives will support aquaculture, both fin fish and shellfish. We hope that the Scottish Government will put more research and development into ways of improving the industry for all concerned.

11:25

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I am extremely happy to close the debate for the Greens, to support the amendment in Robin Harper's name and to express our support for the quality, sustainable aquaculture industry towards which we are working and that we hope we will soon have. We have not got there yet, but we are working towards it and I will welcome it when it comes.

The Greens have good relations with the industry and have had many positive discussions with its representatives. I recognise the industry's importance to the fragile areas in my region, although it has not quite fulfilled its early promise of jobs, as Carolyn Leckie mentioned: in the early 1990s, when production was a mere 30,000 tonnes, there were 1,491 people employed directly in aquaculture but, in 2002, when production had rocketed to more than 145,000 tonnes, the industry directly employed a mere 1,306 people, which is a minor reduction.

Stewart Stevenson: Can Dr Scott tell us the number of jobs that have been created in artisan smokehouses and the like adjacent to the fish farms in fragile rural communities?

Eleanor Scott: That is an interesting point. I do not have the figures for such jobs, but I know that

some of the processing work does not take place in the fragile rural communities, which are primary producers of stuff that gets value added to it elsewhere. Moreover, the fish processors near to where I stay in Easter Ross have to take on workers from overseas to fill the jobs. Therefore, I am not sure how we can quantify the fish farms' net benefit, but I acknowledge that it exists.

Mr Morrison: Eleanor Scott is in the Parliament as a representative of the Highlands and Islands region. Will she share with us how many hundreds of people work in the industry in the Western Isles and how many millions of pounds it puts into homes in the Western Isles every year?

Eleanor Scott: I acknowledge the industry's importance for the Western Isles and would never deny it, in this debate or any other forum.

We have talked about sustainability. Somebody—I think that it was Fergus Ewing, who, unfortunately, is not in the chamber at the moment—suggested that the Greens were in a cleft stick over aquaculture. There is a degree of truth in that, because there is a difficulty in determining whether the industry, which we want to survive, can ever be truly sustainable. We are not the only ones who are in that cleft stick. Some fish farms have organic certification, but that certification is only provisional, because the certifying bodies are still in two minds about whether the industry can be truly sustainable.

On sustainability, we are concerned with the industry's local environmental effects, which Robin Harper mentioned, and about its impact on the wild salmon and sea trout populations, an issue that has been extensively discussed. We are also concerned about where the feed comes from, which is the crucial factor in making true sustainability difficult to achieve. Salmon is a large, fish-eating fish—farming it has been compared to farming tigers for meat—and so is difficult to farm sustainably. I acknowledge the efforts that the industry is making in seriously looking at where the food that the salmon feed on comes from—Robin Harper gave one example of that.

The Pew report has been extensively discussed and the Greens have been criticised for our handling of it. We have consistently supported the Executive's imposition of restrictions on fishing for shellfish in areas where amnesic shellfish poisoning is a risk, even though we acknowledge that the risk is small. That is an example of the precautionary approach, which is the right approach, and we ask the Executive to extend its responsible attitude to farmed fish.

I commend the efforts that the industry is making to reduce the level of environmental contaminants—they are environmental; nobody is

deliberately feeding them to the fish. However, the contaminants bioaccumulate in oily fish and, as I said in my intervention on Ted Brocklebank, the jury is still out on the cumulative effect that a large amount of low levels of those pollutants, which are known to be toxic, might have on human health, even if they are individually below permissible levels.

To some extent I share the reservations that members have expressed on the Pew report. However, when it was published, we suggested that the Food Standards Agency should consider the matter seriously and, at the very least, repeat the studies over time on a larger sample of Scottish farmed fish so that we can find out whether the levels of pollutants are increasing or decreasing.

Members might be interested to know that the European Parliament sustainable development intergroup considered farmed salmon on 31 March. It observed:

"The presence of contaminants and particularly dioxins and PCBs in food and in fish including farmed fish is a cause of concern for the Commission."

It also stated:

"For the 'non dioxin like PCBs'",
the European Food Safety Authority is

"currently performing a risk assessment which is expected to become available by the end of 2004. The Commission will thereafter consider the setting of maximum levels also for these PCBs in feed and food."

Our industry is probably better prepared than some politicians for the regulations that may be introduced.

I recognise the efforts that the industry has made over the years to improve its practices in relation to the environment and health and safety. I recognise that locational guidelines are in place and I echo Robin Harper's plea that those be implemented. Those guidelines are not just about the environmental issues surrounding the siting of a fish farm; they are also about the wishes of the host community. Many host communities welcome fish farms, for the reasons that members have ably outlined, and the employment that they offer. However, many other communities have different ideas about how they would like to use their marine and shoreline environment. I am talking not just about people who do not like the look of fish cages, but about people who have other uses in mind for that environment. Their wishes have to be respected.

I recognise that the industry has been consolidated into big companies, as other members have mentioned. The word "diverse" appears in "A Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture", and diversity is one of the issues

that we have to address. Shellfish farming has been mentioned in that respect. I conclude by mentioning trade defence, which other members have discussed. The best trade defence is a reputation for a quality product.

11:31

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): All members—with one or two exceptions—are agreed that the fundamental problem facing the salmon industry is the price that it is receiving for its product in the marketplace. Yes, the Scottish product is achieving a premium of 10p per kilo, but businesses will not be saved if the price is below the cost of production. Survival for our farmers is about two key objectives: first, to maintain the quality and the premium that is being achieved in the marketplace; secondly, to make the industry more competitive. The industry must be competitive if it is to be sustainable in the longer term. Quality and the Scottish premium will not secure the industry's future; the competitiveness agenda must be addressed.

On a recent visit to Scottish Sea Farms at South Shian, I saw a company that has cut its costs while improving the quality of its product so that it is achieving a better return, year on year, from the marketplace. The way in which it goes about its business is also completely compatible with the protection of the environment and ensuring a sustainable future for production in the farms that it owns. The company has turned its business around and has moved back into profitability in the past two years, against a difficult background. It needs the Scottish Executive to speed up the process of simplifying the regulatory burden that is currently placed on the industry. That is not about reducing the regime; it is about simplifying it and making it easier to use.

The first key objective that the producers want the Executive to deliver on over the next year is the reduction of the number of bodies that are involved in the regulation of the industry. As other members have said, in Norway, one body regulates the industry and there is a quick turnaround from application to consent. We have a commitment in the programme for government for the Executive to reduce the number of bodies and I hope that we can make good progress on that.

The second key objective for the industry is for SEPA to move away from basing discharge consents solely on the impact on the environment directly below the cages towards an area-based model. The latter has several advantages, as it gives greater flexibility and, most important, it allows longer fallow periods of up to a year. That approach is more sensible and competitive.

The third key objective, which other members have mentioned, is much faster access for the industry to new-generation medicines. In Ireland, a temporary licensing system allows producers early use of the next generation of medicines that enter the marketplace.

Those are three key areas in which the producers want the Executive to make speedy progress if we are to remain competitive. Some people may ask if it matters whether we are competitive and what difference that makes. Whether we like it or not, 80 per cent of the industry is now Norwegian or Dutch owned and the Norwegians and Dutch have interests in Chile, British Columbia, Norway and Scotland. Scotland is competing directly with those other areas for crucial investment in the future. If Scotland is regarded as over-regulated and uncompetitive, the money will be invested elsewhere by the major companies. That will mean that our industry will wither away and die, which could have a devastating impact on the communities that I and other members represent.

Mr McGrigor: The member says that there is over-regulation. However, the Scottish Executive, of which Liberal Democrats are a part, has done nothing to lessen that regulation in six years. Why not?

George Lyon: If Mr McGrigor had been present at the beginning of the debate, he would have heard the minister outline the progress that has been made in trying to simplify the regulation and reduce the number of regulatory bodies that are involved in the industry. That commitment is in the programme for government and I am pleased to say that it was the Liberal Democrats who put it there. If Mr McGrigor had turned up for the beginning of the debate, he would have heard what is going on. I hope that the Deputy Presiding Officer will allow me some extra time in recognition of that long intervention.

I think that all members have welcomed what the minister said this morning about the hard work that has been done in conjunction with the United Kingdom Government on delivering in the crucial area of trade-defence measures. The industry in Scotland needs a sustainable price, which can be achieved only by ending the predatory pricing of Norway in the European market. As I said earlier, when we met the Norwegian minister two years ago, he made it crystal clear that Norway was going to quadruple the size of its industry and go all out to achieve market share. Therefore, it is important that we ensure that there is a level playing field for market prices.

Last week, the Greens tried to portray themselves as champions of our farmers in calling for a fair price for the farmers' produce, yet today we have heard barely a word of support for

Scotland's fish farmers from the socialists in sandals. Indeed, we heard quite the reverse. Not content with refusing to support the industry, the Greens refused to endorse the eating of the industry's product and wished for ever more punitive regulation. I am afraid that, given the position that has been outlined today, we can only conclude that the Greens' position is little different from Don Staniford's: close the cages in Scotland.

The Liberal Democrats support an aquaculture industry that is economically as well as environmentally sustainable and that continues to win greater market share, providing more jobs and opportunities for communities in some of the remotest areas in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I make the observation that no fewer than six members who participated in the debate have not returned to the chamber for the closing speeches. I advise members that the Presiding Officers take note of that. We monitor the statistics and take them into consideration in determining who will be called to speak, and in what order, in subsequent debates.

11:38

Mr Brocklebank: The debate has produced a picture of an industry with massive potential but that is currently in crisis. There was much of value in the minister's opening statement, but there was also an element about it of the road to hell being paved with good intentions. No one doubts the importance of regulation in ensuring a safe, healthy aquaculture industry; however, the minister did not give much encouragement for an early resolution in response to the industry's pleas for a one-stop shop to cut through the red tape.

Nora Radcliffe recently described a speech of mine—accurately, I am sure—as disappointing. I return the compliment today. In her fairly disappointing speech, she too demonstrated the mañana approach that the minister seemed to take. That seems to be the approach that the Executive has adopted. We received no assurances from Nora Radcliffe or the minister that the Executive is treating as a crisis the concerns felt by many sectors of the industry about looming bankruptcy.

Rob Gibson made some solid points about measures that the Executive could take while its laborious collaborative approach grinds on, especially with regard to the input that it could make into resolving certain transport problems to help small, remote producers get their product to market. Despite the minister's statement about support that the banks might give to new sectors of the industry, I agree with Alasdair Morrison's overview that the salmon industry is almost

unbankable. Mr Morrison was also right to draw attention to what might be called the Norwegian blight. As many members have pointed out, the Norwegians are providing sustained subsidies to their own massive industry and dumping their product on the market.

George Lyon: The member is not correct to say that there is no investment in the market. Indeed, when I visited the fish farmers at South Shian, they said that about £250,000 had been invested in onshore handling capacity. The point is that the industry is very competitive.

Mr Brocklebank: I am not quite sure whether George Lyon was referring to the unbankability of the industry that Alasdair Morrison mentioned. However, I accept that some investment has to be made in the industry and I was encouraged by Lewis Macdonald's comment that there would be further attempts to help in that respect.

Although I do not totally agree with Alasdair Morrison's description of Robin Harper's party as ramshackle and involved in low-level politics, I sometimes find it difficult to know exactly where the Greens stand on the subject of farmed salmon. They appear to sit on the fence quite a bit and, as Fergus Ewing rightly pointed out, Mark Ruskell said last week that he was not sure whether farmed salmon should be sold in supermarkets at all.

Alex Johnstone struck a consensual note, because we support the thrust of the Executive's strategy, if not the timescale in which it has been framed. The Conservatives are certainly not afraid of competition; however, we want fair competition and that is not happening with Norway at the moment. Alex also made strong points about cross-contamination as a result of disease arising from fishmeal, of which Denmark is a major producer.

Maureen Macmillan was right to point out that, although Scotland has a world-class industry, we face the same potential problems of disease and sea lice that Norway and other countries face. Indeed, another potential problem is that Norway controls not only much of our industry, but much of the Chilean salmon industry as well. We cannot ignore the fact that these large companies provide the bulk of the jobs, however much Carolyn Leckie—who has left the chamber—might prefer the industry to be locally owned.

Jim Mather was right to say that we must protect those precious jobs, and there is scope for farming other species such as cod, halibut and turbot. I, too, have visited the Johnson brothers' Vidlin salmon farm that Mr Mather mentioned and have seen the valuable work that is being carried out on halibut and turbot farming at Dunstaffnage. As a result, I very much welcome the minister's

announcement that the banks will help to fund new species farming.

John Farquhar Munro made interesting comments about the prospects for shellfish farming. In particular, I support his view that the Executive has seriously disadvantaged the wild and farmed scallop industry. I hope that the Conservatives' long-standing argument on this matter has now been won and that end-product testing will soon be introduced.

Jamie McGrigor, who I understand had problems with the overnight train from London, was right to draw attention to the important wild salmon industry. We note this year's encouraging runs of salmon and sea trout, as the scientific community has got its act together to allow angling and farming interests to co-exist. I also welcome the support for the industry that we received, albeit grudgingly, from Eleanor Scott.

Given all that, it might be said that the consensus that Fergus Ewing sought has been reached to a certain extent. That said, it would have been helpful if Dr Scott had totally disassociated the Greens from the wholly discredited Pew Oceans Commission report. However, she singularly failed to do so. George Lyon was also right to highlight the great difficulties that the industry faces and the need to cut through the regulations that I mentioned earlier.

We have absolutely no doubt that the aquaculture industry can have a healthy and sustainable future. As Alex Johnstone pointed out, we will support the Executive motion if our amendment somehow happens to fail. That said, although I welcome the minister's statement and agree with the need for extensive collaboration, many sectors of the industry are now saying that there must come a time for the talking to stop. I commend our amendment to the chamber.

11:45

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): The fact that, since 1999, we have discussed this important and perhaps uniquely Scottish industry several times in the chamber says a lot about the value of a Scottish Parliament. A couple of weeks ago, I read in the newspapers that eating oily fish gives people bigger brains. After listening to some of the speeches this morning, I certainly think that there is a case for putting more oily fish on the menu in the Parliament's restaurants. It must work; after all, Fergus Ewing said that he had salmon for his starter and main course last week, and everyone in the chamber will agree that Fergus has a pretty big brain.

We have reached consensus on other issues, particularly on the value of the aquaculture industry to Scotland. As the minister pointed out in his opening speech, it is worth half a billion pounds a year and accounts for 10,000 jobs in western and northern coastal communities. Moreover, we must not forget that it also secures jobs in processing factories in Annan, Fraserburgh, Shetland and other parts of the country.

Jim Mather raised a very good point about concerns over the ownership of the industry. Although Scotland is a major aquaculture producer, Norway tends to own much of our industry. Similarly, although we are the biggest oil and gas producer in Europe, Norway owns more of our industry than we own of its industry. Government needs to learn some hard lessons on these matters.

Members have also expressed a unanimous view about other industry pressures such as the lack of investment in recent years, current low prices and oversupply in the European Union. In that respect, the SNP welcomes the minister's announcement that he is pursuing further safeguards to ensure that there is a level playing field for Scottish producers in Europe.

Other members have referred to the health benefits of eating oily fish and other aquaculture sector products. That said, we must ensure that we act as responsible politicians and I appeal to all MSPs to think twice before they make comments to the press that might fuel any media scaremongering. Such conduct does no one any favours. After all, the whole purpose of the FSA is to ensure that we receive independent advice on these matters. As a result, if we have any concerns about the health effects of Scottish food products, including farmed salmon, our first call should be to the FSA for its advice, not to the press.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): If that is the case, why does the SNP repeatedly abstain from the vote on amnesic shellfish poisoning orders, despite the fact that the FSA has given advice on the matter?

Richard Lochhead: The SNP's position on that matter is well documented. In any case, the system is being changed, so the parties that have questioned the regime have been vindicated.

Given that Scotland has one of Europe's worst health records, we must promote healthy eating, and farmed salmon has a key role to play in that respect. We must ensure that the Minister for Health and Community Care works with the rural development ministers to promote the many healthy Scottish food products. Indeed, fish products are top of the list. However, although we

are one of the world's most famous fish-producing nations, we eat almost the lowest amount of fish per head of population. That ironic and unhealthy situation must change, and the Executive must do more to promote the eating of fish.

Debates on aquaculture are always characterised by arguments about the environmental situation, and quite rightly so, because certain genuine concerns have to be addressed. The SNP welcomes all the steps that the aquaculture industry has taken to do so, because it is important that all producers are sustainable and adhere to the strictest environmental standards. We also welcome the comments about the code of practice, which the industry is considering and which we hope will be introduced as soon as possible. Every producer should sign up to that code and it should be made clear if anyone does not do so. Products must be clearly labelled to ensure that people know about the environmental and welfare standards that producers must adhere to.

The matter of sustainable fishmeal is crucial not only for the global situation, but for the Scottish commercial fishery and it must be addressed. Fish offal that can be used for feeding in the Scottish aquaculture industry will always be produced in Scotland, but we must ensure that wider industrial fishing is addressed because it damages Scotland's commercial fishery.

I will consider two further issues. The first is regulation. Since 1999, the SNP has called for regulation to be streamlined so that the industry can be more competitive. We have waited six years for that and we are still waiting. It is a pity that the Government has dragged its heels and it is ridiculous that the industry must deal with 10 statutory bodies, 63 pieces of legislation and 43 EU directives. We need a one-stop shop. Let us not forget that time is money. If we get a one-stop shop, we can save time and make the industry more efficient. Secondly, the Crown Estate issue must be addressed. It is a throwback to a past age, which causes real costs and problems for the aquaculture industry. It is ridiculous that more has not been done about that before now.

Shellfish cultivation is also important because it offers huge potential for the aquaculture industry. It is environmentally benign and it is sustainable and profitable—it should be encouraged. I have visited and spoken to shellfish farmers in Shetland and Skye. They, too, can sustain employment in our rural and coastal communities. Therefore, I support members' comments about promoting and protecting the interests of shellfish cultivation.

Aquaculture has huge potential for Scotland, but it must be environmentally and economically sustainable, and it must have the Government's continuing support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lyon's extra time, minister, means that I must ask you to restrict your closing remarks to nine minutes.

11:51

Lewis Macdonald: I will attempt to be brief.

I welcome the great majority of what has been said by the great majority of contributors. The debate has reflected the widespread recognition in the Parliament of the importance of aquaculture for many communities around our coast and for the Scottish economy as a whole. Sadly, there is an exception to every rule. The only positive thing that I can say about the speeches of Robin Harper and Eleanor Scott is that they succeeded admirably in uniting all the other parties in the chamber in opposition to the Green's approach to this important industry.

I talked at the outset of the debate about the importance of investor confidence for the future sustainability of the aquaculture industry. Investor confidence is affected by what is said in the Scottish Parliament and members should be aware of that when making their speeches. We should all seek to send out a positive message endorsing the aquaculture industry and its produce, and send that signal around Scotland and beyond.

The point was also made that we should not only act to support the industry, but seek to ensure that investors are aware of the actions that we are taking and of the difference that they will make. I assure members that we are doing that. My predecessor, Allan Wilson, met with the banks not so long ago and we continue to talk with investors. Moreover, the banking community is represented on the ministerial working group for the strategic framework for Scottish aquaculture, which I chair. We will talk to the banking community and to others about what we need to do to secure the industry's future.

We believe that the case for definitive safeguards has been well made. We also recognise that we must continue to make that case with all EU member states to ensure that the measures are put in place. Members will be aware that the industry has lodged an anti-dumping complaint, which could provide an alternative route if the safeguards route proves unfruitful. However, the signals are positive, as I said at the outset, and we believe that we should go ahead on that basis. What we want is an agreed process that produces a minimum price that can underpin a sustainable industry for the future. Beyond the safeguards that we seek, we are aiming to achieve a level playing field on which the Scottish industry can compete successfully. Several members commented on the support that we have had from Douglas Alexander

and UK ministers. Having spoken to Douglas in recent days, I can confirm that we have not only that support, but valuable support from within the European Commission and from other member states.

It is important to recognise that, even after we have done the things that we want to do and have resolved the issues of production costs in Norway and loss-making prices being set for Norwegian produce, it will remain the case that Norway will be an important producer in the sector and that Norwegian companies will be important players within the Scottish industry. Therefore, we will continue to pursue dialogue with the Norwegian Government and seek to improve our competitiveness in order to attract investment for what is an international market.

We will also continue to tackle future impediments to competitiveness and will press ahead with the streamlining of regulation, providing a basis for best management practices and supporting the production and marketing of quality food products. The point has been made from a number of directions that that process is important and that it ought to go faster. I assure members that we are working closely with the industry, stakeholders and regulatory bodies to ensure that the process goes ahead as quickly as it can. I emphasise that we have identified a one-stop shop as a priority for action under the strategic framework.

Mr Brocklebank: I accept what the minister has said, but does he agree that, if the Executive is progressing the issue as rapidly as it claims, the timescale for its aquaculture bill, which will not even start to be read until the end of next year, hardly represents an Executive that regards the industry as being in crisis?

Lewis Macdonald: If the action that we are taking in Europe does not indicate to members the urgency with which we are tackling the issue, I can say only that their measure of what constitutes urgency must be somewhat different from mine.

We are, indeed, addressing the issues with urgency and we are doing so with the industry, which is the critical point. It is not good enough just to say here in the Parliament that Government ought to do more; nor is it good enough to overlook the fact that the industry's buy-in to what we want to do is critical. We must persuade and bring with us all those within the industry, whether they are big producers, small Norwegian-owned companies or Scottish-owned companies. We must work with them and find ways in which they can support the changes that we seek to make. We are exploring a more efficient approach to the question of relocation and there are a number of

good examples of what we are doing in that regard.

The Crown Estate issue was raised, which was perhaps predictable. It is worth saying that part of the process of examining regulation that we are undertaking is the examining of comparative costs within the industry. The kind of figures that have been bandied around in the debate will be replaced by firm, clear figures that will allow us to make sensible judgments. It is worth recalling that the Crown Estate does indeed provide funding for community projects and, among other things, provides funding for the Scottish aquaculture research forum to the tune of £100,000. Therefore, the Crown Estate recognises its relationship with the industry.

The Scottish aquaculture research forum is moving forward. The question was raised whether it attracts sufficient funding. Its projected budget is some £900,000 over three years, which is a more significant figure than has been recognised by one or two members. The forum includes within it the industry, environmental non-governmental organisations, wild-fish interests, public bodies and the Executive. The forum is clearly and decisively setting an agenda and calling for research tenders to address those issues that must be considered.

It is worth emphasising that we are consulting on the extension of planning controls. Those who feel that they can contribute to the consultation should do so. The closing date is 14 January next year, so there is still time for those who want to, to respond. The principle of transferring the responsibility for planning consents from the Crown Estate to local authorities is clear and established, and is on course for next year.

Overall, the actions that we are taking are designed to ensure that the industry has a sustainable and competitive future. We believe that Scottish salmon and Scottish aquaculture products can compete with the best in the world, but they need the support of all stakeholders in the industry to do that. The industry particularly needs an end to the kind of scare stories that we have had in the past and an end to the kind of ambiguity that we heard again in the debate from the Green party about the bogus science that has been brought forward to discredit the industry. There must be consensus around promoting a quality, profitable industry for the future.

The industry's profitability depends on the trade-defence measures that the UK Government is promoting in Europe. The efforts of the UK Government and the Scottish Executive deserve the whole-hearted support of all in the Parliament. We will continue to work with the industry for the benefit of Scottish-owned companies and the

whole industry within Scotland in order to achieve a sustainable future and support jobs in many of our most remote communities.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1243)

I asked that as slowly as I could.

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): And the First Minister is eternally grateful. My papers are falling on the floor.

At next week's meeting of the Cabinet, the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport will report back to us on her visit to Australia this week to support the Scottish team in the youth Commonwealth games. I am delighted to be able to report to the Parliament that, after only two days of those games, the Scottish youth team has already won 14 bronze medals, seven silver medals and seven gold medals. The team deserves all our support.

Nicola Sturgeon: I echo the First Minister's comments—we are all proud of the team and wish it the very best of luck in the remainder of the games.

The First Minister will be aware that the unfair council tax—the tax that hits pensioners and hard-working families hardest—has risen by 50 per cent since Labour came to power. Does the First Minister consider that to be acceptable?

The First Minister: That figure is not true. As I have said before in the chamber, every year since devolution, the increase in the council tax in Scotland has been smaller than the increase in the final six or seven years of the last Conservative Government. The council tax in Scotland is going up by less than council tax in England and Wales is going up. That is partly because of the way in which we have worked with local authorities in Scotland to ensure that they deliver better value for services, but also because we are using our resources to fund properly education and the other critical local services that local government in Scotland supports.

Nicola Sturgeon: For the First Minister's information, band D council tax has risen by 50 per cent since Labour came to power. If he thinks that it is any comfort to hard-pressed pensioners and families in Scotland to say that, in England, it has gone up by 70 per cent, he should think again.

I have a positive suggestion for the First Minister. Earlier this week, the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform announced a package

of public sector efficiency savings. In local government, the efficiency savings for next year alone are in the region of £80 million. Some people doubt whether those savings can be made without cuts being made in council services, but if the First Minister is confident that they can, does he agree that the people who should benefit most from the cutting of waste in councils are the hard-pressed council tax payers who have seen their bills go up by 50 per cent under Labour? Instead of simply cutting from councils' budgets the amount that they have been told to save and keeping the savings centrally, as the Executive intends to do, will the First Minister give back the money to local authorities to pay for a freeze on council tax next year?

The First Minister: It is precisely the purpose of our measure to ensure not only that we have adequate and, indeed, strengthened funding for local services and that, over and above investment in front-line services, we bring about improvements in those services, but that increases in council tax levels are even more reasonable than they have been in recent years. Those twin aims are in line with the views, opinions and aspirations of the people of Scotland. Miss Sturgeon simply cannot come to the Parliament week after week to demand more money, offer no reforms and then stand up and claim that, in some way, she could cut taxes.

Nicola Sturgeon: The money in question is the money that the First Minister is telling us can be made in efficiency savings. I asked him a specific question that was not about keeping increases as low as possible, but about freezing council tax. The average projected increase in council tax next year is 4.5 per cent. For families and pensioners who are already struggling to pay their bills, that could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

An extra £80 million in council coffers could wipe out that increase and allow council tax to be frozen next year. If the First Minister believes that that much can be saved by cutting waste in councils, surely council tax payers should get the benefit. Surely even the First Minister cannot think it fair to force councils to make efficiency savings and still have to raise council taxes to pay for services.

Instead of siphoning off the money to pay for a stream of headline-grabbing ministerial announcements, will the First Minister give the money back to local authorities, to allow councils to give respite to people by freezing council tax next year? Yes or no?

The First Minister: This is absolute, total hypocrisy from Ms Sturgeon and the Scottish nationalist party. Every SNP spokesperson who has spoken about this since July this year has condemned the efficiency savings that we are going to deliver in local government and national

Government in Scotland and has said that they will result in job cuts and reductions in front-line services. Now, not only is Ms Sturgeon supporting the efficiency savings, but she is saying that she does not want the money to be reinvested in front-line services.

The services that the SNP claims to support and which it is always demanding we spend more money on are services that she wants to be cut so that she can finance a tax cut. She should sort her policy out, one way or the other. The SNP should either support services or support tax cuts. It should support either our approach, of improved services that are well financed through efficiency savings, or it should support the Tory policy of tax cuts, if that is now its position.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues will be discussed. (S2F-1244)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I expect to meet the Prime Minister tomorrow and I expect to discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

David McLetchie: I wish the First Minister well in his discussions with Mr Blair. No doubt they will be swapping notes on so-called efficiencies in government, as that is very much the thought of the day or the week.

Since the First Minister and Mr McCabe are about to tell us about all the money that is supposedly to be saved in the next few years, will the First Minister hazard a guess as to how many billions his Scottish Executive has wasted over the past five years? Further, why is any interest being shown in the subject only now, five years too late?

The First Minister: That is absolute rubbish. The percentage of the Scottish Executive's budget that is spent on administration has been reduced systematically since devolution. We have ensured, not only in central Government but in local government as well, that there is a constant drive for efficiency. It is absolutely right and proper that, five years into devolution, we now make a further drive for efficiency savings and redirect that resource to front-line services.

We know that the Tories consistently oppose what we are doing in this regard because they oppose that investment in front-line services. They do not want to see additional investment in education. In fact, in Mr McLetchie's area, the Tories have proposed substantial cuts in education. They do not want to see the substantial investment in the health service in Scotland that is part and parcel of this efficiency drive, because they do not want public resources to be used for

the public health service; they want them to be used to subsidise those who can already afford to pay. Further, they do not want to see investment in transport, tackling crime and the other areas that we are investing in, because they do not support public services. That was their record during 18 years in office and it is a record that we have proudly reversed. We will continue to do that even more effectively in the years to come.

David McLetchie: We can debate records but, as I adequately demonstrated last week, the health service in Scotland is in a far poorer state today than it was seven years ago. It is galling—and shows a real brass neck—for the First Minister to try to suggest that not a penny has been wasted in Scotland in the past five years. Do not make us laugh. The Scottish Executive is a byword for waste and profligacy in this country. Administration costs are up £50 million since 1999, there are four times as many ministers interfering with the running of this country and there is a growing retinue of cars, advisers and spin doctors. However, we are supposed to believe that the leopard has changed its spots.

If the Executive claims have any real substance, and if the so-called savings are real, why will the First Minister not show us the money by giving some of it back to Scotland's taxpayers in the form of a reduction in business rates, which the Executive could announce next week, or a substantial cut—never mind Ms Sturgeon's pathetic little freeze—in the council tax that people pay? If the money is there and is real, why can the Executive not give it back?

The First Minister: As I have already said, in every single year of devolution, council tax increases in Scotland have been less than they were during every one of the final few years of the Conservative Government to which Mr McLetchie wants us to return. He does not want a Government or a devolved Parliament in Scotland. It is clear from his remarks again today that he wants to return to the old days when a small group of Conservative ministers ran Scotland by diktat and introduced the poll tax, cut back on transport, health and other important public investments and made sure that our schools languished at the bottom of the league tables instead of rising all the way to the top. The changes that are happening in Scotland today are those for which the people of Scotland voted when they voted for devolution and for Labour and Liberal Democrats to be in Government in this Parliament and driving efficiencies and investment in public services.

David McLetchie: What the people of Scotland want is value for money, which is what they have not had for the past five years. I will tell the First Minister what could be done with all the money that is supposed to be available. We could reduce

business rates in Scotland to the level they are at in England; we could scrap the Liberal Democrats' £2,000 graduate tax; and we could cut council tax by at least 20 per cent across the board. Why will the First Minister not even consider doing any of those things? Does that not demonstrate that this remains at heart a spend, spend, spend and squander Executive?

The First Minister: We take a reasonable and balanced approach. As the devolved Government in Scotland, we have said that, during this four-year period, we will not increase income tax as we have the power to do and we will consistently maintain low increases in council tax. We will drive through efficiencies in areas such as water services, where the level of efficiency that the devolved Government is achieving is admired in the rest of the United Kingdom.

People are coming here to see how we are delivering efficiencies and investment in public services right across the board. We are delivering those because we believe in public services. That is what the devolved Parliament is here to deliver for Scotland and we will continue to achieve that.

Mr McLetchie has made clear his alternative agenda today. Even one of the three examples that he gave would mean taking out hundreds of millions of pounds from our schools, hospitals, transport improvements or proposals to tackle crime. There would be fewer police on the street and fewer teachers in our schools; fewer people would be involved in improving our transport systems; and there would be fewer improvements in our health service. That is the Conservatives' agenda for Scotland, and that is why they are so consistently rejected by the people of Scotland.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): When the First Minister meets the Prime Minister, will he tell him about another Scottish success story? Will he tell him about the excellent track record of the new futures fund initiative in providing employability programmes for those who are furthest from the labour market, such as those with addiction problems, the homeless and ex-offenders? Is the First Minister aware that more than half the members of the Parliament have signed a motion, in the name of Jackie Baillie, that expresses concern about the future funding of the initiative or a permanent replacement for it? Will he take a personal interest in the issue and agree to meet representatives of the charities involved and, more important, those whose lives they have helped to transform, to discuss a permanent replacement for that excellent scheme as well as interim funding, so that highly valued project workers do not have to be made redundant this Christmas?

The First Minister: I agree entirely with Keith Raffan that such investments are important. We

are driving through our budget efficiencies precisely because that will allow us to allocate more resources to such important local projects. If there are projects that are concerned about their future, either I or another minister—depending on our diaries—will be only too happy to meet their representatives.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): When the First Minister next meets the Prime Minister, will he raise the findings of the recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, which highlights some of the challenges that the city of Dundee still faces, in particular the fact that it has the worst record of mental health problems and teenage pregnancy in Scotland? Will he commit today to meet me and other representatives in the city to discuss how we can respond to some of those challenges?

The First Minister: I have discussed the situation in Dundee on many occasions recently with the leaders of Dundee City Council, local representatives and local people. On all those occasions, it has been clear that although Dundee still faces many challenges, the city is transformed from where it was only 10 or 15 years ago. Many of those changes were inspired by Kate Maclean when she was the council leader before she joined us here in Parliament.

Today, Dundee not only has a stronger economy and a brighter economic future than it has had in recent years, but it has made investment in education, which the Scottish nationalist party would have denied it; it has invested in health services and in improvements in Tayside NHS Board, which the Scottish nationalist party opposed; and, critically, it has two of the best universities in the whole of Europe, one of which has just won an award for being a world leader. Those successes in Dundee need to be recognised and supported at the same time as we take up the challenges to ensure that Dundee prospers even more in the years to come.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-1253)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I expect to speak to the Secretary of State for Scotland tomorrow and I am sure that we will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Robin Harper: Among other matters, the First Minister might discuss the problem of troops returning from Iraq with combat stress. In the light of the continuing horrors of the illegal occupation of Iraq, what is the Executive doing directly to

support soldiers returning to Scotland with combat stress?

The First Minister: I am afraid that I do not know the specific answer to that question, but I am sure that there will be plans in our health service, which I know works closely with the Army, to support those who are returning. I will ensure that the Minister for Health and Community Care writes to Mr Harper with a full and complete answer.

Robin Harper: I inform the First Minister that Executive support for Scotland's only centre for combat stress—Hollybush House in Ayrshire—is just £54,000 over three years. That is shockingly inadequate. The centre faces growing demand for its services. Currently, it operates at a loss and it needs £1 million to build new accommodation to comply with the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. The First Minister's party supported sending troops to Iraq, which is now a civil disaster area. Will he support those troops now and re-examine the centre's funding needs as a matter of great urgency?

The First Minister: It is important to recognise that the centre does not represent the sum total of the support services that are provided for troops in Scotland. It is also important to recognise that there are important relationships between the health service and the Ministry of Defence that involve close working to ensure that those who work in our armed services receive the support that they need across a wide range of services. I am happy to ensure that the specific issue is addressed in the reply that Mr Harper will receive from Mr Kerr following this question session.

Parole Board for Scotland

4. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive will ensure that the Parole Board for Scotland upholds the rights of victims and their families. (S2F-1252)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We are absolutely determined to ensure that the interests of victims are taken into account whenever decisions are taken to release offenders from prison. The Minister for Justice has indicated to the Parole Board that she expects it to make improvements in public accountability to reassure the public that that is so.

Mr McNeil: I am sure that the First Minister agrees that it is unacceptable for victims to be afraid to go about their daily business for fear of meeting their newly freed assailant. New rights and information will be welcome. However, does the First Minister agree that we need to go further and bring to an end the attitude of authorities towards victims and their families in my

constituency and elsewhere in Scotland that it is none of their business?

The First Minister: It is important to recognise that sections 16 and 17 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 provide new rights for victims to register a specific interest in the potential release of those who have offended against them and to receive information in advance of that release so that they can make representations to the Parole Board for Scotland about receiving information following any decision about release.

We must examine whether those rights are adequate in the circumstances and whether further improvements can be put in place. We must also ensure that the public are well aware of how the Parole Board makes its decisions and that the board can justify its decisions. That is precisely why the Minister for Justice has initiated discussions with the Parole Board on that subject, and I am sure that the Parliament will be informed of the outcome of those discussions in due course.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I associate myself with the concerns of my colleague across the chamber, Duncan McNeil.

In considering a prisoner's suitability for release, does the Parole Board take any account of the availability of programmes and support in the community for the prisoner when they leave the prison service? If it already operates such a policy, is it the lack of such services that causes the inspector of prisons to comment adversely on the number of prisoners who remain in prison?

The First Minister: I will make two points. First, the Parole Board certainly should take availability into account, and the improvements in public accountability that the Minister for Justice wants to see would reassure us all that that happens, because we would be able to see proof that decisions are based on the fullest range of information and advice from the different services.

Secondly, Stewart Stevenson's point raises the important advances that we require to make in offender management in Scotland. Currently, in too many parts of the country, there is at least a perception—if it is not the reality—that the service is not joined up. There is a lack of public confidence in community services and there are far too many problems in the prison service relating to reoffending and a revolving-door approach to prisoners. We must ensure that we have a joined-up offender management service in Scotland that brings the different elements together. I hope that the comments that have been made today indicate that the Scottish National Party is moving towards supporting us in that initiative.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I very much welcome what the First Minister has said

about accountability. However, does he agree that any additional scrutiny of Parole Board decisions should remain faithful to the principle that was established in the first parliamentary session that ministers should not interfere in individual parole decisions?

The First Minister: It is important that politicians should not interfere in individual Parole Board decisions and that the Parole Board should make a proper, independent assessment of the situation. However, if the Parole Board has such independence and such rights, it must be publicly accountable for the way in which decisions are made and for the impact of those decisions. That is the right balance for us to try to strike and precisely the balance that the Minister for Justice hopes to achieve.

Public Sector Jobs (Cuts)

5. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how many public sector jobs will be cut under its efficient government strategy and how that will impact on services to the public. (S2F-1255)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Clearly, there would be many more under the SNP's proposal today than there were going to be yesterday. We know that efficient government will mean job changes—that is the inevitable consequence of reforming and modernising to streamline and become more efficient. However, we will not impose an arbitrary job-cut target, as many bodies will wish to retrain staff or redirect them to front-line service delivery. I say to Mr Adam that the objective of our efficiency savings is to ensure that we redirect resources from the back office to the front line to improve services to the public. If he has concerns about that, I suggest that he might want to raise them with Miss Sturgeon, following her earlier comments.

Brian Adam: I am grateful to the First Minister and am glad that he is willing to answer questions today. Gordon Brown has identified the more than 80,000 jobs in the public sector south of the border that will go as part of the efficiency and effectiveness drive there. In the interests of openness and clarity, and as the ultimate employer of many public sector workers, will the First Minister tell us which posts are at risk beyond those that he has identified so far—the up to 80 administrative posts in the Crown Office and related areas?

The First Minister: I have made it clear that we do not have an arbitrary job-cut target. We have a target to ensure that the resources that are available in Scotland's public services, in national and local government, are used for front-line services in education, health, transport and tackling crime. Those are vital services on which

the people of Scotland depend and we want to ensure that resources are redirected to them.

Where people in national or local agencies can be retrained or redirected to work at the front line, so that there is direct benefit to members of the public, that will be welcome. There will be instances in which people's jobs have to go and it is right and proper that we review those circumstances. However, to impose an arbitrary job-cut target, as the SNP apparently wishes to do, would be wrong and unfair.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): It is obvious to everyone but the Executive that having fewer people employed in public services means cuts in public services. I would like the First Minister to comment specifically on remarks that Tom McCabe made on the television the other night when justifying the First Minister's programme of increasing and swingeing cuts. He cited the existence of 32 different human resources and payroll departments as a problem. Just a few months ago, the Executive refused to intervene to avoid 32 different pay rates for nursery nurses and to do anything to secure one national pay scheme for them. Do Mr McCabe's remarks indicate that the Executive supports national pay for nursery nurses and other workers, or is this a breathtaking example of the Executive's double standards?

The First Minister: I am probably in quite a good place today. On the one hand, we have the SNP and the Tories advocating massive cuts in public services, and on the other hand we have the Trotskyists at the back of the chamber saying that we are not employing enough administrators and bureaucrats. We are in exactly the right place. In Scotland today more people are working in the health service, our schools, our police services and the safety services in our community. More people are involved in the private and public sector investment that will be made in our transport and water services and in many other parts of our infrastructure. That trend will continue year on year. In all the areas that I have mentioned, there will be more investment and more staff members doing the things that are important. In achieving that, we will deliver more efficiencies behind the scenes to provide services even better. That is the right balance for Scotland and is exactly what the Parliament should be doing. We will continue to do it.

Sectarianism

6. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive is addressing sectarian abuse and violence. (S2F-1260)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Sectarian abuse and violence have absolutely no

place in today's Scotland and we will work to eradicate them, wherever they occur. Our review of marches and parades will report in the new year. We are developing an anti-sectarianism education resource for use in schools. With colleagues in various sporting bodies, we are working to tackle sectarianism in sport. We are continuing to provide funding to bodies such as Sense over Sectarianism, the Scottish Inter Faith Council and Nil by Mouth. Last month I outlined a five-point plan to reduce knife crime as part of a wider strategy to tackle violence, including sectarian violence.

Donald Gorrie: The First Minister has a welcome personal commitment to this issue. Will he use some of that commitment to press the football clubs that are part of the problem to take the lead, along with the police, in imposing on their supporters better standards of behaviour, so that we do not get abuse and violence from sectarian or other motives? Universal condemnation was visited on Spanish fans for jeering at a black English player. We want to create an atmosphere in which the same attitude is taken to people who jeer at players in Scotland for religious or similar reasons. Will the First Minister try to deliver that through the clubs?

The First Minister: I agree absolutely with Donald Gorrie on this matter and admire his long-term commitment to tackling the issue. It is just as unacceptable for white football fans in Scotland to hurl sectarian abuse of an anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant nature at players and other fans inside football grounds as it is for them to jeer black players or to pick on someone on the pitch because they are Jewish or Muslim. We need to make very clear in the Parliament that such behaviour is unacceptable in Scotland today and that we will continue to work to eradicate it.

We do not need exaggerated headlines on what the penalties might be, such as those that we saw earlier this week. However, we need seriously to consider football banning orders and the reasonable action that we can take. After a period of convictions or incidents, there could be more extreme sentences or cautions.

We also need to consider the action that the football clubs can take. Recently, ministers and I met representatives of the football clubs, who have been helpful. I intend to meet representatives of football supporters. I notice that there was an exchange this week between supporters of Rangers and Celtic, in which they both indicated a willingness to discuss the issue. It is time to bring the supporters' representatives on board. I intend to do that early in the new year, and I hope that we can get their full support to help us in our task.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Does the First Minister agree that, abhorrent as this type of

behaviour is, it is only part of the wider growth of crime and disorder over which the Executive has presided, and that such behaviour will be deterred only when we have a much stronger, much more visible and much more practical police presence on the streets and in the proximity of football grounds? When will the Executive introduce proposals that will result in a substantial increase in police numbers?

The First Minister: If they ever rerun that old Askit advert, Bill Aitken would be one of the miseries. He cannot see anything good about Scotland today. We have the lowest level of crime in Scotland for years; we have the highest clear-up rate that there has been in Scotland for decades; and we have the highest number of police officers ever. The police are on the streets more now than they ever were in all the years of Tory Government. They are now supported and complemented by neighbourhood wardens—to which the Conservatives are opposed—who are helping them in the local community. The police have more powers than they ever had before, most of which the Conservatives voted against in this chamber. The police are doing an extremely effective job, and they will do even better with the support of this devolved Government. That is the action that we need to take for Scotland. That is action that we should be praising and supporting, Mr Aitken, instead of coming along here like a misery week after week and condemning the police for what they do.

12:32

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport

Schools (Class Sizes)

1. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had about reducing class sizes. (S2O-4313)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): I have regular discussions with local authority and teacher representatives on several educational issues, including class sizes.

Dennis Canavan: Does the minister agree that many classes are far too big? For example, is he aware that according to the Executive's latest figures, in secondary schools in the Falkirk area, 47 per cent of first-year maths classes and 55 per cent of second-year maths classes have 30 or more pupils? Instead of allowing head teachers to dilute the partnership commitment to reduce such class sizes to a maximum of 20, will he fulfil the commitment by increasing teacher recruitment and giving local authorities additional resources to employ more teachers, to improve educational opportunities for pupils in our schools?

Peter Peacock: I am glad to be able to satisfy Dennis Canavan on all those counts. The Executive is firmly committed to reducing class sizes in secondary 1 and 2 maths and English in particular, precisely because we think that classes are too big. That is part of our commitment to have 53,000 teachers in our schools, even though school rolls are falling. We are on track to meet that commitment.

We have increased teacher training places by 700 this year and in the subject to which Dennis Canavan referred—maths—we are training 80 per cent more teachers this year than we did last year. In the past two weeks, I have given education authorities an extra £60 million to build extra classrooms to house extra teachers. We have in place the budget to train those teachers and to pay their salaries. Everything is in place to meet the targets by 2007. Far from being given latitude to dilute that commitment, head teachers will have latitude to go further and to cut class sizes more, provided that that is in the educational interests of pupils.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I was pleased to hear what the minister said. In allowing head teachers more flexibility over class sizes and providing on-going information, will he undertake always to keep teachers informed, particularly through the Educational Institute of Scotland and other trade unions?

Peter Peacock: Not only will teachers be kept informed, but I hope they will play an active part in national and local discussions about how we provide the flexibility for which head teachers and schools have asked. It is good professional practice for head teachers to seek to involve teachers in the discussion of potential changes to class sizes in their schools. That is very much the spirit in which I want progress to be made.

Once we have in place all the resources that I outlined to Dennis Canavan, we want to ensure that head teachers can on occasion consider cutting some class sizes further, provided that doing so does not disadvantage other pupils. That ought to be a professional judgment made by the head teacher and the class teachers to do the right thing by the kids in a school. I therefore hope that teachers will be actively involved in the process.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): Are falling school rolls not having more impact on class sizes than are Executive policies to boost the number of teachers? Several news stories in the past few weeks have suggested that a shortage of teachers persists, not least in Glasgow. Given that driving down class sizes is the key to improvements in attainment and discipline in school education, will the minister undertake to review the measures that he is taking to increase teacher supply, rather than twisting and turning on matters of flexibility?

Peter Peacock: I do not for one minute think that I am "twisting and turning on matters of flexibility". Our policy is clear and I will reiterate it. We have given the extra cash to build the extra classrooms to house the extra teachers whom we are recruiting. We have in position all the places in our universities to train those extra teachers and we have all the money to pay their salaries. Given that everything is on track, it is right that we should examine how we might advance our policy even further with some local flexibility. Indeed, last week the First Minister quoted the SNP spokesperson speaking in support of that policy rather than opposing it. I hope that we will get support from the SNP.

Fewer than 1 per cent of all teacher posts in Scotland are still advertised after three months, so we do not have a big national problem with teacher shortages. Mechanisms have been put in place to plan the type of teacher we require and

what type of subject we require to be taught, in advance of any shortage that we see coming.

I accept that there are localised shortages, but local authorities are working hard to resolve that through their supply provision. However, not only do we not have an overall problem, we are supplying extra teachers to make sure that with the combination of falling school rolls and extra teachers, we can make use of an unprecedented opportunity to reduce class sizes more than we had planned.

Foreign Languages (Primary Schools)

2. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to support the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools. (S2O-4355)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Since 2001, the Scottish Executive has provided education authorities with more than £14 million to support the implementation of the recommendations made in the report by the action group on languages "Citizens of a Multilingual World".

Robert Brown: Does the minister accept that the notorious incompetence of people in Scotland and the rest of Britain in foreign languages is a serious handicap to our ability to take maximum advantage of European trade opportunities? Has he done any assessment of the success of the recent teaching of foreign languages in primary 6 and primary 7 and of whether that offers a successful way of changing the scenario? Is he looking at the possibility of rolling out language immersion for primary 1 children, which is being piloted in Aberdeen and which could copy the success of Gaelic-immersion schools in a slightly different context?

Peter Peacock: I am more than happy to consider new ideas of ways to advance the cause of promoting better language use in Scotland. I am one of the incompetent Scots who does not have other languages. That is a matter of personal regret because, in the past when I was operating in European political forums, all the people around me could speak several languages and, to my shame, I could not. Many people in Scotland and the rest of Britain believe that because most people speak English, we do not have to learn other languages. That is one of the major challenges facing education in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. However, all the evidence shows that learning other languages is good for the brain and for expanding learning capacity and that whether someone learns other languages determines how competitive they will be in the future jobs market. Undoubtedly our young people will have to compete on a European stage in the future more than they have to do

today, so having one or more additional languages would be a clear advantage.

On the member's first point, there has been a lot of success in giving young people an entitlement to speak a modern European language by the time they are in primary 6. Currently, 96 per cent of pupils in primary 6 are studying a modern language, as are 98 per cent of primary 7 pupils. There is therefore a high rate of adoption of the policy to encourage and give an entitlement to young people to speak other languages. We all have a duty to encourage that.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): The minister has acknowledged the challenge ahead of us and he is no doubt aware that according to research by the European Commission, only 34 per cent of UK citizens speak a second language compared with 98 per cent in some other member states. Does he agree that inter-regional co-operation and joint projects with schools in other regions of the European Union can greatly assist pupil motivation by allowing them to engage with other young people and getting them interested in learning languages? Will he join me in welcoming the European Commission's Comenius programme and the involvement of local authorities such as North Ayrshire Council in progressing such programmes?

Peter Peacock: I join Irene Oldfather in congratulating that council on its involvement in that programme. I acknowledge that she is not one of the incompetent Scots, because she is competent in French as I know from her involvement in the European Committee of the Regions. When she was entertaining visitors to the Parliament last week, she conversed in French for the whole evening. She is to be congratulated on the example that she sets for the rest of us.

I also applaud Irene Oldfather's point that the more it is possible for us to connect our schools with other modern European countries, share language skills and use modern technologies, the more we should do that. Interesting things are happening in Scottish schools to connect electronically with France and other parts of the European Union to ensure that there are real-time opportunities for young people to converse in other languages.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Is the minister aware of the innovative scheme at Rothesay Primary School where one teacher has refreshed her language teaching skills so that she can provide all the language teaching in the school and free up the other teachers for non-contact time? Is that initiative not worthy of consideration for repetition elsewhere in Scotland?

Peter Peacock: I am not aware of the particular scheme to which Lord James refers, but I will be happy to receive information about it. However, Lord James makes a good point—I do not always say that—that some councils are using the opportunity that is created by the reduction in class contact time imaginatively by deploying specialisms to fill up the time. That is one way to advance not just languages but other specialisms in schools.

Modern Languages

3. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what further action it will take to make the primary and secondary school modern language programme more successful. (S2O-4318)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): It is obviously the Liberal week for languages. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education is evaluating provision for modern languages in Scottish schools. Its final report is due this month. Those findings will help to inform future support for modern languages and work that is under way to revise our schools curriculum.

Donald Gorrie: The fact that two questions on languages came up together is a coincidence and not a plot. Taking up Irene Oldfather's point, how does the minister think that we can help teachers to enthuse pupils in secondary schools about modern languages? I would hate to try to teach a modern language to pupils who were dead against it for whatever mistaken reason. How can we enthuse them about the importance of learning modern languages and the pleasure to be gained from it? Our education system is notoriously at its worst in the early secondary years, so how can we grab those pupils for modern languages in that period?

Peter Peacock: Donald Gorrie makes an important point. The thrust of the changes to the curriculum that we announced last month is to try to ensure that young people are more engaged in learning in S1 and S2. Part of the secret of that is not to use compulsion in all subjects but to encourage and enthuse people and to give them greater choice and space than we have given them in the past to pursue the subjects that they want to pursue.

I was recently in a first-year secondary school class, where young people still have a broad experience of the curriculum and the chance not just to sample languages but to continue the work that they have done in modern languages at primary school. In that classroom, I saw the most modern technology available allowing young people to engage in the types of computer games that they would engage in anyway but in a much more constructive way than they might in their

bedrooms at home. We want to see young people enjoying the learning process and that is part of the way in which we can enthuse them. That brings us back to Irene Oldfather's point about making the connection between living languages, communication and understanding other cultures. That makes all the difference.

The reason why I did not pursue languages at secondary school was because they tried to teach me French grammar from day one in a stultified, pretty awful way that switched me and many others off. That is not happening today. We are exciting young people about learning and we need to keep doing that to increase the numbers of people who are learning languages.

Marine National Parks

4. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether tourism would be boosted by the establishment of statutory marine national parks. (S2O-4407)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): Tourism in coastal and island areas, including watching marine and other forms of wildlife, is an important and growing component of Scotland's tourism sector. VisitScotland is already actively engaged with other organisations in promoting its further development. The Executive consulted recently on a strategic framework for Scotland's marine environment, and asked for views on whether there is a role for marine national parks in better managing the use of our seas. Responses to the consultation are being evaluated and the Executive's conclusions will be announced in due course.

Eleanor Scott: I am sure that the minister agrees that Scotland's marine environment is the envy of the rest of the United Kingdom and much of the rest of the world. Scotland's marine environment is an asset to our tourism industry, as the minister said, but its management is a guddle of more than 80 pieces of legislation and 35 public bodies. It has taken half a century for Scotland to catch up with England and Wales on terrestrial national parks—even though one of our national parks does not have sensible boundaries and has no planning powers. Does the minister recognise the potential iconic value of establishing the UK's first marine national park? Will he persuade his Cabinet colleagues to speed up moves towards the establishment of such a park?

Mr McCabe: I will persuade my Cabinet colleagues—although they will need no persuasion—to pay full attention to the responses to the consultation, as the Scottish Executive always does. I fully accept the member's point about the value of marine wildlife tourism in Scotland, which generates more than £57 million

per year, supports more than 2,600 jobs and is of tremendous importance. More than 90 per cent of visitors to Scotland mention our tremendous natural resources as a reason for visiting the country, so I accept that those resources are an extremely important part of tourism activity and I accept the importance of protecting our wonderful natural heritage.

VisitScotland (Marketing Strategy)

5. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what its plans are for VisitScotland's marketing strategy. (S2O-4334)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): VisitScotland's marketing strategy is key to the ambition of increasing the value of tourism revenues in Scotland by 50 per cent over the next decade. We have made available a 28 per cent increase over three years in VisitScotland's marketing budget to support that ambition. VisitScotland will use that extra money—most of which will be matched by the private sector—to broaden its United Kingdom and United States marketing campaigns, to extend its European campaigns and to strengthen the marketing of the many new direct air links to Scotland from international and UK markets.

Brian Adam: I thank the minister, who is standing in to answer questions. I acknowledge that there have been recent successes in attracting new tourists to Scotland and I hope that such success continues. However, concerns are expressed, particularly by people in the industry, that the projected shortfall of between £2 million and £4 million might have a damaging effect on local funding. How will the expected 10 to 15 per cent redundancy across the network be paid for? Will VisitScotland take on the pension liabilities of the 14 area tourist boards?

Mr McCabe: I am blinded on any potential shortfall. I mentioned the substantial increase in VisitScotland's marketing budget and VisitScotland's overall budget is £43 million per year, which is a considerable sum of money. VisitScotland's results are impressive; this year there was a 12 per cent increase in visitors to Scotland and a 25 per cent increase in visitors from the European Union, which indicates that we are on the right track. Work is going on to refine our efforts even further to ensure that we are up to date with the best possible practice in the management of our tourism assets and with the most effective techniques of promoting this country in the UK and around the world. I am sure that in any changes that are made, VisitScotland will follow the best human resources practice, but discussions on the matter are going on and as far as I am aware have not yet reached a conclusion.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I am sure that the minister is aware of Edinburgh's crucial role as a driver of Scottish tourism and a gateway to Scotland. Indeed, I am sure that he is aware that 54 per cent of overseas visitors and 21 per cent of UK visitors to Scotland route through Edinburgh. Will the minister provide an assurance that the new arrangements and marketing plans for the VisitScotland integrated network will continue to maximise the capital's gateway role and build on successes such as the Edinburgh convention bureau, and in so doing ensure that not only Edinburgh but the wider Scottish tourism industry and the wider Scottish economy reap the maximum benefits?

Mr McCabe: I am happy to endorse the efforts that have been made in Edinburgh not only to improve tourism in the city but to allow the effects of increased tourism to be spread across Scotland. That is to be commended in every possible way. More and more, we realise the benefits of co-operation rather than competition between areas of Scotland, to ensure that there is the maximum transition from one area to another; that we gain the maximum possible spend from visitors to Scotland; and that through those efforts and exposure to the maximum number of attractions that Scotland has to offer we encourage even higher numbers of repeat visitors.

Edinburgh plays an important role in business tourism. In both Scottish and UK terms, it is an iconic place. In our previous home and here, we have seen how many people are attracted to Edinburgh and find it a welcoming place. I am glad that Edinburgh takes a lead in Scotland and that other areas are learning lessons from what has been put in place in this city.

Finance and Public Services and Communities

Land-value Taxation

1. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive when the independent body reviewing local government finance will meet to consider the benefits of land value taxation. (S2O-4391)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): We are moving on apace, as the Presiding Officer is well aware.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I realise that Mr McCabe is doing two jobs today.

Mr McCabe: It is public sector efficiency.

It is for the independent review committee to set its working methods and timetable. However, land value taxation is included in the committee's remit,

and I understand that it will consider that form of taxation as part of its work.

Mark Ballard: I welcome the minister's confirmation that the committee will consider land value taxation as part of its work. Does he have information on whether the independent review committee plans to meet external organisations to discuss the potential of land value taxation? In the voluntary sector, the Henry George Foundation, a think-tank that is based here in Edinburgh, is at the forefront of research into how public services can be funded through land value taxation. In academia, there are experts in Scotland such as Dr Roger Sandilands at the University of Strathclyde—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We do not want a speech, Mr Ballard. Come to the question.

Mark Ballard: Does the minister agree that it is essential that the review makes full use of all resources and external bodies properly to consider the contribution that land value taxation might make to the cultural, economic, environmental and democratic renaissance of Scotland? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is still a question.

Mr McCabe: Even applying my best efficiency, I cannot remember half of what the member has said, but I will do my best to respond.

The most important feature of the committee is its independence. We set it up deliberately as an independent body, separate from ministers, so that it could take an objective, comprehensive view on all the options for financing local government. It is important that neither members of the Parliament nor members of the Executive unnecessarily try to guide the direction that the committee takes. I have no doubt that if it has proper regard to the remit that it has been given, which is very wide, it will take on board some of the points that Mr Ballard has made. I intend to meet the chair and other members of the committee early in the new year. At that time, they will no doubt take the opportunity to inform me of any progress that they have made and any intended work streams that they may have in the months to come.

Domestic Abuse (Prevention)

2. Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what funding assistance is offered to organisations involved in the prevention of domestic abuse. (S2O-4397)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): Over the past few years, an unprecedented amount of funding has been made available to organisations that are involved in the

prevention of domestic abuse. From 2000 until 2006, almost £26 million will have been spent on tackling domestic abuse. A further £6 million will have been spent on the wider forms of violence against women. The funding includes such programmes as the refuge development programme, the domestic abuse service development fund, the Scottish domestic abuse helpline and the domestic abuse court pilot.

Janis Hughes: Does the minister agree that Scottish Women's Aid and other such organisations that are working in my constituency and throughout Scotland must continue to be resourced, so that they can provide invaluable assistance to women and children, who are by far the main victims of domestic abuse?

Johann Lamont: Absolutely. The Scottish Executive has recognised the key role of Scottish Women's Aid, both by providing funding and by working with such organisations to develop a strategy. We know that 89 per cent of the victims of domestic abuse are women and that more than 89 per cent of perpetrators are male.

The two purposes of our strategy are to support anyone who is a victim of violent intimidation and abuse and to prevent it. Unless we acknowledge the pattern of violence and unless we challenge the attitudes that underpin it and allow it to develop, we will never change it. Scottish Women's Aid and other organisations like it have been crucial not only in supporting survivors of abuse but in raising the hard issue of what causes abuse, which gives us an opportunity to take action to eradicate this evil.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I welcome the minister's comments. I wish to raise a constituency matter relating to the Edinburgh domestic violence probation project, which has been running for many years. The project is waiting to hear the outcome of an application for additional funding to allow it to operate at proper capacity. At present, sheriffs are unable to divert people to the project and although it has been successful in Edinburgh, it cannot be extended to other jurisdictions, such as Haddington. Will the minister consider accelerating consideration of the project's funding in order that further progress can be made?

Johann Lamont: The Scottish Executive is committed to working with organisations and projects that seek to make the changes on which we all agree. Although I do not know the details of the project to which Kenny MacAskill referred, I am more than happy to meet him to talk about it or to receive correspondence from him highlighting the issues, which I will ensure are pursued within the Executive.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): Given that many young people and children in schools display emotional difficulties or do not learn because they are affected badly by domestic violence, does the minister agree that there is a need for more awareness raising among teachers? Does she agree that initial teacher training courses should provide courses in conjunction with Scottish Women's Aid—which does training well—and that refresher courses should be provided every few years so that teachers are aware of the signs and know how to deal with those young people?

Johann Lamont: When I was a schoolteacher I worked with young people who were often blamed for their non-attendance and difficulties in school, when in fact their behaviour was absolutely logical given what was happening to them in their homes. Sometimes they were afraid to leave their homes because they were afraid of what they would go back to if they left their mother on her own. I understand the issues that Rosemary Byrne highlighted. The £6 million that has been allocated to children's workers recognises that there are people who, although they are not working in Scottish Women's Aid refuges, have a central role in working with young people. It is crucial that as a result of training for teachers and other people who work in schools and elsewhere, they should be able to ask the right question at the right time, to allow young people to explain their circumstances in a safe way and get the help that they and their families need.

Scottish Borders

3. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it has taken to sustain and invigorate Borders communities. (S2O-4408)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): A wide range of Executive policies are in place and are making a real difference, for example investment in affordable housing, funding to support community transport projects, significant economic development investment, and 175 jobs in the Scottish Public Pensions Agency.

Christine Grahame: I note what the minister says, but does he agree that central to sustaining and invigorating Borders communities is the local primary school? Given that, Borders-wide, schools such as Burnmouth, Hutton, Fountainhall and many others are going to close, that cannot be said to be supporting sustainability or invigorating communities. Will the Minister for Communities liaise with the Minister for Education and Young People to consider providing targeted funding to local authorities such as Scottish Borders Council to enable schools to remain open in the wider

interests of the social and economic well-being of often fragile communities?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will raise the matter with the Minister for Education and Young People, who heard the member directly, so I am sure that he will get back to her. Obviously, I was not expecting an education question. When I was talking about the Scottish Public Pensions Agency, it sprung to mind that Christine Grahame attacked that movement of jobs to the Borders, saying that it was little more than “cynical political manoeuvring”. I hope that she is now willing to retract that and accept the analysis of Scottish Enterprise Borders, which estimates the annual economic impact of that move at £6.13 million and 289 full-time-equivalent jobs.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The minister may be aware of my opposition to the proposal of the Conservative-led council in the Borders to close schools. Does he acknowledge the work of Lauderdale Development Trust and the community of Walkerburn, which are working hard to develop their areas? Will he ensure that the local funding structures, through the enterprise company, the council and Communities Scotland, are properly co-ordinated to offer support to communities such as Lauderdale and Walkerburn?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am pleased that Scottish Enterprise Borders has put funding into those communities. I strongly support that and I will see what further work can be done.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): It would not be appropriate to comment on education issues during this section of question time, so instead I will ask the minister about community planning and the co-ordination of activities to sustain communities. Scottish Water already imposes significant development constraints in the Borders and now the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has adopted a negative attitude towards soakaways in the building of individual houses. What discussions has the Executive had with SEPA about that restriction on housebuilding in the Borders and other parts of rural Scotland?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am not aware of any discussions on the issue, but I will investigate the matter and write to the member.

Housing (Local Authorities)

4. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is a good use of public resources for local authorities to compete in the private housing market for homes rather than build new local authority owned properties to meet their obligations under homelessness legislation. (S2O-4305)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): As a general rule, Scottish Executive funding goes to programmes that increase the supply of housing. However, there may be circumstances in which the purchase of properties is justified to meet particular housing objectives quickly. That is a matter for local authorities to consider in the light of their housing needs assessments and local circumstances.

Richard Lochhead: All members support the recent homelessness legislation that will ensure that homeless people have access to temporary accommodation. However, the public in Aberdeenshire have raised concerns because the council there has just spent £0.5 million on buying six houses in the private market, competing against local people. Does the minister accept that that shows that there is a council housing crisis? Surely it would be cheaper, more sensible and a better use of public funds for councils to build council housing to help people who need a roof over their head than to compete in a market in which housing is already in short supply.

Malcolm Chisholm: As I said, the fundamental policy is to increase the supply of affordable housing. In the next three years, £1.2 billion will be targeted at that. Aberdeenshire Council has benefited greatly from the increased expenditure on housing—it received a big increase in its funding for housing in the past year. However, as I stated, those measures may need to be supplemented in some circumstances. We have increased the rights of homeless people and the number of people who have those rights, which obviously means that short-term as well as longer-term action needs to be taken. The fundamental policy is to increase the supply of homes, but the private sector should be used where necessary. I emphasise that because, as a result of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004—which will ensure that families are not in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for longer than 14 days—some councils may have to use the private sector.

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): The minister is aware that local authorities play a key role in housing, not just as landlords, but in leading strategic discussions and decision making about housing provision, particularly in relation to homelessness. Will he reassure me that he will continue to work with local authorities to address the needs of homeless people in their areas?

Malcolm Chisholm: I strongly agree with Mary Mulligan on that point. On Tuesday, I was pleased to convene one of a series of regular meetings between the Executive and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on housing, homelessness and regeneration, at which I made clear my total commitment to working in

partnership with COSLA on the challenges of homelessness and of housing and regeneration more generally. I repeated that commitment at yesterday's Communities Committee meeting, in which there was some disagreement with COSLA. I do not want to go into the details, although some of this morning's reporting of the disagreement was one sided. We engaged with COSLA as much as we could in the past year on the order that I mentioned, but it did not respond to the consultation on the matter. However, that is water under the bridge and I am determined to ensure that we work in partnership with COSLA on all the challenging housing matters.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): The trouble is that the water is not entirely under the bridge, I am afraid. Is the minister aware that the order has made it necessary for East Lothian Council to try to purchase former council houses to meet the growing needs of homeless people? Does it make sense for the Executive to compel local authorities to sell houses at discounted prices as low as £20,000 and then compel them to buy back the same houses at the market price of around £100,000? How does the minister reconcile that with the theme of efficient government that the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform will talk about this afternoon?

Malcolm Chisholm: That is not the main thing that is happening in housing in East Lothian. One of the most important developments for East Lothian Council—over and above the £1.2 billion that will benefit everywhere in Scotland—is the Executive's decision to allow councils to use a prudential borrowing regime. I know that East Lothian Council is keen to benefit from that regime, which will do a great deal for council housing in the area.

John Home Robertson sounds as if he is attacking the right-to-buy policy in its totality—that, of course, is his right—but the Parliament took a view on the matter in 2001. We are committed to reviewing the policy in 2006, at which time he and everyone else can give their views. What he described concerns the purchase of a small number of private sector houses. As I said in my last answer, those purchases will be necessary for some authorities that have to take very quick action in order to meet the terms of the order. I think that East Lothian Council might be looking at its allocations policy to see what the proportion of lets that go to homeless families is. As John Home Robertson knows, Communities Scotland heavily criticised the council in its report on the subject.

Local Authority Services (One-stop Shops)

5. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is encouraging

the development of one-stop shops for local authority services. (S2O-4356)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): The Executive is encouraging the development of one-stop shops—and, most important, one-stop services—through the modernising government fund, which provides direct financial support to local authorities, and through the community planning process, which encourages councils to work with their partners.

All 32 local authorities have benefited from the modernising government fund in the development of their one-stop services. The fund has provided support including direct funding of £17 million from the first round in 2000, £28 million from the second round over 2002-04 and a further commitment of £35 million from the third round until 2006.

The Executive, along with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other representatives from the local authorities, is also encouraging a consortium approach to the development of modern one-stop services with councils. We are working together to share development, experience, costs and good practice.

Scott Barrie: I thank the minister for his comprehensive response. He might be aware of the extensive network of one-stop shops for local authority services in my local authority area in Fife. I am heartened to hear him acknowledge that, as part of the process, authorities should work with partner agencies. What encouragement can be given to all local authorities to include in their one-stop shops not only local authority services, but services that are offered by non-departmental public bodies?

Tavish Scott: Mr Barrie raises an important point in relation not only to non-departmental public bodies, but to departments of Government in the round. We intend to work with the range of organisations that he describes in order to ensure that one-stop shops and one-stop services link across Government. We intend to ensure that citizens receive the best possible service as quickly and efficiently as possible. That is very much part of our efficient government approach.

Local Government Finance Review

6. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects to receive a progress report on the work of the independent review into local government finance. (S2O-4296)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): As the member will have heard in the response to an earlier question, Tom McCabe and I plan to meet the review committee early in the new year to hear of progress in its work.

Iain Smith: When the ministers meet the independent committee, will they stress the importance of publicising its work and of inviting people who have views on the future of local government finance to submit their comments? Liberal Democrats are keen to put forward our view that the council tax is unfair and should be replaced by a local income tax.

Tavish Scott: It is certainly our intention, when we meet the independent review committee, to ask its members about the mechanisms for ensuring that all who wish to put forward their views and give evidence can do so. The information on the committee's approach should be promulgated as widely as possible throughout Scotland.

Housing Support Services

7. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to improve housing support services. (S2O-4375)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): Under the spending review, £1.2 billion is available over the next three years for housing support services. Local authorities are being asked to conduct local service reviews in order to identify services that do not fit with strategic priorities and gaps in provision and they are being asked to deliver improved value for money. The Scottish Social Services Council is examining the scope for introducing a training qualification for housing support staff.

Christine May: Although I appreciate the work that the Executive is doing in the area, does the minister accept that the changes to the arrangements in the supporting people fund are causing difficulties for projects such as the supported housing accommodation for young people in Alexander Road in Glenrothes in my constituency? Will she outline the management arrangements that have been put in place to deal with the changes connected with the supporting people programme? Will she ensure that there is meaningful dialogue with local authorities and voluntary bodies on the matter?

Johann Lamont: We all recognise the challenge that always comes with redistribution and change. In its dialogue with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Executive has acknowledged some of the difficulties that have emerged around the supporting people fund. We should be clear about a number of things, however. First, £1.2 billion over three years is a significant amount of funding in anybody's language. Because it is spread over three years, it is providing stability and an opportunity for local authorities to plan ahead, as they themselves have recognised.

We have discussed with COSLA how the change will be managed. We recognise the difficulties. Transition funding and support will be given to local authorities that are in particular difficulty. In addition, there will be service reviews over the next period. In guidance, we will be asking local authorities to assess the impact of the change.

We must recognise the necessity of the change. When we are spending £1.2 billion, it is logical to ensure that there is a match between funding and need. Currently, there are some huge disparities. One local authority is spending £235 per head of population; another authority is spending £16 per head of population. It is clear that funding and need do not match at present. Moving the distribution as we have under the formula brings difficulties—we have acknowledged that. We are working with COSLA and local authorities on the matter. However, we believe that the drive underpinning the change is correct: there should not be a postcode lottery for vulnerable people across Scotland.

General Questions

Health Services Funding (Grampian)

1. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to change the funding formula for health services in the Grampian area in the next three years. (S2O-4306)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): Grampian's 2004-05 unified budget has increased by £30.9 million over the comparable 2003-04 budget. The Executive currently has no plans fundamentally to change the funding formula for the health service, which is based on national health service boards' population share, the age and sex mix, the level of deprivation and the proportion of the population living in remote and rural areas. A short-life resource allocation committee is being set up and part of its remit is to improve and refine the Arbutnott formula.

Richard Lochhead: The minister will know from a recent parliamentary answer that he gave me that two years ago Grampian received the third-worst funding settlement in Scotland per capita for health services, last year it received the second-worst funding settlement in Scotland and this year it received the worst funding settlement in Scotland. That is despite the fact that, although Grampian has perhaps the most efficient health board in the whole of Scotland, it has some of the longest waiting times in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to the question, please.

Richard Lochhead: Grampian NHS Board could be about to run up a deficit of around £13 million. Does the minister accept that the current formula does not reflect need for patients in Grampian? Will he initiate a review to ensure that the formula used reflects need and takes into account the pressures that are experienced by medical staff and patients in Grampian?

Mr Kerr: I tried to indicate that to the member in my initial answer. If he does not believe it from me, he should perhaps correspond with his party leader, who said:

"The Scottish Executive is considering diverting cash from some of the more affluent parts of Scotland to help Glasgow back to health ... I am 100% behind that. It'll cause uproar in some other Scots towns and cities, for sure, but that's tough".

The Executive does not take that view. We have carried out a review of how we fund our health service—the first such review in 20 years. Funding is based on share of population, age structure, the level of deprivation, remote and rural issues, mortality rates among people under 65, the unemployment rate, the percentage of elderly people on income support and the number of multiply deprived households. It is not just based on per capita figures, as some members would wish. I should mention that, on a per capita basis, Mr Lochhead's proposal would be disappointing news in the Western Isles, Shetland, Orkney, Glasgow, Highland and Dumfries and Galloway, all of which benefit from a rational disbursement of resources that is based on need.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Is the minister aware that, as a result of financial constraints, NHS Grampian has had to postpone its appointment of infection control nurses until April next year? Does he agree that those nurses have a vital role to play in education about, and control of, MRSA and other hospital-acquired infections? For the future, will he seek to restore NHS Grampian's fair share of resources, which were directed away from the north-east under the Arbutnott formula?

Mr Kerr: Let us get this in context, colleagues. The current budget is £8.1 billion, rising to £10.3 billion in 2007-08. On the point about Grampian, I point out that the Executive has levelled up resources; we have not taken money away from any health board. With the progress that we are making and the additional resources that we are putting in, we have been levelling up. No one is losing in hard-cash terms. The new money that has gone to Grampian is in line with the average increase throughout Scotland. There is no reduction in funding. Of course all our health boards are under pressure with regard to resources. We all know that they could do more with more money. However, it is for them to decide

the local priorities. I share the member's view on infection control, about which the Executive will make announcements in due course.

Road Safety

2. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to improve road safety. (S2O-4387)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Executive is investing in road improvements targeted on accident black spots. We are also funding road safety programmes, such as the foolsspeed and Christmas drink driving campaigns, and safer road projects, such as safer routes to school and home zones. We are supporting tougher enforcement by the police, for example to stop drivers using hand-held mobile telephones, which is illegal and irresponsible and costs lives.

Irene Oldfather: I welcome the measures that the minister outlined. Does he agree that elderly pedestrians can be particularly vulnerable, given that they could have sight, mobility and hearing problems? Will he consider running a road safety awareness campaign to encourage drivers to recognise the specific difficulties that elderly and disabled pedestrians face?

Nicol Stephen: I thank Irene Oldfather for that suggestion. She has raised with me the recent tragic incident involving an elderly person in Ayrshire, so I am aware of that sad case. I will certainly raise her suggestion with the Scottish Road Safety Campaign and encourage local authorities to consider what measures they can take, particularly in areas where there are a significant number of elderly people. I will also raise with trunk roads officials in the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department the issue of dangers and points on the trunk road network where we might be able to take action that would assist elderly people or people with disabilities.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the minister agree that we live in one of the gloomiest countries in the world at this time of year, when darkness descends in the early afternoon? Is he as surprised as I am at the number of drivers who persist in driving along roads such as the A82 with no headlights in half-darkness, fog or even snow? Will he adopt the Scandinavian model of having drivers use dipped headlights at all times and advocate that as part of a road safety campaign?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not sure that that is within the Executive's devolved competence.

Nicol Stephen: I am pretty sure that it is not, Presiding Officer. Much of the gloom tends to

come from the left side of the chamber, particularly when Fergus Ewing is on his feet. Any constructive suggestion about road safety should be considered seriously and I would be happy to raise his proposal with the appropriate authorities, including the police and the Scottish Road Safety Campaign. Legislating on road safety issues remains reserved, but we in the Executive have an important role to play in promoting better road safety. I will certainly consider any suggestion. The Scandinavian approach of using dipped headlights at all times is worthy of study.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I am sure that the minister will agree that making alternatives to the car more attractive would go a long way towards improving road safety, so will he tell us when we will have a proper strategy and meaningful targets for road traffic reduction?

Nicol Stephen: We have a proper strategy for road traffic reduction. We have an ambitious target to reduce road traffic levels by 2021. We are determined to achieve that target through the most ambitious investment programme in public transport initiatives that we have seen for decades. That is why we are committing to new bus, rail and tram projects and extra investment in our ferry services. That package of measures, which is targeted on improving public transport, will transform our public transport infrastructure over the coming years.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): What examples can the minister give of the positive use of speed cameras for road safety? Will he describe the criteria that are used for determining fixed-camera sites?

Nicol Stephen: Speed cameras can be very effective. For example, when the grade-separated junctions were introduced on the section of the A90 at Forfar—the Forfar bypass—safety cameras were in place throughout the road works and were welcomed by the local community and all sensible motorists. Correctly positioned safety cameras can help to protect drivers, passengers and the local community and all the surveys show that they have strong local support. I would like to ensure that, when new safety cameras are introduced, there is always a strong safety case and an open and public account of why they are being introduced. I have no doubt that I will recommend more safety cameras in appropriate locations, where they can help to reduce the toll of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): The minister made a comment about how people on this side of the chamber can be gloomy every so often. I was cheerful when his predecessor announced that there would be an improvement to the Ballinluig road junctions to tackle that accident black spot. However, I was less than happy when I

found out in a series of ministerial answers that virtually no progress has been made with the improvements that the then minister promised more than two years ago. What steps have been taken since I asked those questions to intensify the timescale for that essential measure to improve road safety on the A9?

Nicol Stephen: I understand John Swinney's concern and I, too, want to ensure that the project goes ahead as quickly as possible. I had meetings with officials following the commitment that I gave John Swinney in the chamber recently. The project is complex and involves two crossings of the railway line as it passes through Ballinluig, but I am determined to move forward with it as quickly as possible. I had an assurance from officials that work is being done on the detail of the project, based on the new consultancy contract. The draft orders will be published in the spring and I want to move forward as quickly as possible after that, I hope without a public inquiry, to ensure that the scheme is built.

Drugs (Legislation)

3. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding plans to alter legislation on possession which would introduce an offence of having drugs in the bloodstream. (S2O-4401)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with the UK Government on a wide range of issues, including the misuse of drugs. I understand that there are no plans to introduce an offence of that nature.

Jeremy Purvis: I am grateful for that confirmation. The minister has acknowledged that more needs to be done to reduce drug-related crime, but will he confirm that the Government's alcohol strategy review showed that offenders have been found to be intoxicated with alcohol in 30 per cent of sexual offences, 33 per cent of burglaries and 50 per cent of street crime and that the problem is more severe in Scotland? What is the Executive doing to raise the profile of alcohol-related crime in police areas throughout Scotland?

Hugh Henry: Excessive consumption of alcohol and alcohol-related crime remain issues throughout Scotland. We have invested significantly in education programmes to make people aware of the dangers of alcohol and to promote safe alcohol consumption. As part of our review of licensing laws, we are encouraging a debate about the need for those who sell alcohol to act responsibly and for those who purchase and consume alcohol to take responsibility for their own safety and protection and the safety and protection of the wider community.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): In the minister's discussions with Her Majesty's Government, will he support a reduction in the limit of ethanol that is permitted in the bloodstream of people who are driving?

Hugh Henry: We discuss a range of issues with our UK colleagues and I am sure that they will continue to review the limits of various substances in the bloodstream in relation to driving. The message must go out that people who take substances that affect behaviour should be careful and, in fact, should not consume them when they are considering driving.

Strategic Road Projects Review

4. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the review of strategic road projects will begin in order to ensure that gaps in the network are closed and that bypasses for those communities seeking them are given consideration. (S2O-4379)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The partnership agreement commits the Executive to starting the strategic projects review before 2007. The review will cover all transport modes, not just strategic roads. A significant number of major new road schemes, including bypasses, are already being progressed as part of our £3 billion capital investment programme for transport.

Helen Eadie: One of the Scottish Executive's success stories is the development of the Superfast ferry, which has helped to remove millions of heavy-goods vehicle miles from the road network. However, the continuing success of the ferry means that many HGVs are using the roads in and around the Rosyth ferry port, so will the minister and his colleagues give priority consideration in the review to the aspiration of the communities in Rosyth and Inverkeithing to have a bypass at Rosyth? Every time that there are high winds, the Forth road bridge is closed to HGVs, caravans and high-sided vehicles, which are rerouted through the towns of Inverkeithing and Rosyth, creating an unacceptable impact on the people there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we just have the question?

Helen Eadie: Will the minister bear that in mind?

Nicol Stephen: I will bear it mind. On the earlier point, Helen Eadie has made representations to me, as have other MSPs from the area, such as Scott Barrie, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is busy on other matters today but would be interested in this reply. I want Rosyth's future to be considered carefully and I agree that new investment is needed in the road network. If we are going to be ambitious for Rosyth, make new

linkages and take more freight off our roads, a rail network to Rosyth, as well as the enhancement of the ferry service, will be required.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Will the minister consider promoting the development of a bridge across the Forth that would take some of the traffic that at the moment goes by the Forth road bridge or by the A80? The new Kincardine bridge could ease those two blockages.

Nicol Stephen: The new investment that we propose in the extra Kincardine bridge—it will not replace the existing bridge; a second bridge will be created—is important and can help the road network through to Stirling and Clackmannanshire. We must be prepared to take a longer-term view on the issue and consider the future of all the Forth crossings, which is why the early-stage work that the Forth Estuary Transport Authority is doing on the long-term options is important.

Racism

5. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to reduce racially motivated attacks in Edinburgh. (S2O-4317)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): Racially motivated attacks have no place in today's Scotland. We are committed to challenging racism, whatever form it takes and wherever in Scotland it occurs. Where cases are reported, the Lord Advocate has made clear his desire to see the police and procurators fiscal improve the prosecution of race crimes. The police and other agencies across Scotland are also working hard to reassure and support all our communities.

Mike Pringle: Recent reports have shown a 30 per cent increase in recorded racial attacks in the capital. Does the minister agree that, in light of recent press coverage, the media have a responsibility to ensure that they do not encourage or inflame racial prejudices?

Hugh Henry: Everyone has that responsibility. Members of the Parliament have a responsibility to be careful in what they do and say to ensure that they do not inflame racial prejudice. Members of the public should take particular care about what they say or do and should try to avoid offence or stirring up racial prejudice. Equally, members of the media of whatever form should be careful in what they report so that unintended slight does not occur, words are not misconstrued and people do not suffer as a result. We all need to think very carefully about what we say or do. We need to think carefully about our responsibilities to other members of our society.

Efficient Government

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2093, in the name of Tom McCabe, on efficient government, together with three amendments to the motion.

15:00

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): The Scottish public sector has the enormous task of ensuring that all people throughout Scotland receive a comprehensive range of services that are tailored to meet the needs of customers and citizens. Those services are the cornerstone of our society, improving our quality of life, providing new opportunities and offering stability and security to all Scots. They make Scotland a great country in which to live, work, study and do business.

Since 1999, there has been unprecedented growth in the resources for public services. However, we want to be judged not only on how much we have invested in public services, but on how well we have delivered for the communities that we serve. Every pound that is used inefficiently is a lost opportunity to provide better public services. We must eliminate inefficiencies where they exist and redirect resources to the front line, providing more nurses, teachers and police officers and improving hospitals, schools and transport links throughout Scotland.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mr McCabe: Not at the moment.

The publication this week of the efficient Government plan is the first milestone in our long-term programme to reduce waste, bureaucracy and duplication in Scotland's public sector. It is not a painless programme, but it will establish Scotland as a leader in efficiency, innovation and productivity in public services. Our ambition is clear: to make the Scottish public sector the most productive in the United Kingdom.

My predecessor announced to Parliament on 24 June an initial target of £500 million in efficiency savings to be made by 2007-08. The plan that we have published this week will significantly exceed that sum and place us on a long-term path—not for three or five years, but for longer. Because I attach such importance to this issue, I want to ensure that our plan is sound in three areas. First, it must be wide enough in its ambition; secondly, it must be robust enough to withstand scrutiny; and, thirdly, it must be deliverable in the interests of hard-working Scottish families.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Focusing on local government and the £325 million a year that the minister has identified, can he tell me whether the money will come back to the Executive or stay with the councils? Also, what happens if a local authority—such as Aberdeenshire Council—is already so efficient that it cannot identify where to make its share of the savings?

Mr McCabe: We stress throughout the document that this exercise is about investing in front-line services, expanding front-line services and creating fresh front-line services. The whole purpose behind it is to ensure that we are able to continue to provide not only the best quality public services, but broader public services that are perhaps better than those anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Mr McCabe: I am still answering the first intervention.

I do not think that it would be justifiable for any council not to produce any savings. I would want to hear sound reasons why any authority, with the level of resources that are now in councils' hands, could not produce further efficiency savings. We know that those savings are possible, not only through change in the organisations, but through their joining with other service providers in the local authority sector and in other spheres.

We have taken slightly longer to get here than we originally intended, but we now have the plan and we are confident and determined.

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give way?

Mr McCabe: In a moment.

Much has been done to improve both the efficiency and the quality of Scotland's public sector, of which I shall give a few examples. The best-value regime has played a huge part in that; the modernising government fund has been a catalyst for finding new and improved ways of working; and the Executive has driven down its own costs across the board. However, we acknowledge that more is needed and now is the right time for a step-change in intensity and focus.

Mr Swinney: Now that the Government has finally stumbled over the word "efficiency" in the public services, is it right to assume that instead of focusing on efficiency from day one it has been wasting public money over the past five years?

Mr McCabe: Over the past five years, we have been listening to the nationalists spend money without any responsibility and tell us about their grand programmes without one word about how they would finance them. I will take no lectures from that side of the chamber.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): What about this side of the chamber?

Mr McCabe: I might as well answer that comment: if the nationalists have no hope, the Conservatives have no hope whatever.

Our plan sets out how the public sector in Scotland will achieve sustained cash savings year on year, which will lead to £745 million of savings by 2007-08.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the minister respond to the commentators who this week have suggested that triple accounting is going on and that the savings will not come into play until the end of the spending review period?

Mr McCabe: I am grateful for that intervention, because it allows me to respond to a point that has already been raised.

This is a printed document that clearly sets out the savings that we expect to make in year one, year two and year three and highlights our ambitions for the time beyond that. We have clearly announced that, in the third year, we anticipate year-on-year recurring savings of £745 million and have explained to people in Scotland what we will have saved when we arrive at that point. That approach is perfectly justified. Under no circumstances did we try to mislead people about that figure. A document that has been printed sets out a specific figure for each year and we have explained to people how much we have already saved and how much we will save across each of those three years.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give way?

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Mr McCabe: Presiding Officer, I have taken a number of interventions. I really need to get on with my speech.

People will see that, over that period, £1.7 million will be reinvested in front-line services. However, that is only phase one. The work that we have carried out since June has convinced us that we can go further and release even more cash into the system. Initial indications tell us that we might even reach as high as £900 million by 2007-08; however, it is important that I underline the robustness of the process by not confirming that figure at the moment. Although we will give an indication to allow people to scrutinise our thinking, we will confirm the figure only when we are confident that we can deliver it.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Mr McCabe: I am sorry, but I really must get on with my speech.

Although we will make more back-office efficiencies, we will also transform the front line to drive up efficiency and productive time. We will invest in technology and the workforce and will remove boundaries that get in the way of delivering excellent services.

We have identified five initial areas of reform that will achieve time-releasing efficiencies on top of the cash-releasing savings that I have just referred to. We will develop these plans over the coming months and will produce technical notes for both sets of savings.

Again, our indications suggest that we can go further than the £300 million figure that we have announced for time-releasing savings. Indeed, we think that, over the time frame, it is possible to make savings of as much as £600 million, but I will confirm that figure once we have completed our work.

We will expect every public body in Scotland to identify and deliver cash and time efficiencies within their own organisations.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mr McCabe: I will not be taking any more interventions.

We will do this because public services that operate innovatively are effectively the public service at its very best. On procurement, the Scottish Executive has made a significant commitment through the creation of eProcurement Scotl@nd. However, if we are to make a real breakthrough, e-procurement has to be adopted right across the public sector. We fully acknowledge that it will not be enough simply to install a system. We all need to develop the processes, skills and joint working that will drive out the £200 million of efficiency savings that can be achieved by 2008. I am pleased to announce that we have secured the assistance of John McClelland, an eminent Scottish business person, to undertake a review of procurement practice.

Turning to support service reform, we believe that there is scope for saving in joined-up services across Scotland. One example is council tax collection. We are asking councils to look at their systems and to ask hard questions about the 32 different arrangements for collection. The same principles apply to non-departmental public bodies and agencies in Scotland. We need to examine right across the public sector what are core in-house systems and what can be shared.

We have also said that we want to focus on streamlining bureaucracy. We know instinctively and through dialogue with our partners that there

is considerable scope for improvement in this area. There is a paradox, however, because councils complain to us about the burden of monitoring, while ministers and, I believe, the general public are unsure whether councils have all the information that they need for proper evaluation. Reporting and scrutiny should be retained when they deliver for the public, but they should be removed when they simply get in the way.

We have also said that we want to examine absence management. However, let me make it perfectly clear that I reject the stereotype of the public sector being a sick-note culture. Many parts of the public sector do as well as, or better than, the private sector and many people in the public sector do difficult and stressful jobs. That is why we are taking forward legislation to protect emergency workers. However, failing to manage sickness absence does no favours for workers, employers or the public. Therefore, we will look carefully at patterns of sickness absence across the public services and take strong action when improvements are needed. We know from experience that better management of our assets can produce significant gains.

This is a huge and challenging agenda. We will lead and drive change, working with our partners in public services and with our most successful private companies. We have drawn together some of the leading players from the public and private sectors, who have expertise and hands-on experience of transforming organisations. They are helping us to develop our long-term plans. We are determined to deliver on time and on target. We will work with the Parliament and with Audit Scotland to monitor delivery and we will ensure that it is a transparent process to show real and measurable improvements.

I know from experience that an army of public servants are excited and enthusiastic about the opportunities for change. I know, too, that breaking down resistance to change can be enormously frustrating. However, the rewards are great and I would urge the use of our efficient government fund to promote success. Some people will say that the drive for efficiency is an attack on the public sector, but nothing could be further from the truth. I believe passionately in the contribution that the public sector can make to the quality of life for all Scots. Our aim is to protect, enhance and secure the role of the public sector for future generations. Our new constitutional arrangements provide us with a unique opportunity in Scotland to challenge some of the things that have held us back for so long, while enhancing our reputation around the world. Success in this initiative will help to demonstrate how Scotland's public sector has risen to the challenge.

In an ever-changing world of increased expectations, choice and competition, we need to demonstrate the breadth of our ambition. We also need to learn from others so that our services remain the best throughout the years to come and we need to think hard about the baton that we hand to future generations. If we work together, we can meet that challenge.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *Building a Better Scotland: Efficient Government – Securing Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity*; recognises the need to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of the Scottish public sector, and endorses the Scottish Executive's ambition to make the Scottish public sector the most productive and innovative in the United Kingdom.

15:14

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):

The Scottish National Party welcomes any effective steps in making government more efficient. However, the scale of the challenge that faces us in government at all levels is that too many people see efficient government as an oxymoron. Government is seen as largely inefficient, bureaucratic, wasteful and incapable of reform. Surely it is our task as politicians to change that perception and any reality that underlies it.

Because this is such a serious matter, I must say—even after listening to the minister—that I was disappointed with the method of presentation that was used in the centrepiece table in the document “Building a Better Scotland: Efficient Government—Securing Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity”, which we are debating. If we look at the savings that are projected for 2005–08—and leave aside the 15 per cent of the claimed savings that is actually from Scottish Water, which we already know about and which does not even count in the Scottish budget, but which miraculously appears when we need to beef up the savings—then the most obvious example of the unnecessary spin that the Executive feels must accompany all its utterances, as Mr Purvis said, is the double counting that occurs in the second column of the table and the triple counting that occurs in the third column.

The minister will say that the figures are correct.

Mr McCabe: Leaving aside the point about the figures, is the member really saying that people throughout Scotland are saying, “The Executive is going to save £95 million, but Scottish Water is outside the block, so that does not matter.” That is not how the people who pay taxes for those services think. They are delighted that an effort is being made to save money and to reinvest it in the provision of front-line services.

Alasdair Morgan: If the Executive, when it presents percentage savings in its budget, includes things that are not in its budget, it does us all a disservice.

Arithmetically, the figures add up, but I do not think that there is a shred of justification for such presentation. The fact is that if a saving is made in year one—by closing something, sacking someone or, more sensibly, delivering a service more efficiently—unless what has been closed is reopened, the person who has been dismissed is re-employed or the increase in efficiency stops, that saving is done, dusted and over with. On the logic of the Executive's presentation, the closing of the Waverley line through the Borders, which was done, of course, by the Labour Government in 1969, would still be being claimed by this Executive as a saving. I would not be surprised if the present Labour Administration attempted to do that.

Jeremy Purvis: Can the member tell the Parliament whether the Scottish National Party's efficiency savings were the reason why the Borders railway was not in its manifesto in 2003?

Alasdair Morgan: The Liberals have so few seats that they are able to include in their manifesto all the pet projects in each seat.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Will the member give way?

Alasdair Morgan: I will not take any more interventions, as I do not have quite the latitude that Mr McCabe had.

One can understand why the Executive presents its figures in that way. It does so because more than half the savings will be made next year, so we can bet our boots that they are already in the pipeline. After that, the rate of new savings initiatives drops by a massive 57 per cent. It is no wonder that the Executive wants to talk about the cumulative figure. Even if one accepts all the Executive's figures, in spite of the bluster, the fact is that its percentage savings are much less than the equivalent savings at Westminster—even though the First Minister said that he was going to go farther in Scotland.

When we consider the various projected savings, such as those that will be achieved through managing absence, smarter procurement and streamlining bureaucracy, the question that we should all ask is why on earth we should have a special announcement about, and fanfare for, the intention to tackle those issues. Any normal business, government or local authority department that wants to run itself efficiently should be doing that day in, day out, year in, year out. If the Executive has discovered only now that all those savings are there to be made, what on earth has it been doing for the past seven years,

since the Labour Government was first elected? How many of the inefficiencies that are built into the system have been built in by Labour over the past seven years and to what extent is the Executive simply undoing a mess that is of its own making?

Let us assume, for a moment, that the savings will be made. When we—or, more important, the people who sent us here—go into a shop, buy something and make a saving on it, because the retailer has been able to cut his price by being more efficient, we expect, after saving that money, still to have it in our pockets; we do not expect the shopkeeper to keep it. How much extra money will the taxpayer, the council tax payer, the income tax payer and the corporation tax payer have in their pockets as a result of the huge savings in the Executive's document, whether they are single counted, double counted or triple counted? The answer is, of course, not a bean. In the topsy-turvy world of devolved finance, a saving is not expenditure that is not made; it is simply expenditure that remains expenditure, usually remains with the department that has made the saving and gets spent on something else. No one who is out in the street should think that they will be able to spend a little more in 2005 or 2008 because the Executive has made a saving. They will not see a penny piece of it.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alasdair Morgan: I am sorry, but I will not take any more interventions.

The Executive's answer is that the savings will be spent on delivering more front-line services, but for several years, in successive budgets, the Executive has boasted about successive increases in expenditure, because of the enormous improvements in public services that they would enable it to deliver. The trouble is—and the evidence is all around us, out there in the health service and elsewhere—that in the Executive's hands, more spending does not mean more or better services. We have had years of expenditure increases that have been fuelled by substantial increases in taxation—particularly council tax, but also every other stealth tax that the Government and our paymasters in Westminster can get away with. After all these years of increases, we are entitled to ask the Executive whether, if it is genuinely to make the savings—there is a big question mark over that—it is not about time to give a little back to the people who put us here in the first place and who eventually pay all our bills. If the Executive cannot do that, we are entitled to conclude that the initiative is just more smoke and mirrors from the usual front-bench suspects.

I move amendment S2M-2093.1, to leave out “welcomes” and insert:

“notes”.

15:21

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I cannot start without mentioning the ministerial behaviour in appearing reluctantly before Parliament to tell us about the Government's plans for further inefficiency. Not only was the statement postponed and then delivered outside the Parliament, but when the proposals were released on Monday, the details were not made available to members in the Scottish Parliament information centre until very late in the day. If we cannot have efficiency in meeting simple parliamentary courtesies, what faith should we have in the minister to deliver the savings about which he boasts?

It is odd that efficiency has suddenly become important after seven years of Labour in power. Could it be that maybe—just maybe—the wheels are beginning to come off Gordon Brown's wagon? Money is becoming tighter and tax receipts are faltering because Labour has hurt the economy. The chancellor's finances are in a mess and, with desperation, efficiency is back on the agenda as a way to find more finance.

I am always keen to welcome savings to the public purse, but the proposed savings are not real; they will mean more waste. Tom McCabe shuffles the spending pack, but he still has 52 cards, while he and his deputy remain the jokers. We are not laughing and we are not fooled. The minister's proposals are unbelievable without cutting programmes that have failed and are known to be wasteful. The proposals are incredible without reducing manpower when we know that the administration in many layers of government has increased or is superfluous. What is proposed is not savings, for the money will not return to the taxpayer.

The minister behaves like a man in a bar who saves his money simply by moving it from one pocket to another. He does not do that to have the bus fare to go home or to put it away for a rainy day. He proceeds to buy the same round of drinks that he would have bought anyway, by putting both hands in both pockets. The money is being shuffled about.

Having decided to cut back on the Buckfast, ministers now think that they can buy some Martini instead. The Executive is composed of politicians who are drunk on taxpayers' money. They cannot get enough of it and they cannot have it quickly enough. They are lush politicians whose binge spending is a social menace.

I have a better idea: the Executive and its ministers should dry out. They should seek help. The first step is to cut spending and take it to more tolerable levels. We know—or at least I believe—that alcohol in moderation is good for us. So, too, is Government spending. It is necessary and can do good, but only in moderation. Spending can be reduced by cutting unnecessary programmes and reducing the size and scope of the Government. If the economy is allowed to grow, revenues will grow, too.

The First Minister suggested earlier that the Conservatives would make savings by cutting money from the education budget. That has to be corrected. The accusation, also made by Peter Peacock, was that we would cut spending by some £600 million. However, our public proposals state that school spending that currently costs £600 million and is funded by councils through the council tax should be funded by central Government. That would mean that education would receive the same level of funding, but that council tax, not education, could be cut by £600 million. We know that that can be afforded because Mr McCabe has said that he will find an average annual saving of £577 million for the next three years. That is within striking distance of the £600 million council tax cut that we are proposing. We know from the Barnett consequential that a further £75 million will be coming north of the border. So there we have it. We know that we can fund council tax cuts to the tune of £600 million without making any impact on the delivery of education. I have laid that out quite plainly and I wait to see how the ministers will correct that.

Iain Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Monteith: The member is not a minister, thankfully. I must finish, but I might be able to take his intervention in a moment.

If ministers choose to present our proposal as a cut in education funding, they are either ignorantly misrepresenting our position or they are lying intentionally. I cannot bring myself to believe that a Labour minister would lie to the chamber, so I can only suppose that they have been ignorantly misrepresenting our position for the past few weeks.

Before I conclude, I cannot miss the opportunity to say something about the SNP. What does the SNP have to say today about efficiency savings? Their amendment would change one word of the minister's motion. That is it; just one word. The SNP is as drunk on taxpayers' money as the rest of the socialists. The SNP is not in Opposition; it also wants to buy everyone a round with someone else's money, just like the Government. It might change the currency, but the round would cost the same. Do not make me laugh. It is risible and

comical and the SNP is an apology for an Opposition.

The Conservative Opposition—the real Opposition—will offer real savings and real tax cuts.

I move amendment S2M-2093.2, to leave out from “and endorses” to end and insert:

“believes that such efficiency savings can only be made if there is a substantial reduction in the scope and size of government in Scotland, and therefore calls on the Scottish Executive to move away from its target culture of intervention and interference as well as to end the monopoly provision of public services in order to ensure better value for money.”

15:27

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): It is vital to put on record immediately the role of all public workers in delivering essential public services to the people of Scotland. Our recognition means that we reject from the outset the artificial notion that some workers in public services are more worthy than others because they are front-line workers rather than administration or back-room workers.

Firefighters who are very much in the front line depend upon control-room staff so that they can do their jobs efficiently and professionally. Any talk, as there appears to be in the spending proposals document, of reductions in the number of control rooms in Scotland will lead to a reduction in fire safety, not to a more efficient service.

The doctors and consultants about whom the Executive talks so lyrically would not be able to do their jobs properly if not for the medical secretaries who work in the back rooms to ensure that their services run efficiently. The pensions and benefits counter staff rely on the calculations and information that are provided by workers who sit behind the screens in the benefits and pensions offices. The social workers of Scotland would not be able to deal professionally with their human case loads without professional clerking and administrative support, so let us reject out of hand the idea that public service workers who are in the back room or the back office are somehow less vital than those on the front line.

Public service workers perform essential roles in maintaining and improving our society every single day, some face to face with people and others behind the scenes. It is interesting to consider our own positions and how we as politicians would perform in Parliament if it were not for the research and support staff who provide us with the essential assistance that we need to make speeches and to make our points. The same goes for the rest of the public services.

The purpose of our amendment is not to oppose efficiency savings or better-quality public service delivery; it is to insist that any so-called savings or improvements be made in partnership with the workers who deliver the services and not against them. The Executive has a slogan—“make work pay.” In the context of the document, that slogan really means “make the workers pay”. It means that we should make them pay through reduced numbers of jobs, increased stress and unfair political attacks.

It is insulting that in publishing the document the Executive used a panel of 17 so-called experts—whose salaries are between, at minimum, £50,000 and more than £100,000 a year—to comment on the futures of public service workers whose salaries are between £13,000 and £15,000 a year. It is a disgrace that that panel of so-called experts did not include a single trade union representative to contribute to the expert advice that is contained in the document. How many jobs are up for the chop as a result of that document? It promises £1.7 billion of savings, so how many jobs does that mean? The minister must answer.

It really shows how new Labour has changed when the Chancellor of the Exchequer announces at Westminster, to the cheers of the people on his front benches, that there will be 104,000 job losses. If a private company were to announce so many job losses, there would be hell to pay for those same members of Parliament. On 12 July, the chancellor said in his statement:

“with reductions also in back office and related areas; and with the 2.5 per cent efficiency savings applied also to the settlement for local government in England, this allows ... in addition to the 84,150 posts”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 12 July 2004; Vol 423, c 1130.]

reductions in the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland amounting to a further 20,000 posts. The minister must tell us today whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer consulted the Executive before announcing the loss of 20,000 jobs. We believe—because we were told so—that he consulted the Scottish Administration, so how many of those 20,000 jobs will be lost in Scotland?

The minister must also tell us in relation to partnership and involvement how many meetings he has had with the trade unions to discuss this level of so-called savings? Has he met the trade unions? Will he meet the trade unions? Does he stick to the promise of the previous incumbent of his office, who said clearly on 24 August that any savings that departments make will be available to reinvest in those departments. What we read on page 57 of “Building a Better Scotland: Spending Proposals 2005-2008” contradicts that completely. It says that any savings that are made in departments will go immediately to front-line

services and to “other public services”. That is robbing Peter to pay Paul, but that is the ruse that is represented in the document.

If the minister really wants to make efficiency savings, why not start with the nursery nurses, who deserve a national pay bargain? Instead of that, 32 different local authorities are conducting different wage negotiations. Why not start in the colleges? Instead of having 46 different levels of pay bargaining in those 46 colleges, let us have unified national pay bargaining for our colleges. Why not start in his own department? He is responsible for signing off 20 separate civil and public services pay agreements. Why does he not merge them, as the unions want, into one national unified round of pay bargaining? Those are the types of efficiencies that we need.

If the minister wants to go further, he should consider the waste in private finance initiatives. We are using £5.8 billion more of taxpayers’ money because we use PFI instead of proper public procurement. We can make savings not by making the workers pay but by defending and developing public services. That is why I move amendment S2M-2093.3, to insert at end:

“but believes that such efficiency, effectiveness and productivity will only be delivered with the co-operation and involvement of the workers who deliver these public services and not by attacking them or slashing the number of workers employed in these services; further believes that public service workers embody all that is good about our small country and that they should be properly paid and recognised for the essential duties they perform; rejects any suggestion that reducing workforces improves effectiveness, efficiency or productivity but does believe that such action reduces the quality and scope of public services available to citizens across Scotland, and further believes that the privatisation of public services to date has proved clearly that public provision is superior in relation to both efficiency and quality and that further privatisation should therefore be opposed.”

15:35

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Before I was elected, I ran a small business. The bottom line elected: we had to be efficient and drive out costs wherever we could, while providing good services to our clients. Efficiency and good service were in our small business’s interests.

My view of running a business should be no different from that of a chief executive of a public agency. Sometimes agencies, Government departments and councils talk about “our money”, but that money is not their money; they have no rights over it and are able to spend it only because the people have agreed to share resources for the common wealth. We are promoting innovation, ambition and entrepreneurialism for businesses in Scotland and we should do exactly the same for the public sector.

We should be proud that we can, because we share our combined wealth in Scotland and the United Kingdom, provide public services, offer support to vulnerable people, provide public transport and other infrastructure investments, and establish a national health service for everyone regardless of their wealth or privileged place in society. However, we should never lose sight of the fact that there is no excuse for waste, profligacy and mismanagement in delivering services in the public sector. There should be efficiency in government, which is why on behalf of the Liberal Democrats I warmly welcome the Executive’s review report.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): The member welcomed the report on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. In the parliamentary debate at stage 1 of the Fire (Scotland) Bill in November, the Deputy Minister for Justice, Hugh Henry, said that before taking a decision on the number of control rooms there would be

“a further round of consultation”.—[*Official Report*, 18 November 2004; c 11988.]

However, the Executive’s document on efficient government commits the Executive to a reduction in the number of control rooms “from the current 8”. Will the member clarify Executive policy on the matter?

Jeremy Purvis: Mr Neil knows that the review has not yet been concluded and that dialogue continues on policy on fire services. Of course the Scottish National Party could have raised that matter in its amendment. We considered the Conservative and Scottish Socialist Party amendments, which offer alternative approaches to ours, but the SNP amendment would simply replace the word “welcomes” with the word “notes”. In her first speech as deputy leader of the SNP, Nicola Sturgeon said:

“We will hold the Executive to account on all those issues and more, but we will do more than simply oppose. We will be constructive and we will offer alternatives.”—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2004; c 9900.]

We know now that she meant that the SNP would offer the word “notes” as an alternative to “welcomes”. Alasdair Morgan, Jim Mather and others are conscientious parliamentarians and I know that they will be busily working on alternatives to the review, which they will present to Parliament in due course.

I am glad that the minister quashed the erroneous comments about triple accounting. I did not say that there had been triple accounting, as Alasdair Morgan suggested; that was the view of commentators. I have read and reread the document and all I can see is that the Executive has added up identified cumulative savings over a three-year period. SNP members are an

ungrateful lot: I thought that the Executive was just being kind to them, because we know that they have difficulties in adding up financial commitments—mainly their own. The Executive published the data in a clear table. We add up three columns: year 1, year 2 and year 3—I hope that the SNP is following the explanation. There will be savings of £405 million in year 1, of £582 million in year 2 and of £745 million in year 3. The figures are added up under the heading “Total Aggregate Cash Savings” and the magic figure of £1.732 billion materialises.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: No, I must make progress.

The cash savings figure is 2.7 per cent over the three years of the spending review period, compared to 2.5 per cent in the UK Gershon review. That is a clear response to the remarks of commentators this week.

The Executive's presentation of anticipated savings is far clearer than that of the Gershon review or the UK Government's response to it. The Executive's review is better than the UK Government's review, because it focuses on services and is not predicated on job losses and the size of the civil service. We should have the right people doing the right jobs and delivering the right services as efficiently as possible.

Alasdair Morgan: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: I will give way if I have time at the end of my speech, but I want to make progress.

By calling in their motion for an increase in the number of civil servants who are to be sacked, the Tories are questioning the 3,500 additional nurses and midwives who have been taken on since 1999, the 1,100 additional doctors since 1999, the increase in the number of teachers in our schools and the record high number of police officers. Liberal Democrats ask whether services can be provided differently; for example, on a local basis with community planning, on a regional basis between local authorities, and at national level with Scottish Executive procurement and a different way of working. The review is predicated on a very different way of working, not on job losses. That is welcome.

In the long term, this approach is better for the administration of government. The Gershon proposals for every department start with the number of posts that are to be discarded. My Liberal Democrat colleague at Westminster, Vince Cable, asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give more details of the grades of the jobs that it is proposed be lost, because it is feared that they will be the jobs of lower-grade administrative staff who have been recruited precisely because the UK

Government has made the administration of government more complicated, especially in the Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury. The Executive's document presents more detailed explanations of where genuine efficiency savings will be realised through changes in practice. If those changes release posts, it will be because Government has become less complicated and more efficient. We can achieve both not by centralising collection of council tax but by abolishing it and replacing it with a more efficient local income tax.

Alasdair Morgan: it is clear that the member and I will not agree on cumulative presentation of figures. However, if he is so wedded to it, does he recommend to councils that they should, when they send out their council tax bills, say what has been the cumulative increase since the Executive came to power in 1999, as well as what this year's increase will be?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You must sum up now.

Jeremy Purvis: In my last seconds, I will say exactly what I think local councils should do: they should follow the lead of Scottish Borders Council. Two years ago, the Scottish Court Service announced a decision to close Peebles sheriff court because the building was too expensive to maintain. The then Liberal Democrat Minister for Justice called a halt to the decision and my predecessor MSP worked with Scottish Borders Council, local justices, the community, Lothian and Borders police, the Scottish Court Service and the Justice Department. Scottish Borders Council took the lead and pulled together the team to produce a proposal for a collocated facility for all services. Mr McCabe's predecessor gave capital approval to the project and we now have a new facility of collocated justice services. That is good for the Borders, good for Peebles and good for government. That pioneering facility will lead the way. I remind the SNP that at that time, my SNP opponent—a certain Ms Grahame—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Purvis, you do not have time to remind them. Please sit down.

Jeremy Purvis: Christine Grahame opposed the collocated facility.

15:42

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife (Con): When, at a meeting of the Finance Committee, I asked the new Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform whether he would live up to Jack McConnell's boast that the Scottish Executive would go further than the Gershon recommendations on UK government efficiency, Mr McCabe claimed that he was not interested in comparisons with Westminster. Now, nearly two

months on, it seems that the new minister is interested in a virility contest after all. He says that the Executive is going even further than Jack McConnell proposed and that he plans to make efficiencies worth £745 million a year by 2008 and up to £1.7 billion-worth of savings in the three years that the chancellor's savings cover.

Apparently, before the Executive can make such savings, it will have to spend the small matter of £60 million to help public bodies to work out how they may save money. What happens if the consultants come back with the wrong answers or conclude that it cannot be done unless there are unacceptable numbers of job cuts? Doubtless, the minister will eventually explain that.

The Conservatives welcome government efficiency proposals, but is it in the nature of the beast that we have come to know as the Scottish Executive suddenly to become the frugal Scottish sister of Gordon Brown's long-term mistress, prudence? Let us consider its record. By any standards, so far it has effectively muddled the waters on its efficiency pledges. First we are told that Scotland is already efficient, then we are told that although there will be civil service cuts across the UK, that will not be the case in Scotland. Then, Jack McConnell tells us that we will find more efficiency savings than England and then, his new Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform casts doubt on that suggestion. Now Tom says that he will be even more virile than Jack; he will make even bigger savings. What is going on? Why do I hear that old "Porgy and Bess" number running through my head? Members will remember the one—"It Ain't Necessarily So." We must always remember that line when we consider statements by the Executive.

The proposals are made even harder to swallow by Jack McConnell's statement on 28 June 2004 to the Fraser of Allander institute that he did not believe that public sector job cuts were necessary. Although he seemed to accept that the public sector is too big—51 per cent of Scotland's economy compared with 41 per cent in England—he declared that the way to rebalance things was not to shrink the public sector but to grow the private sector, apparently while having no strategy to achieve that. However, at last we have Tom McCabe telling *The Times*:

"I have been quite specific—I have said we expect to see an increasing number of people working in the frontline, but less people overall."

Surely nothing could be clearer than that. Despite what the First Minister told the Fraser of Allander institute, and despite his fudging of the question at this morning's First Minister's question time, that must mean job cuts, so surely all that we are discussing now is how many jobs and where they are going to fall.

There is another point, which Jeremy Purvis and Alasdair Morgan picked up on. How can the minister argue that his accounting is transparent when no less an authority than Professor Arthur Midwinter, who advises the Finance Committee, claims, in effect, that cumulative creative accounting techniques have been used to reach the very efficiency targets that the minister has spelled out? Have the Executive's figures been triple counted or not? It is clear that they have, although the minister still seems to be in denial. Even accepting the figures, Jack McConnell promised that the Executive would make bigger cuts than Westminster, but Tom McCabe's proposed cuts amount to 4 per cent over the period, whereas the equivalent London figure is 7 per cent. Back to "Porgy and Bess" again—"It Ain't Necessarily So".

The truth is that the best predictor of future behaviour is past performance, so how can we have any confidence in the Executive's promises? Since 1999 there has been an increase of £58 million in administration, an increase of 1,057 Scottish Executive staff, an increase of 556 civil servants, and an additional £137 million spent on quangos. That is without mentioning a Parliament building that has cost £390 million more than it should have cost. The vast bulk of the savings that are proposed by the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform are explained by procurement improvements or sharing support services. There is no radical agenda to reduce the scope, and therefore the size, of government.

Tom McCabe should come clean. If the Executive genuinely wants to increase efficiency, it has to stop tinkering at the edges. It has to explain exactly how it expects local authorities to achieve a 3 per cent efficiency saving and it has to have the courage to give an honest estimate of the number of jobs that will have to go. Gordon Brown says that the figure is 70,000 jobs for the UK as a whole. Are we looking at 10 per cent of that figure—7,000 job losses—here in Scotland? Tommy Sheridan is right to ask where the axe will fall. Will we lose 7,000 jobs? Will it be 10,000? Will it be 20,000? One thing is for sure: if the Executive continues to try to spin the bizarre concept of a magical promised land where it is possible for a declining private sector to support an increasingly bloated public sector, on this side of the chamber the response will continue to be, "It Ain't Necessarily So", and certainly should not be so.

15:48

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)
(Lab): The Executive's strategy, as set out in the revised version of "The Framework for Economic Development in Scotland"—FEDS—which was published earlier this year, is one of

"managing public finances, so that we are efficient and effective in procuring and providing public services and investment".

The Finance Committee strongly supported that approach, and concluded in its stage 1 report that it is

"imperative to seek continuous improvement in the efficiency of public expenditure".

I therefore welcome the focus in Tom McCabe's speech on identifying and implementing major improvements in service delivery and in back room and support processes, which will release resources for the enhancement of front-line services.

One would have thought that no one with any interest in or knowledge of the management of public services could disagree, although I suppose we had to expect that the Tories, who spent the 1980s and 1990s hacking away at public services, would prefer tax cuts to making improvements in public services. However, it is strange that this morning Nicola Sturgeon joined the Conservatives in calling for tax cuts. That is a remarkable volte-face, as we can see in the SNP amendment, which seeks to change "welcomes" to "notes", as Brian Monteith said. Has the SNP become more red blooded, like the Tories, and taken the stance of looking to cut and chop away at public service jobs and the services on which people depend, or is that simply an extension of the SNP approach, which is to be two-faced about everything? Nicola Sturgeon is for tax cuts, Jim Mather is for business rate cuts, Shona Robison opposes rationalisation in hospital services, Fergus Ewing wants reductions in water rates and John Swinney wants more to be spent on dealing with business constraints. The SNP has a different policy for every issue, but they all depend on spending more money. The strategy that the SNP has is to have no strategy.

Alasdair Morgan: Far be it from me to accuse the Labour Party of spending more money, but will the member share his opinion on whether taxation should ever be cut?

Des McNulty: Decisions on taxation always involve a balance between what services are needed and whether they can be afforded. Ultimately, the public decides that in deciding who to put in Government. This country has put the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrat party in Government consistently since devolution, while support for the SNP has been slipping away, which I believe is because the party has little credibility.

We support public services and we want the Executive to seek continually to increase the effectiveness with which resources are used. A key aspect of that is the adoption of more

innovative and effective delivery mechanisms. Every time a difficult decision is to be made, the SNP ducks. That stance has no credibility; we need to engage with the issues and not in the fantasy economics in which breaking economic and political ties with our neighbours and main customers somehow provides benefits for businesses and public services in Scotland.

Many of the measures that Tom McCabe mentioned that aim to bring public services together and link mechanisms have been made necessary because of the destructive approach of the Conservatives during the reorganisation of local government in 1996. That party proclaims the advantages of the greater efficiency of the business approach, yet it replaced a single director of education in the then Strathclyde Regional Council with 12 directors of education, and a single director of social work with 12 directors. Tom McCabe was one of the local authority leaders in the Strathclyde area who, like me, had to manage the destruction that was caused, which resulted in considerable growth in administrative overheads and a reduction in the quality of services for ordinary people.

It is absolutely right that, in considering how to improve the efficiency of local government, the Executive intends to bring the delivery of services closer together. However, Parliament must scrutinise closely the way in which that is done. A balance must be struck between ensuring that the right approach is adopted and ensuring that services are protected properly. I hope that, when we get the technical information that Mr McCabe promised will be provided in January or February, the Finance Committee and Parliament will consider the proposals carefully. We want to ensure not only that £745 million is directed more productively but that, as far as possible, protection is provided for employees and services and that clear evidence of enhancement is given. We will monitor the process extraordinarily carefully to ensure that the Executive does the right things in the right way for Scotland.

Comparisons between Scotland and south of the border are to some extent irrelevant; we must focus on what is best in our circumstances. We should focus our attention on the £745 million and on the moneys that are to be saved in the lead-up—£405 million and £582 million in the next two years. Achievement of such savings in that short space of time will require considerable work in its own right. The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform and the Finance Committee have a considerable amount of work to do to ensure not only that we meet the targets that have been set, but that we achieve the intended effect.

15:55

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Of all the members of the Scottish Parliament, I am the one who has been prepared to face up to the electoral realities that confronted my party. I represent my constituency on the back benches these days, because my party's election performance was not as great as it should have been. I can face up to that, so it is only fair that Des McNulty should accept that Labour's support in Scotland is slipping away—to coin a phrase—in that it lost six parliamentary constituencies in the 2003 Scottish Parliament elections. How can everything in the garden be rosy when the electorate showed its enthusiasm by not returning those Labour candidates to power? Talk of Labour and the Liberal Democrats' steadfast stewardship of the economy and the public services is drivell.

I welcome the debate and the fact that it is being led by Mr McCabe. I think that it would be a fair reflection of public opinion in Scotland to say that Mr McCabe was considered as an effective leader of South Lanarkshire Council and that he was a leader who introduced a great deal of innovation in the delivery of public services. I hope that, in the course of the debate that ensues after today's debate, Mr McCabe will lead a process that is equally imaginative and innovative in the delivery of our public services in Scotland today.

The Government is trying to have it both ways. In effect, Mr McCabe argued that, suddenly, this is the moment at which we must look for efficiency. However, he also told us that everything that had been done in the previous five years was fabulous. If that is the case, we are entitled to know what cataclysmic event led the Government to believe that suddenly—in December 2004—it is time for efficiency. We have not heard the answer to that question.

Much of what is in the document is the sort of stuff that ministers—there are plenty of them—should be doing every day of the week. The job of ministers is to guarantee that public money is being spent effectively on behalf of the people of Scotland; it is nothing imaginative, nothing bright and nothing revolutionary—it is just good housekeeping to guarantee that public services are being delivered efficiently. We are entitled to ask for a bit of ambition and vision from the Administration that has been entrusted to deliver those services on our behalf.

A great deal of criticism has been levelled at my party for the formulation of our amendment to the motion. I venture to say that, given the rather dull parliamentary arithmetic of our Parliament, the wording of amendments does not matter very much. We tend to know the outcome of votes, which leads me to question why we should spend a great deal of energy on the wording of amendments.

Alasdair Morgan: It is efficient of us.

Mr Swinney: I agree, Mr Morgan—and I would expect nothing less of you.

If we were to look back into the annals of history, as some political commentators have been prepared to do, we would find that much of the language and argument that underpin the document that Mr McCabe published on Monday was set out before the 1999 election campaign by none other than myself as the SNP's Treasury spokesperson. I argued that the approach that should be taken should guarantee efficiency in the public services on an annual basis. How was that constructive contribution to the debate received at the time, however? It prompted some marvellous responses, including one from that well-known financial revolutionary on the Conservative front bench, Mr Monteith, who called it absurd and said:

"Patently the SNP believe they can get blood out of a stone."

Do not lecture me, Mr Monteith, on the subject of public sector efficiency.

A Labour spokesperson said that our manifesto commitments did not add up and that we would have to own up to the cuts that we would have to make in Scotland's public services. I look forward to a Labour member telling me about the cuts to public services that Labour is going to make. If no one does so, I invite Labour to withdraw the drivell that it churned out five years ago. If Mr Purvis wants me to share Mr Malcolm Bruce's remarks with him, I will send them to him in the post. Mr Bruce's words were as unworthy as all the rest were.

If we want to have a real political debate about efficiency in our public services, for heaven's sake, let us have the debate honestly and openly. I would be much more interested in a debate that developed some of the arguments that are not quite attributed to Mr McCabe in Douglas Fraser's article in *The Herald* today. In the article, Mr McCabe appears to offer up:

"the possibility of a radical change which would see councils given a much bigger say in the running of health boards."

I am very interested in how we can bring together local authority and health board services in a much more thematic and cohesive way, as that would take away the barriers that annoy to death the constituents whom we represent. None of that imagination is in the document before us today.

I am very interested in the proposals that have been advanced by the First Minister of Wales. We have long argued for such measures for the slicing down of the quango state and the removal of the ludicrous duplication that takes place, with

members of staff in the Scottish Executive civil service monitoring, duplicating and replicating the work that goes on in quangos. Why on earth do we not merge the areas of activity concerned and streamline and simplify government in Scotland? I could not disagree more with Mr Purvis, who said that the government of Scotland is less complicated than it was. The government of Scotland has become more complicated since devolution. This bloated Executive has created that expansion of congested government.

I seek a system that delivers real value to the people of Scotland, but we must be careful about how we achieve that. We must avoid the absurd language of job cuts that was thrown at the SNP in 1999, which can quite easily be thrown at the Government now. The processes of changing the roles of individuals in public service can be managed if we have imagination and direction. That is done in the private sector and it can be done in the public service. It will need something a great deal more imaginative, however, than the drivel in the document before us.

16:01

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I am a little confused about this debate. Nobody, with perhaps the exception of Tommy Sheridan, has spoken to the amendments in their name. The SNP has criticised and attacked the Executive's motion, yet it wishes to change only one word in it, from "welcomes" to "notes". SNP members have not done their work. It is not efficient just to change one word of a motion and not to propose alternatives. It is an insult for the SNP not to state its alternatives, so that the people of Scotland could find out what the SNP would do differently from the Executive's proposals. That is not efficient—that is lazy.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): If Mr Smith had been present at First Minister's question time, as I was, he would have heard what the SNP proposes to do with an element of the savings: freeze the council tax. Do the Liberal Democrats support that or not?

Iain Smith: I am delighted to have been asked that question, because it means that I have a good opportunity to attack the SNP on that policy. The SNP proposes that an SNP Executive would tell councils what level of council tax they should set. That is more like a Conservative policy. The SNP proposes to cap council tax and to tell local authorities what they may spend. I will never support that policy. I believe, and will continue to believe, that local authorities have the right to set their council tax and to determine whether their level of spending is appropriate for their area.

If a local authority wishes to use its efficiency savings to reduce its council tax, that option is

open to it. We should not, however, dictate such things to local authorities. I am afraid that the SNP has got this one wrong. Its members have not thought the matter through. Perhaps they should ask SNP councillors in places such as Angus what they think about the prospect of their council tax being capped.

The debate should be about partnership between councils, the health service, Scottish Enterprise, local enterprise companies and other public bodies as they work together to find better ways of doing the things that they all have to do. Let us consider e-procurement. A vast amount of money can be saved through people working together using e-procurement to reduce costs to local government and the health service.

People can work together to reduce the costs of human resources and payrolls. I would say to Ted Brocklebank that it is true that some money needs to be spent up front to do those things—we have to spend to save. If we are to create a more efficient payroll, we need to create the new payroll service. In the end, we will be able to get rid of two, three, four, five or perhaps a dozen other payroll services, but up-front spending will be required to achieve that—we cannot change things overnight with no cost. That is what the £60 million is there to do. It will allow for that spending to be made in order to save in the long run. That is a sensible approach.

Modernising and making services more efficient does not necessarily save money. In Fife, for example, occupational therapists now have palmtop computers, which they take with them when they see clients. That makes them more efficient, because they are able to see more clients. Occupational therapy will therefore cost more, because more clients are being dealt with and more services are being provided. That is a good thing, but being more efficient in that way does not necessarily save money. That is an important lesson for us to learn.

I turn to the various conservatives who spoke in the debate. I have talked about the SNP's new policy of attacking the freedom of councils to set their council tax. The SSP is perhaps another conservative party, given that conservative, in the traditional sense, means making no change. The SSP's policy, which is set out in its amendment, says in essence that public services cannot be changed, because changing them might affect somebody's job. If things were left to the SSP, somebody would be wandering around out on the streets tonight trying to light the gas lamps, which were removed several decades ago. That sort of blinkered thinking will get us nowhere. As for PFI, certain members should go and ask the residents of Anstruther whether they think that the new school that has been provided through a PFI is an

improvement to public services. The school would not be there if it were not for PFI. Of course we would save money if we did not have PFI—because we would not have such new schools to run—but that would not benefit the public.

I turn to the other Conservatives. Brian Monteith seems to think that we can cut £600 million from a budget, but spend the same amount of money. We cannot do that; he is pulling the wool over the public's eyes. What the Conservatives are proposing is a cut in any terms. Taking £600 million off the council tax is a cut and the Conservatives have to make it much clearer why they intend to make it.

Mr Monteith: It is a cut in council tax.

Iain Smith: It is not a cut in council tax; it is a cut in spending and the budget. There would be £600 million less in the public budget to spend. That is the simple equation.

Mr Monteith: It is clear that the member is able to hear only what he wishes to hear. I also made it plain that the £600 million would be funded centrally. We would put £600 million in one hand and take £600 million out of the other. That means that the schools would still get the same money. The member should try to change his arithmetic and get it right next time.

Iain Smith: The arithmetic is simple: if we take £600 million away from the resources, we do not have it to spend. If we cut the council tax by £600 million, £600 million less is available to spend on public services in Scotland. That is a simple fact. Central Government does not have another £600 million in its back pocket. We would have to find the money from somewhere. By removing £600 million from public spending on improving public services, the Conservatives would cut those services, not improve them. That is the difference between the Liberal Democrat-Labour Executive and the Conservatives.

The Conservatives' real agenda, which they have not talked about in the debate, is privatisation. That is what their amendment talks about, but they were not even brave enough to say it in the debate. The one true thing that Ted Brocklebank said was that the best predictor of future behaviour is past performance. We know what the past performances of the Conservatives were. They will be rejected again in Scotland.

16:07

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): Since my election to the Parliament in 1999, I have been a member of the Audit Committee. A common theme in all the reports that come before the committee has escaped those in the many departments of the

Scottish Executive. The concept of joined-up thinking and working has yet to permeate the silo mentality of the civil service.

We are here to meet challenges and make changes for the benefit of the Scottish people, irrespective of the barriers that are erected by those who want to continue with the old ways of working. The people whom we represent do not care which department is responsible for each part of the Scottish Executive; they want things delivered on time and with an immediate impact on their lives.

Public sector workers who deliver front-line services in health and local government are able to think outwith the silo. When assistance is required of the Scottish Executive, the silo mentality kicks in and some of that thinking is watered down to meet the silo criteria of each department.

My constituents in Kilmarnock and Loudoun have first-hand experience of the innovative thinking that will deliver joined-up services. Policy makers and implementers in East Ayrshire Council and Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board have designed a local service for north-west Kilmarnock in the form of a centre that will offer sport, care for the elderly, housing, health and nursery services, to name but a few. The facility is the third such development by the partners and, on each occasion, the communities that will benefit have quickly developed their ideas into a firm proposal for funding. The delay occurs when the partners have to go their separate ways into the silos of the Scottish Executive and communities are left waiting to reap the benefits of the innovation.

We are aware that the barriers between local public sector organisations are becoming greyer by the month, with the advent of the joint future agenda, community planning and the soon-to-be-introduced community health partnerships. Why, then, should we stand still by continuing with the institutional Scottish Executive departments? I challenge the Parliament to ask why we continue with the existing barriers between local authorities. Why do we not look at the boundaries between local authorities, the NHS, the Scottish Enterprise network, area tourist boards and further education—to name but a few—and assess whether they are relevant to the delivery of services today? Should we continue with the plethora of variations of delivery processes and internal functions?

Joint procurement can operate—and is operating—in local government. The 12 local authorities in the former Strathclyde region have created the Authorities Buying Consortium—ABC—to procure for them and the savings that result are made available for each local authority to use locally in whatever way it wishes. Why

could that not be extended to include other public sector organisations in the area? Why could we not go farther and include the civil service and the Scottish Parliament?

As we move further towards joined-up working across traditional employment barriers, it is time to consider the employment of public sector workers. If the local authority holds their contract, their pension scheme is different from that of the colleague with whom they work each day, whose contract is with the national health service. All such institutional pension schemes are in the public sector, so why do we not have a Scottish public sector pension scheme to cover the whole public sector in Scotland? After all, in those pension schemes the deferred wages for public sector workers are paid for by the public purse irrespective of the public sector employer.

The expansion of best-value audit throughout the public sector will challenge many of the traditional ways of working and funding. We have an opportunity to demonstrate that we can do those things differently. We should not wait, as we have done in the past, until we are criticised by either the Auditor General for Scotland or those outside the Parliament. All the challenges can be overcome if the traditional barriers are removed. The Scottish people do not have the patience to wait until each part of the public sector agrees. They want and deserve responsive service delivery irrespective of who holds the public purse strings.

16:13

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Efficient government is something that we can all subscribe to. Nobody likes to see public money wasted, but what is up for debate today is how we achieve efficiencies. Do we conduct a campaign of cutting civil service jobs and hope that services do not suffer too much? Do we retain jobs but work people harder so that productivity increases, or are there other ways to think about efficiency and decide what we mean by efficient government?

Sir Peter Gershon's review of public sector efficiency, which was carried out at the UK level, identified some 80,000 jobs that could be cut. The review used the word "saved", but I imagine that the effect is much the same to the individuals concerned. The problem with such cuts is the effect that they might have on the quality and level of service to the public. All too often, rationalisation increases the distance between the service provider and the public and decreases quality in the process. It is the quality of public services that we should be most concerned about.

Iain Smith was right when he said that efficient government does not necessarily mean the

cheapest possible form of government. We have seen that reorganisation in the name of cutting jobs and making cash savings may lead to a decline in quality. The Benefits Agency is the arm of the United Kingdom Government that has suffered the most from constant reorganisation in the name of savings. The latest is the move away from filling in forms to be processed locally to the use of telephone consultations to fill in the forms. No doubt that makes economic sense, but it means a decline in the quality of service, as those who have to fill in forms over the phone might find it more difficult to provide the required information. That is why it is important that we put quality first.

There are many good things in the Executive document that is up for debate. One of the key areas in the document is reducing absenteeism, and it is important that the document mentions the workplace environment and ensuring that people do not fall sick at work. It is important that we start by looking at the quality of the workplace environment as a way of reducing absenteeism rather than thinking that we merely have to crack down on some non-existent sick-note culture. I remind the Executive that one of the key causes of absence is stress, which is often caused by working in an environment in which staff numbers are not maintained and there are not enough staff to perform the jobs.

Although there are good things in the document, I find it frustrating to read. For example, the section on the communities portfolio says of one saving:

"Improvements to the planning system will streamline bureaucracy—with faster decisions, allowing quicker investment decisions, while strengthening the involvement of communities."

Everybody welcomes quicker decisions and I hope that everybody—perhaps apart from the Conservatives—would welcome involving communities at an earlier stage, but we need to know how that will happen. It is cited as a saving, but there is no detail on what the saving will amount to.

Another area that is mentioned in the document and which has been discussed this afternoon is procurement. I am pleased that the Scottish Executive has moved away from the Tory, cost-based procurement model, in which all that mattered was the cheapest provider, to the notion of best value, but that notion should be more thoroughly embedded in the document. We want greater smart, strategic use of procurement to invest in local, community and mutual enterprises. We want better use of the massive amount of money that central Government and local government procurement represent to benefit local economies and communities. That would be a much more efficient use of the funding. Therefore,

I urge ministers to examine ways in which social enterprises can become active partners in public service provision and look at that as one way of making the most efficient use of public sector procurement.

Efficient government must be about high-quality services, so let us not talk about government efficiency in terms of reducing staff numbers or making cash savings. Instead, we should focus on maximising the economic and social benefit of government and ensuring that, pound for pound, the quality of service is maximised. That should be the true measure of efficient government.

16:19

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I did not expect the debate to make me come over all nostalgic, but it has. I am amused—even pleased—that John Swinney chose to invoke the memory of the 1999 election campaign. I remember well the programme of efficiency measures that the Scottish National Party proposed in that election, but John Swinney failed to remind us what the SNP dubbed that programme. It was, of course, the Holyrood project, which strikes us now as somewhat prescient, because not only was it over time and over budget, but it never got to the starting blocks.

I felt nostalgic as I listened to the Tories engage in the debate. Many of us worked in and around the public sector during the years when the Conservatives were in office, and we remember what it was like to try to work in that environment. Not only was there declining spend; the Tories introduced flawed, ideology-driven mechanisms such as compulsory competitive tendering in local government and the internal market in the NHS. It is liberating, therefore, for us to have the opportunity to try to proceed with what will be, I hope, a positive and progressive agenda on efficiency in government. I am pleased that Labour politicians and Labour Governments north and south of the border have reclaimed the language of efficiency and effectiveness in our public services. I have always thought that those of us who believe most passionately in public services should work the hardest to achieve those ends.

I welcome the minister's statement and the Executive's commitment, but I have one big question. Frankly, I wish that we had had a ministerial statement to introduce this policy, so that there would have been further opportunities for us to question the minister directly. I will attempt to do so now. My question is not about why specific targets have been chosen or what the Executive hopes to achieve; it is about how the Executive will ensure that its programme is driven forward and how more truly efficient practice will come about as a result. At the risk of displaying

my anorak credentials, I remind members that efficiency, in a literal sense, is about the relationship between inputs and outputs. It is always possible to reduce inputs when there is pressure to do so; people in public services have done that for years. The challenge is to reduce inputs while, simultaneously, maintaining and improving—even increasing—outputs. Having read the documentation carefully, I have yet to see just where, as Des McNulty put it, some of the delivery mechanisms for meeting that challenge are.

I have read the Gershon review and a lot of the material that has been produced south of the border about the work that is being done. I agree absolutely that we must craft our own way forward in Scotland; however, if one reads the Gershon review—which I am sure the minister has done at length—one sees that a great deal of attention has been paid to the way in which the machinery of and the cultures in government will be developed to ensure that real efficiency is achieved. Attention has been paid to the way in which momentum and capacity will be put in place to secure real improvements in efficiency. However, I do not see some of that evidence set out explicitly in the Executive's programme.

I note—and we should all remind ourselves—that it is not so long since we discussed the Fraser report. I welcomed then, and I support again now, the firm and bold statements that were made at that time by the First Minister to ensure that civil service reform was given top priority, not least in the wake of that report. Let us remind ourselves of the evidence that that report presented us with about the lack of capacity in central Government to manage projects and people effectively and to have in place the specialist skills that are necessary to enable modern and effective management. For the avoidance of doubt, I say—as I have said before—that that is not to suggest that the prevailing culture or practice in the civil service means that individuals in it are bad people: far from it; they are very committed public servants. Nonetheless, the world has changed, and if we are to deliver the kind of modern public services that are set out in the Executive's document, as with many other policies, there must be the capacity in the machinery of government to do so. I would like to hear what the Executive has to say on that. We have the expert advisory group and the initiative that the minister has announced today regarding e-procurement; however, frankly, a review by one individual is not the same as embedding those skills and that capacity at the heart of government.

Like Margaret Jamieson, I have sat on the Audit Committee—although not for as long as she has—and have joined in the group therapy sessions that we have had there. I make a plea to the minister to

try to avoid reinventing the wheel in this policy area. As a member of the Audit Committee, I have been shocked—I put it no less strongly than that—to see the lamentable progress that has been made, over the past few years, in certain areas that are mentioned in the report that is before us today, such as changes in prescribing practice. I do not think that that is the result of a lack of political will or a lack of policy. I am not even convinced that it is the result of a lack of investment. Nevertheless, something somewhere is stopping the implementation of policies to which ministers and, often, the Parliament are committed. That is the issue that we need to get behind, instead of having yet another review of policy.

I also urge the minister and others who engage in this debate to be very careful about language and attitudes. For example, we should not refer to admin savings or talk about administration and management as if they were bad things. We need good administration and management if we are to deliver good public services and I want us to dispense with some of the simplistic shorthand that we use all too often.

Finally, I ask for the minister's assurance that he will emphasise the importance of information technology. I am talking not just about e-procurement, about which we have heard an awful lot this afternoon. For example, I have been struck by the difference in the investment in and the machinery for e-health projects north and south of the border. We share common objectives and I want them to be achieved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): We must go to closing speeches. We are a couple of minutes behind the clock, so I give Mr Sheridan a very tight six minutes.

16:25

Tommy Sheridan: I would like to pick up on a couple of points that Susan Deacon made at the end of her speech. She said that we should move away from simplistic shorthand descriptions of admin workers and management. She might not have heard the First Minister refer earlier to the Trotskys at the back of the chamber who would employ more administrators than doctors and nurses. I do not think that such comments are helpful to this debate. As she correctly pointed out, if we really want quality public services, we need quality back-office staff as well as quality front-room staff who interface with the public. We cannot have one without the other.

Susan Deacon: Just as we should be careful that we do not dispense blanket phrases about administrators for the reasons that the member has mentioned, we should also be careful that we

do not come out with blanket statements about managers, many of whom are trying to do a good job in the public sector.

Tommy Sheridan: I do not have a problem with that. We employ public service managers to manage public services. If they manage them well, the public gets a good deal. However, the crux of this debate should be the question of what happens if they do not manage them well.

Much of this discussion has not been about reinventing the wheel but about trying to manage services better. We are angry about the £1.7 billion of savings that have been announced, because we do not think that they are evidence-based. There have been no discussions with the front-line workers who deliver the services. Instead, the document in question refers to department heads and advice from 17 experts, but I do not think that that is good enough if we are talking about targets that we are apparently determined to achieve. If achieving those targets means that we have to reduce the number of front-line or back-office workers, that will not lead to better or more efficient services.

It would have been better if there had been a ministerial statement, as that would have allowed us to question the minister directly. I asked a number of questions in my opening speech that have not yet been answered because the minister has not had the opportunity to reply. I have also been hoping to speak to Mr Purvis about page 25 of the efficient government document, which refers to the Scottish Public Pensions Agency. The agency was relocated from Edinburgh to Galashiels only two years ago and employs only 120 workers. However, page 25 states that efficiency savings of £600,000 will be made there. I want to know how we will make such savings out of such a small department.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Tommy Sheridan: I would love to give way to the member, but he did not have the courtesy to give way to me. My time is much more limited than his.

I want the minister to tell us whether Mr Brown consulted the Scottish Executive before he announced an extra 20,000 job losses on 12 July, which will include job losses at the Scottish devolved Administration. We are told that he did so; indeed, that is what the trade union movement has been told. However, we in the chamber deserve to know whether the chancellor discussed the matter with the Executive, because he cannot simply pluck a figure out of the air and say that 20,000 jobs will go in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. We have a right to know how many of those jobs are in Scotland. I hope that the minister will address that point later.

Members have talked about the need to make efficiency savings, but on the employment of consultants, for instance, we know now that the amount of money that is spent at the UK level on consultants within the public services rose from £650 million the previous year to £1.3 billion last year. That means that £3 million a day is being spent on consultants—the equivalent figure for Scotland is £300,000 a day. I do not think that that represents the good and efficient use of public moneys, particularly when so much expertise within the public services is often overlooked.

I will finish on an issue that is vital for and central to the whole idea of public money, but which is unfortunately not within the ambit of the Scottish Parliament. We have a major problem across the UK in connection with tax evasion. The multimillionaire class thinks that taxes are only for the wee people. Big businesses arrange their accounts to ensure that they are in Bermuda, Jersey or the Isle of Man so that they do not have to pay their corporation taxes. The figures involved amount to between £25 billion and £85 billion a year. What is the Westminster Government's response to that glaring problem? It is to announce that there will be 40,500 fewer workers in the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise. That news is music to the ears of the multimillionaires who are evading their taxes. We should address not only such action across the UK but the issue here in Scotland that privatisation costs more money and does not save us money. That is why we should keep the services in the public sector and why our amendment should be supported.

16:32

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate on efficient government. Efficient and effective government at whatever level is something that, this morning, I would have thought we all supported. The more efficient the service, the better the support for the public who depend on that service. However, after hearing some of the speeches in the debate, it is clear that some of my colleagues in other parties do not support measures that will allow for better public services.

The document that the Executive published on Monday sets out clearly the Executive's ambitions. High goals have been set, but they are achievable. Surely it is not an impossible task to achieve more efficiencies, cut out waste and reduce bureaucracy and duplication and, by doing that, deliver better services to the public with, as the document states,

"The right staff, with the right skills."

Achieving efficient government is not about job cuts, but about ensuring that staff are doing the right jobs. I am delighted that the Executive has committed to investing in new skills for those whose jobs may change because of the process. I am also pleased that the Executive will continue to consult trade unions on changes that will affect staff. Indeed, with a Labour-led Executive, I would expect nothing else.

Our public sector workers are highly valued and the drive for efficient government should allow them to use their skills and potential to the full. Indeed, I have spoken to public sector workers who see waste and inefficiencies in the departments in which they work. They know the solutions to those inefficiencies, but they are not listened to. Let their voices be heard and let them join in the redesign of services from the back office to the front office, as the First Minister put it today. Tommy Sheridan also mentioned that earlier. We should let the managers, the workers and the service users become involved in improving and modernising the delivery of services. That is what efficient government and efficient polices are about.

As I said, achieving efficient government is not about job cuts. The drive for efficiency has provided an increase in the number of nurses, doctors and police. Indeed, North Lanarkshire Council, which represents an area in my constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, has achieved £47 million of efficiency savings without reducing the number of its staff. In fact, the council has increased the number of its employees since 1999.

Tommy Sheridan: Does the member agree that that is part of the problem? Glasgow City Council has achieved efficiency savings of £80 million over the past four years. In the next three years, we expect local authorities to save another £325 million. Has the slack not already been taken out of local authorities and is the worry not that jobs will be the next to go?

Cathie Craigie: No, I do not worry about that at all. Whether we work in a council or not, we can all make efficiency savings. I say to Mr Rumbles that Aberdeenshire Council can make such savings. It is a question of making savings and using those resources at the coalface, where they will make a difference. We have been able to do that in North Lanarkshire.

Tommy Sheridan's speech was one for the soap box. He might have been inventing concerns that do not exist. Let us work together to ensure that the efficiency drive is not about making job cuts, but about achieving efficiencies. That will allow us to target money and resources where they will do the most good, which is in the delivery of services to the people who need them. I do not think that I

can put that better than the Executive's document puts it:

"This is growth in public sector jobs in the right places; public sector jobs where they are needed, at the frontline, delivering demonstrable improvement to our public services."

We must lead by example on efficiency. We cannot expect savings to be made by our partners in local government and—as Margaret Jamieson highlighted—in other public agencies if we do not embrace efficient government ourselves. I am pleased that the document acknowledges that, details the savings that the Executive has already made and commits it to making future savings.

Like the Executive, some councils, such as Glasgow City Council and North Lanarkshire Council, have already taken on board the message of efficient government. Since 1999, North Lanarkshire Council has been working to make savings and to reinvest them in front-line services. That has proved to be hugely beneficial and has meant the targeting of millions of extra pounds on meeting the needs of the elderly and supporting young people with special educational needs. Extra money has also been provided for the day-to-day repair and maintenance of schools. Who can argue that we should not be targeting money on those areas?

The people of North Lanarkshire who benefit from such improvements in services would pour scorn on the SNP's suggestion that the efficiency proposals are only to make headlines. We must ensure that we support the local authorities that have made a start and do not move too far in a direction that would make it impossible to achieve the efficiencies that we seek.

Mike Rumbles: That is what I was saying.

Cathie Craigie: We agree.

Can I continue, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, but you do not have very long.

Cathie Craigie: What we have heard from the SNP and the Tories does not stand up. The council tax cannot be reduced without cuts in jobs and services being necessary. The SNP wants to square that circle, but that is impossible. When Ted Brocklebank compared expenditure in local government in England with expenditure in local government in Scotland, he was not comparing like with like; his per capita analysis was simplistic. Perhaps Tom McCabe and our colleagues who work in public services should paraphrase Sinatra and say, "We won't do it the way other people do it, we'll do it our way."

16:38

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

We should start by congratulating the Executive on finally waking up to the fact that there are inefficiencies in the Scottish public sector; it is about time that it did so. Why has it taken it five years to get to this point?

As my colleague Ted Brocklebank said, there has been a huge expansion in spending and staffing in the public sector over the past five years—and I do not mean in front-line services. The Executive's administration bill has increased by £50 million and it has an extra 1,057 staff. There are another 556 civil servants in quangos, on which an additional £137 million of funding has been spent. It would not be so bad if outputs in the public sector had increased, but that is patently not the case. Since 1999, recorded crime and the number of offences are up by 7 per cent. In the health service, the percentage of out-patients who are seen within nine weeks is down by 10 per cent; the number of people who are on a waiting list is up by 25 per cent; the percentage of in-patients who are seen within three months is down by 13.5 per cent; and the total number of hospital discharges is down by 9.9 per cent. I could go on.

The number of workers in the public sector has increased by 8 per cent—by 50,000—whereas the number of workers in the private sector has increased by only 4 per cent, or half the public sector rate. That is a sorry tale and the Executive has nothing to be proud of. It is little wonder that Treasury officials in Whitehall last week talked about the Scottish Executive's Toytown economics.

If the Executive now admits—as it seems to—that we spend £745 million too much annually, what does that say about its spending in the past five years? In each of those years, we have spent that amount too much. In effect, an admission has been made of failure and inefficiency to date. The Executive admits that it has wasted more than £3.5 billion of Scottish taxpayers' money in five years. That should be a resignation issue for the minister. The situation is unacceptable.

The Scottish Executive has missed the opportunity to use the money to reduce the public sector's size. The consensus is growing that the public sector is too large and is crowding out the private sector. Professor David Bell made that point to the Finance Committee on 2 November. Last night, a similar point was made at the Policy Institute debate that was led by Professor Sir Donald MacKay and Professor Donald MacRae, who are both eminent economists. The self-same point was made last week by Sir John Ward, who was appointed Scottish Enterprise's chairman by the current Scottish Executive.

Even the First Minister seems to accept the point. On 28 June, he said to the Fraser of Allander institute:

"The size of Scotland's public sector, compared to the size of the private sector, is too big."

We are all agreed. We have a consensus. Is it not marvellous? We can all sign up to it. However, when the opportunity arises to do something about the public sector's size, the Executive does absolutely nothing. Why is it missing the opportunity? Why does it not return some of the hard-earned money that it will save to our taxpayers? Why does it not use some of the money to cut business rates and council tax?

Gordon Brown has announced that £1 billion will be used to reduce council tax bills in England. What is happening in Scotland to reduce council tax bills? Nothing. I know that we have devolution and that the Scottish Executive keeps saying that we do things differently in Scotland, but would it not be marvellous for Scottish council tax payers if the minister said that a little of the money would be used to reduce council tax bills? However, the Executive will not do that. What a shame and a disappointment for our council tax payers.

I can go no further without commenting on the remarkable volte-face from the Scottish National Party, which now seems to favour—even if only half-heartedly—a council tax freeze. If the SNP wants lessons on cutting taxes, it has only to ask and we will be happy to assist.

Mr Swinney: In his tour de force of the parties in the chamber, does Mr Fraser want to say something to his colleague Mr Monteith, who told us on 5 March 1999 that it was impossible to make efficiency savings in the Scottish Executive's budget and that

"Patently the SNP believe they can get blood out of a stone".

Why does Mr Fraser not give Mr Monteith a lesson on how to make efficiency savings in the way in which he spends public money?

Murdo Fraser: Mr Monteith was commenting on the SNP's efficiency savings proposals, which is not the same matter.

Only we have the commitment to reduce taxes, which is why we are the effective Opposition. The SNP offers no philosophical alternative to the Executive. It offers a change of passport, but not of policy. For all that I disagree with him, at least Mr Sheridan proposes with some conviction an alternative to the Executive's suggestion, as do we, but we are a real Opposition party and we do not reduce our opposition to proposing the amendment of one word in the Executive's motion.

The Executive admits that it has failed to make savings in the past five years and that it has

wasted more than £3.5 billion of Scottish taxpayers' money. When it now seems to be saving money, it will give no relief to our businesses through their rates or to council tax payers. It is time for the Executive to start giving back some of the excess money, to tighten its belt and to reduce the public sector's size, which will boost the private sector and the Executive's oft-stated yet never-delivered-on top priority of growing Scotland's economy.

16:45

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I do not think that any of us will take lessons from a Tory party that wasted billions of pounds on introducing the poll tax, trying to collect it, and scrapping it. We are still trying to collect it today, about 12 years on from when it was introduced. We could go through many of the Tories' other failures, such as the fact that they picked Devonport over Rosyth and how much that is costing the taxpayer, or the millions that they spent on privatisation. Look at the millions that were spent on privatising British Energy plc just for us to have to bail it out with another £1 billion in the past year or so. I do not think that we will take any lessons from the Tories on efficiency.

Murdo Fraser: Would Alex Neil care to share with the chamber how much the privatised companies contribute in tax revenue to the Treasury compared with the subsidy that they used to receive from the Treasury when they were in public ownership?

Alex Neil: We all know how much was spent and who made the millions in profit from the privatisations of Mr Major and Mrs Thatcher.

Let us move on to today. I reiterate something that Susan Deacon said. Those of us who believe in public services have a special duty to ensure that they are delivered as efficiently as possible. I hope that that aspiration is shared by members on all sides of the chamber.

The question that we are being asked to consider is whether the document "Building a Better Scotland: Efficient Government—Securing Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity" provides any grounds for hope that the Executive will do what it says it will. Although some elements of the document might be acceptable, as a whole it is full of contradictions and, in many places, is based not on evidence but on wishful thinking, as Tommy Sheridan said.

Let us look at some of the contradictions in the document. First, there is the issue of jobs. When Gordon Brown announced his Gershon-type economies, he said that we would be participating with other devolved Administrations in the 20,000 job losses, which he had discussed with the

Scottish Executive. When Tavish Scott winds up for the Executive, will he tell us how many of those 20,000 losses will come from the Executive's efficiency cuts and savings?

Will he also tell us whether consideration has been given to the cost of job cuts? Redundancies do not mean that money is saved from day one. The cost of making people redundant has to be taken into account when considering the expected net savings. Does the document contain an assumption of the number of job cuts that there will be? If it does, what is that number, what will the cost of those job cuts be, and what will the effect be on the estimated savings?

On the fire service, will the minister confirm which one of two statements is right? Was Hugh Henry right on 18 November to say that no decisions have been taken by the Executive on reducing the number of control rooms from eight, or is the document right when it says—and has built into its assumptions—that the number of control rooms will decline from eight? If it is the assumption in the document, will the minister tell us what assumption has been made about the number of control rooms that will be closed down and how many will be left? Until the minister answers those precise questions, the document has no credibility.

Let us consider what the document says about procurement. There is an inherent contradiction in the idea of efficiency savings through procurement, which is not spelled out in the document. For example, if we go for cheaper procurement in road construction, that might mean that we contract people from outwith Scotland to undertake major road projects, which means that there will be fewer jobs in Scottish companies in Scotland. Has that been taken into account? In other words, what will be the economic impact of the savings on other Government revenues and expenditure?

The fifth area that requires clarification is what assumptions have been made about the relocation of Scottish Natural Heritage to Inverness. One sentence in the document refers to the savings on car journeys that will result from some of the Executive's decisions. However, in reality, what will happen? Many of the senior executives will not relocate to Inverness, but will stay in Edinburgh and set themselves up as consultants. They will go to Inverness to get contracts from SNH and the extra cost of that will be built into the price that they submit for their contracts. Then, they will charge consultancy rates to Scottish Natural Heritage. Have all those calculations been made? If so, what is the revised estimated cost of SNH's relocation to Inverness?

Then there is Scottish Enterprise. When one looks at Scottish Enterprise's budget in the draft

budget document, one finds the heading "Management and Administration", the cost of which is estimated to be £75 million this year, which is 18 per cent of the total budget, rising to £92 million by 2007-08. Why does an economic development agency require to spend nearly 20 per cent of its budget on management and administration? How much is wasted on consultants, some of whom are getting £1,000 a day and are people I would not send for the messages? Is that good value for money? Has the Executive looked at the consultancy budget?

The minister has to answer those questions, otherwise his boss Mr McCabe will go down as the fiddler on the hoof.

16:52

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): The debate has shed some light and not a little heat. Indeed, there has been sufficient heat from the Opposition benches alone to power our green jobs strategy—that would be the embodiment of efficient government. Her Majesty could probably power a whole wing of her palace on Mr Brocklebank's singing earlier this afternoon—a song from an earlier hit parade. Just as "Top of the Pops" disappears, so too do the Tories. As for Mr Monteith, I feel that he should keep his speech for a licensing bill debate. We got binge rhetoric from him rather than anything more useful.

Efficient government is central to our programme of modernising and reforming the public sector to make it as efficient, effective and productive as possible. Efficient government is important for our economy, so that our public services are effective in delivering quick, responsive services to support a strong workforce and strong communities.

Efficient government will ensure that the valuable time of teachers, doctors and policemen is spent doing what they have been trained to do and not on bureaucracy. Efficient government is important in maintaining the reputation of our public services and the high regard in which the public hold them. That is why we will not get bogged down in anything other than what is right for Scotland to deliver the most efficient public services possible.

The Executive's plan does just that. It sets out how we can make our public sector more efficient by improving procurement practices, sharing support services, improving transactional processes, increasing the productive time of our staff and streamlining bureaucracy. It outlines the cash savings that each portfolio will deliver for reinvestment in front-line services—not the cuts that the Tories have proposed.

Murdo Fraser: Those are marvellous words from the minister, but why has it taken the Executive five years to get round to making such savings?

Tavish Scott: I will come to that in just a minute. First, I will answer the points that Susan Deacon and others raised about how we will implement the programme.

We will ensure that the efficient government programme is delivered throughout the public service. We will use delivery mechanisms such as technical notes, which will set out detailed project plans; the improvement service, which will work with local government, and measures will be fully integrated into best value; regular reporting to ministers and Parliament; and, above all, transparent monitoring by Audit Scotland.

I turn to Mr Fraser's question, which I was not going to ignore—I never ignore Mr Fraser's questions. I will give him an example that he should know about, because we mentioned it in a parliamentary debate in June: the e-procurement system. The Executive introduced the system, which is the model for public sector procurement—that has happened already; it is not an aspiration for the future. E-procurement is at the cutting edge of procurement and is valued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to such an extent that it suggests that other countries should follow Scotland's example. Not only did we introduce that system, but we have abolished national health service trusts, implemented a business transformation project in Scottish Enterprise—saving £200 million—and carried out a major programme of reform and modernisation in the Crown Office, to name only another three examples.

Alex Neil: In what service was the £200 million saved from Scottish Enterprise reinvested?

Tavish Scott: As Mr Neil knows, because he is the convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, the £200 million has been reinvested in ensuring that Scottish Enterprise meets the objectives of "A Smart, Successful Scotland", which is the framework that we expect Scottish Enterprise—*[Interruption.]* Mr Neil laughs, but the organisation will be judged against those objectives not just by Government but by committees of the Parliament.

We will make a step change in the delivery of efficiency savings. There are many examples of such savings in the efficient government plan, but I will mention two examples that might interest members and I will respond to particular points that have been made. First, classroom assistants will be employed to reduce the unnecessary burden on professional teachers that is caused by administrative tasks. Secondly, we will deliver a

bureaucracy audit that is aimed at reducing the burden of paperwork in the teaching profession so that education alone can be considered.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Tavish Scott: I want to make progress.

We can transform the way in which our public services are administered and lock in savings to deliver a more sustainably efficient public sector. Public bodies will be required to look beyond the boundaries of their own organisations and to explore opportunities to work together to provide support and front-line services. That is why the efficient government plan contains measures for longer-term efficiencies.

A number of members mentioned the unions. We invited the unions to join the efficient government working group, but they declined. Obviously that is a matter for the unions, but Mr McCabe and other ministers will meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress on 13 December, so our door is, of course, not closed to the unions.

Mr Neil and others asked about fire service control rooms. The position was laid out clearly by Hugh Henry in the stage 1 debate on the Fire (Scotland) Bill. The issue is being consulted on as we pursue issues that were raised during the consultation on the bill, and the efficient government document reflects that. However, the position will be transparent, because not only the committee but Audit Scotland will observe the process, so there will definitely be an opportunity to pursue the matter.

It is important to stress that central Government is not immune from the initiative but will lead in making savings. Scottish Executive expenditure on administration is already much less than that of other UK Government departments as a percentage of overall expenditure. During the spending review period, spending on central Government administration will fall in real terms by 6 per cent.

Margaret Jamieson asked about public sector pensions. The Scottish Public Pensions Agency in Galashiels is considering the matter and Margaret Jamieson's point will be raised when the agency expands its role to deliver efficient and effective economies of scale.

Members raised issues about local government and portfolios. Local government receives a large chunk of Government expenditure and it is right that it should contribute its share of efficiency savings.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give way on that point?

Tavish Scott: In response to Mike Rumbles and other members, I point out that if a local authority

achieves its efficiency target, they can redirect to front-line services—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order. Far too much private conversation is going on. The minister is winding up.

Tavish Scott: Further progress over and above the target will be retained by local government. The modernising government and efficient government funds will help local government to make further efficiency savings.

We have heard a broad spread of ideas from some parties but, not for the first time, the Parliament and, certainly, members of the Executive parties have been unimpressed by the Conservatives. In England, the Tories have embarked on the James review—I understand that James is not Lord James Douglas-Hamilton but someone else—to help Government departments to prepare a list of spending cuts.

The latest phase was announced last month. I must admit that the announcement was met with a bit of a whimper in England, but that was better than the reaction in Scotland, where no one noticed it. There was not a whisper from the Scottish Tories about their equivalent proposals. I have had to resort to their new charter, of which we have all helpfully been given a copy—“with no small print” in relation to these matters—to find out the extent of their ambition, which is extremely difficult. Their plans for the 2,800 Scottish schools mean that we would be seeking extra bursars and administrators to ensure that children in our schools get their buses, that their lunches are cooked healthily and that contracts are designed, monitored and enforced so that children with special needs get the expert help that they need.

The Tories’ plans to wind back the clock on health would mean a massive recruitment drive for senior hospital managers. Members should recall that there were 650 more senior NHS managers under the Conservatives than there are now—that is £35 million more in spending on bureaucracy under the Tories. They have no way of paying that bill. Last weekend, their London colleague Oliver Letwin said that they would cut £35 billion across the UK. It is no wonder that we are all looking for the small print on the Tory books.

I hope that I have been able to address the points raised by members, but I would be happy to write to members on the issues to which I have been unable to attend today.

I remind the chamber what the plan looks like. It sets out an ambitious agenda for making the Scottish public sector a leader in efficiency, innovation and productivity. It sets out a five-year plan to attack waste, bureaucracy and duplication in Scotland’s public sector, freeing up £745 million of cash and releasing efficiencies for investment in

front-line services. It commits us to finding more as we move towards our longer-term goal and sets out an agenda for long-term efficiencies to lock in a sustainably more efficient public sector in Scotland, delivering first-class services.

We have a plan for action. People will see that it makes sense. Ministers are determined to see that it makes a difference.

Business Motion

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-2091, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) that the timetable for completion of consideration of the Prostitution Tolerance Zones (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 30 April 2005;

(b) that consideration of the Edinburgh Tram (Line One) Bill and the Edinburgh Tram (Line Two) Bill at Preliminary Stage be completed by 25 February 2005; and

(c) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 3 December 2004 on the Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment (No.2) Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/491); the Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Amendment (No.3) Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/492); and the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 Amendment Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/493).—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-2096.2, in the name of Rob Gibson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2096, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on a sustainable aquaculture industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central 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)
 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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (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)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-2096.3, in the name of Ted

Brocklebank, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2096, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on a sustainable aquaculture industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McGregor, 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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (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, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 34, Against 77, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-2096.1, in the name of Robin Harper, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2096, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on a sustainable aquaculture industry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 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)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 15, Against 97, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-2096, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on a sustainable aquaculture industry, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive commitment, as set out in *A Partnership for a Better Scotland*, to support a sustainable aquaculture industry, through the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture and other measures, including trade defence and a review of the regulatory procedures and associated costs and of the scope for improved access to veterinary medicines, all of which are designed to protect and improve employment and investment opportunities in many parts of the Highlands and Islands, including many of our most remote rural and island communities.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that amendment S2M-2093.1, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, which seeks to amend motion

S2M-2093, in the name of Tom McCabe, on efficient government, 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 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, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

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)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 26, Against 85, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S2M-2093.2, in the name of Brian Monteith, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2093, in the name of Tom McCabe, on efficient government, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (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)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 95, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S2M-2093.3, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2093, in the name of Tom McCabe, on efficient government, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 15, Against 79, Abstentions 18.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The eighth and final question is, that motion S2M-2093, in the name of Tom McCabe, on efficient government, 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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (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)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 22, Abstentions 26.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *Building a Better Scotland: Efficient Government – Securing Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity*; recognises the need to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of the Scottish public sector, and endorses the Scottish Executive's ambition to make the Scottish public sector the most productive and innovative in the United Kingdom.

Domestic Abuse Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-2055, in the name of Mike Rumbles, on domestic abuse services for all victims.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the very serious and totally unacceptable problem of domestic violence in Scottish society; notes in particular that all victims, whether they be women, men or children, need to be supported, and therefore considers that the Scottish Executive should provide practical help and assistance to all such victims.

17:12

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am pleased to open the debate, in which we can at last address issues that relate to all victims of violence and domestic abuse in Scotland. I make it clear that I fully support the Executive's initiatives to tackle the problem of domestic abuse against women. It is to the Executive's credit that that issue has gained the prominence that it has. However, over the years, Parliament has held many debates on violence against women in all its forms and I have become more and more concerned that, in focusing our debates in that way, we are in danger of sending out the wrong message to other victims of violence, perhaps to the effect that their suffering does not warrant so much of our attention.

The matter is not just about giving our attention to all the other victims of abuse; it is much more serious than that. To eradicate the problem, we must first recognise that the problem exists. We must tackle it and, in so doing, allocate Scottish Executive resources to help and assist victims. I will give an example of what I mean about lack of resources. Some support groups for the victims of sexual abuse have had their links with Scotland's leading rape charity severed because they offer counselling to men. Group directors were told to leave Rape Crisis Scotland's network after they decided to help men through rape ordeals. Centres in Dumfries, Stirling and Ayr have been denied Scottish Executive funding because they deal with men. Irena McGroarty, the director of the Dumfries centre, told me that

"the Scottish Rape Crisis Network always turned a blind eye when we supported children—there was no blind eye turned when we helped men, there is a massive gap in the system".

The argument that is used for withdrawing funding is that men should, if they want a service, set it up for themselves. When I raised the issue of funding for male victims of domestic abuse with Margaret Curran, the Minister for Social Justice in

the previous session of Parliament, she said the same thing. In last month's debate on domestic abuse, Johann Lamont, Malcolm Chisholm's Deputy Minister for Communities, said:

"the reality of an experience is whether self-help groups begin to develop".—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2004; c 11629.]

To me, that denies the reality that men suffer violence and domestic abuse. It simply is not good enough for the Government to shrug its shoulders and say that if help is to be given, men should first help themselves. All I have been trying to do is to get the Scottish Executive ministers who have responsibility in the matter to acknowledge the existence of the problem.

I will focus on the clear evidence that is available throughout the western world that indicates that domestic violence is not limited to male violence against women. I will share just a few of these studies. The British crime survey of 1996 found that the number of males and females who had experienced domestic abuse from their partner in the United Kingdom was exactly the same, at 4.2 per cent of the population. From two large national US surveys, the American social scientists Strauss and Gelles reported that husbands and wives had assaulted each other at approximately equal rates and found that more wives than husbands were severely violent towards their spouses. In a New Zealand survey of 1,037 young adults, 18 per cent of young women said they had perpetrated severe physical violence against their partners, as compared to just 6 per cent of young men who had done so. Three times more women than men said that they had kicked or bitten their partners or that they had hit them with their fists or an object.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: I cannot at the moment. I must get through this part of my speech.

My point is that a wealth of studies and reports from across the western world indicate that domestic violence is not only an issue when the victim is female, a youth or a child.

I return to the domestic scene here in Scotland: The Scottish crime survey of 1996 showed that about 6 per cent of females and 4 per cent of males reported experience of abuse during the previous year. At first sight, the Scottish Executive-sponsored research on domestic abuse against men in Scotland, which was undertaken by Keele University, seems to show that 92 per cent of domestic abuse incidents were male against female. The study used as an indicator actual reports of violence that were registered by the police.

I said "seems to show", because the authors of that report caution us on over-reliance on the

statistics because there is evidence of reluctance among male victims to report their experiences to the police. It appears that there are a host of reasons for their not doing so. Fewer than one in six incidents against male victims are reported to the police compared to almost one in two incidents against female victims. The report even suggests that the split of incidents in Scotland is more likely to be in the ratio of about 80 per cent female to 20 per cent male victims. That represents about 60,000 incidents of male violence against females, but also some 15,000 incidents of female violence against males.

So, the evidence is clear that, although the vast majority of victims of domestic violence in Scotland are women, there is a substantial minority of male victims, and a large number of female perpetrators, of violence. The research goes on to say that

"disbelief and lack of service provision are both factors that can compound male victims' experience of abuse".

What I am trying to do in the debate, while I have the attention of the minister, is focus on the disbelief and lack of recognition that seems to emanate from the Scottish Executive ministers who have responsibility in the matter.

The report is clear in what it says:

"male victims would benefit from support and advice regarding housing and welfare. Men who are trying to separate from abusive partners may benefit from the provision of alternative accommodation for themselves and their children and better legal and financial support."

There is no doubt at all that Scottish Executive ministers are doing good work in driving through efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. In the motions that they have lodged, we have seen ministers move their focus from exclusive identification of females as the victims of domestic abuse to inclusion of children and young people. However, ministers seem to have a mental block when it comes to the inclusion of male victims. I do not know why. I am simply asking the minister to do the obvious thing, which is to take just one more step: he should recognise that men are also victims of domestic violence and provide them with real help and support. We need to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse, whether they are women, children or men are helped and assisted with appropriate services that are funded by the Scottish Executive.

In the terms of my motion, effective domestic abuse services should, in a modern 21st century Scotland, be available for all victims

17:20

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): Here we go again—almost. I will say at the outset that nobody, including me, has ever claimed that

there should be a denial of services to anyone who suffers violence.

Mike Rumbles cannot escape the facts. According to the Scottish crime survey 2000, which he did not quote, 93 per cent of domestic abuse victims are female and 93 per cent of the perpetrators are male. That is just the start. In nature and in the vast majority of cases, such abuse is a gender-based crime; it is the most extreme manifestation of sexism and misogyny.

I will not do as Mike Rumbles did: I will not let my whole speech be dominated by confronting him and his beliefs. I will not do as he has done in the debates on violence against women and domestic abuse in the past few weeks. However, I wish in passing to raise some issues about Fathers 4 Justice. It is becoming evident that the actions of at least some members of that group are a continuation of domestic abuse. Some men will go to persistent lengths to project and perpetuate their dominance in the living rooms of women and children, via the television screen. That is one reason why I will leave the chamber after my speech to join the demonstration against violence against women, which is assembling on Market Street at 6 pm.

All victims of abuse and violence need appropriate resources and support. Unless, however, there is a recognition that the majority of domestic abuse is gender based and is rooted in the inequality of women in society, it cannot be expected that services will be appropriate for either women or men. The prevalence and severity of domestic abuse is greater against women. Women are more likely to be strangled, they are more likely to be raped, they are more likely to suffer actual physical injury and they are more likely to have to go to hospital.

Attitudes and perceptions are completely different between men and women. I will quote from a survey that perhaps explains why the prevalence of violence against women is higher than it is against men. When asked whether they thought domestic violence was

“wrong, but not a crime”,

38 per cent of women said yes, compared with only 18 per cent of men. When asked whether domestic violence was “just something that happens”, 54 per cent of men thought that that was the case, compared with 22 per cent of women. Those attitudes are engrained, and they are at the root of the violence and batterings that women receive.

I support universal services for all, but they need to be appropriate for the violence and abuse that are perpetrated. For Mike Rumbles consistently to argue that the Executive’s strategies on domestic abuse should refer generically to domestic abuse

and make no reference to the gender-specific nature of abuse is to deny appropriate services for either gender. Mike Rumbles needs to understand the nature of the issue and to know what it is he argues for. It would not be appropriate for services designed for women who experience gender-specific abuse to be rolled out to men because those services would not be appropriate for the type of abuse that men suffer. I suggest that Mike Rumbles develop his arguments, and that he ask for specific services.

Mike Rumbles has pointed out that the Executive expects men to self-organise, but women have had to self-organise for centuries. Women have only ever achieved concessions, services or recognition of the abuse and violence that they have suffered because they have self-organised. Every single service for women who have suffered abuse and violence exists only because women fought for it, organised for it, funded it and battled for inadequate resources. It would be a good thing for men to battle for services that are appropriate for them, to determine what those are and to organise for them. That would be more appropriate than for them to breenge their way into services that are gender specific for women.

I will leave now, because I want to attend the demonstration. Maybe Mike Rumbles will come down and get us at 6 pm—see you there.

17:25

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I find myself in a rather curious position, not because of my solitary presence on the SNP benches—a by-election is attracting the attention of many of my colleagues who are elsewhere—but because I find myself wanting to stand and defend the Executive against someone who has risen frequently to defend it, but who on this occasion, in the deployment of his argument and in his speech, is in essence attacking it.

We will not be voting on the motion, but we would find it easy to vote for if we were—indeed a number of my colleagues have signed it—because its terms are fair and proper. However, the picture that Mike Rumbles paints for us is one of a new Boudicca coming across the horizon with the scimitars attached to the wheels of her chariot to cut the legs off any man foolish enough to stand in her way.

Of course I accept that the test of a real civilisation is not how it treats its majority—although it must respect and respond to the wishes of the majority—but how it supports and respects the rights of minorities. I am far from convinced that there is merit in Mike Rumbles’s case. He has to acknowledge that he is talking

about a significantly small minority and he is doing his case no justice with his rather spurious manipulation of statistics, based on small percentages, from which it is unwise to extrapolate.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I really do not have time.

Before coming to the chamber, I put two phrases into the Google search engine to get a feel for the issue. I put in “female violence against men” and “male violence against women”. The hits were 98 per cent for “male violence against women” and 2 per cent for “female violence against men”. Of course that does not tell us about the incidence of the violence, but it does tell us how big a problem it is perceived to be by the people who are engaged in that technology, who are predominantly men. The oldest paper that I could find on female violence against men dates from 1975. It is not as if the issue has surfaced suddenly; it has been around for 30 years, but it has yet to make the kind of impact that, quite properly, male violence against women has made.

The figures that the Executive uses in its papers suggest that there are more than 10 times as many victims recorded where the perpetrator is male than there are where the perpetrator is female. That gives us the scale. It takes nothing away from men to support women.

Mike Rumbles made a rather curious argument, which I suspect the minister will address. He appeared to suggest that even though the Executive provided a grant for one purpose—protecting women—it would be okay to pretend in a Nelsonian manner that we were not seeing that it was being misused for other purposes. It is vital that we ensure that there is support for all people affected by domestic violence—women, children and men—but men are not being neglected just because we are giving women the support that they deserve and need.

17:29

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

There is no doubt that male violence towards women is the most prevalent form of domestic abuse and rightly deserves the prominence that it is given. However, the debate is welcome, because it allows us to talk about all victims of domestic abuse. Our social culture does not allow men to be vulnerable or weak and it is hard to encourage dialogue between men and health professionals when it comes to physical, emotional or mental health problems.

Some 20 per cent more women than men visit their general practitioner. Men are more likely to suffer in silence and tend to ignore symptoms of

illness or delay seeking medical attention until a crisis point is reached. Suicide rates for men are more than three times higher than those for women. It is rare for me to agree with Mike Rumbles, but I hope that those who trivialise the fact that men have a problem will look at some of the background statistics.

The Executive’s definition refers to people who experience domestic abuse as women because they represent the majority of victims, and rightly so, but they are not 100 per cent. We must maintain an awareness that domestic abuse can take place in any relationship and defining those who experience it in gendered language reinforces the belief that it is not macho for a man to be a victim of violence.

It is difficult to ascertain accurate figures for male victims of domestic abuse because the problem is likely to be seriously under-reported. We cannot get an accurate picture simply by looking at police reports. The Executive’s study “Domestic Abuse Against Men in Scotland” found that the embarrassment that many male victims feel is a factor that explains the infrequency with which male victims of domestic abuse come to the attention of the Scottish police. Among the men who were interviewed for the report there was a common feeling of being more upset or angry about the breakdown of a relationship in which abuse had occurred than about the abuse. We cannot allow male victims of violence to be trivialised—or indeed ignored—simply because they are not represented in the same distressing number as females.

I will say a few words about rehabilitation programmes. In several local authorities, criminal justice workers provide programmes for men who have been convicted of domestic violence offences. Such programmes aim to encourage men to identify and rethink some of the attitudes and fears that underpin their use of violence. That is necessary and praiseworthy, but I note that the Royal College of Psychiatrists states that male abusers tend to be emotionally inexpressive, to have low self-esteem and to lack assertiveness, and by the time they get to programmes it is often too late. We should consider more preventive measures. The level of repeat incidence is alarmingly high, which points to the fact that the help that is available, for both men and women, is not sufficient. Although preventive work to repair the culture that permits violence is difficult to undertake, it might provoke healthier results than our forcing a convicted male to undertake a rehabilitation course in what will already be a crisis.

The priority is confirmed and well outlined in the motion. It is to open service provision to men and to make men aware of the support that is available

to them just as it is available to females who wish to leave a situation of domestic abuse. Every effort must be made to ensure that the act of leaving an abusive partner, whether they are male or female, is not hindered by financial, housing or other constraints. Everyone in Scotland is entitled to the social and natural justice and protection that we expect from our public and voluntary agencies.

17:34

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To some extent, we are arguing about a non-argument. I am sure that everyone in the Parliament is committed to supporting the Executive's praiseworthy emphasis on improving services for women who are assaulted in the home, outside the home, or wherever. Historically, women have undoubtedly had problems in our society. In many places and many homes they are not regarded as equal partners. We must support women, give them more self-confidence and help them when they are physically attacked. None of that means that we should not also help other people who have a problem. If there is violence in 10 homes in a street and, in nine of them, men are hitting women but, in one of them, a woman is hitting a man, we should help all 10 households. That need not be done in a fashion that in any way diminishes the support for the women.

I have tried to argue in correspondence with the Lord Advocate that domestic abuse is abuse in the domus—the home—and affects everyone. I even used Latin, which seemed to me to be the correct thing to do when arguing with a Scottish lawyer. Domestic abuse can be an age issue; grandparents, aunts, cousins or children can be victims and mothers can be victims of large sons. Partners can be victims of each other. The Executive's working group thought—no doubt correctly, at the time—that priority should be given to violence between partners. It is important that that support should be given, but it would surely be easier for the police to deal with all sorts of violence in the home. The same can be said for the supporting agencies, because there is often fallout from domestic violence. Often, if the man drunkenly beats up the woman, the children get involved and he beats them up too.

We must consider domestic violence in the round, and we must do so in relation to alcohol, from which we shy away. We are all for banning smoking, but we are not banning alcohol. I am not suggesting that we can ban alcohol instantly, but we can take much more serious steps than we do at the moment against the misuse of alcohol, which can lead to all sorts of domestic violence.

We are not disputing about nothing, but everyone is reading into what other members are saying what they think that they are saying rather

than listening to what they are really saying. There are no grounds for dispute. There is a big problem of violence towards women and the Executive is correct to be dealing with it. We probably need more resources for that work, but we also need to take an holistic view of domestic violence so that we can deal with everyone who gets involved in it. I hope that peace can break out, because we have debated the issue often and we should now concentrate on getting something done to help all those who need support.

17:37

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Like other members, I welcome the motion and the fact that society is taking domestic abuse far more seriously. I also welcome the Scottish Executive's work to raise awareness of the issues and to fund services for those who suffer from domestic abuse.

Although there is nothing with which I disagree in the motion, I was rather disappointed with Mike Rumbles's speech and his presentation of the arguments, particularly the way in which he seemed to dwell on various international examples but skipped quickly over the report "Domestic Abuse Against Men in Scotland", which the Executive commissioned. That report's main finding is that, on the available evidence, there are considerably fewer male victims than female victims of domestic abuse in Scotland. That is the basic fact, although Mike Rumbles can quibble about the percentages.

In general, the abuse that male victims experience is less frequent and less severe than the abuse that female victims experience. Mike Rumbles fails to understand that we are talking about different things in different contexts and situations. Among the men who were interviewed, the majority of those who were abused were themselves perpetrators of violence. The research found little evidence in the responses of abused men or service providers to suggest that there is a need for a new agency with the specific remit of supporting male victims of domestic abuse or that there is a need for refuges for abused men.

Mike Rumbles: Will Mark Ballard give way on that point?

Mark Ballard: Mike Rumbles did not give way to me, so I do not see why I should give way to him.

We need a different service for men because the context is different. We have to understand the domestic abuse of women in the context of a sexist society and of societal violence against women. Different services are required. I am pleased that the Scottish Executive supports the Scottish Women's Aid network and I am worried by anything that implies that that network should

be undermined. It is there to provide women-only spaces and support for the women who form the vast majority of those who face sustained abuse in domestic settings. That is the context in which we have to see the issue. We have to challenge the legitimisation of violence against women, which still exists in our society.

Mary Scanlon: Would Mark Ballard also exclude from support services males who were the victims of males?

Mark Ballard: The contexts are different. If there is a need for specific services for same-sex couples, I will support them, although I do not see any evidence of that need. I am saying that we should not undermine the Women's Aid network or the Scottish Rape Crisis Network but challenge the legitimisation of violence against women.

I was appalled when, while pursuing research for the debate, I read that, in a survey carried out in Glasgow in 2001, half of the boys and a third of the girls who were questioned thought that hitting a woman was acceptable in some circumstances. Mary Scanlon is right to say that we need early intervention. In a previous members' business debate, Chris Ballance spoke of peace education and the need to develop, especially among young men, the skills for conflict resolution, co-operation and the avoidance of violence. Our education system must combat the context of domestic abuse against women—a context of sexism in society and the condoning of violence by society. If our education system does that, we will get to the root of some of the problems.

Conflating what happens to men in domestic abuse settings with what happens to women misses the social context. I am disappointed by Mike Rumbles's speech because of that.

17:42

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I congratulate Mike Rumbles on obtaining this debate on an issue about which I know he feels strongly. As members have said, it is difficult to disagree with the terms of the motion. However, the motion is pregnant—if I may be permitted to use a gender-specific word—with latent implications and overtones, some of which have been developed by other members. It would have been helpful if Mike Rumbles had given us some practical examples relating to domestic abuse services—not services for rape victims and others—which might have been developed in response to his point.

A heavy dose of perspective and attention to practical issues is required if the discussion is to cast light on policy options.

Mike Rumbles: Will Robert Brown give way?

Robert Brown: No. With respect, I have only four minutes.

I have some professional experience of the issues under discussion from my past legal practice and I think that I can make some useful observations. First, every case is different: the backgrounds, the personalities that are involved and the way in which they interrelate are different. Donald Gorrie rightly talked about the issues as they relate to children, older people and others in the house. Secondly, policy makers have to recognise certain patterns. Domestic violence does not exist in a vacuum; it is linked to other forms of abuse, both verbal and psychological. In last week's debate on violence against women, my colleague Margaret Smith spoke of the many guises in which abuse comes, including threats and what she compellingly described as

"not only the fist raised in anger, but the voice raised to belittle and demean."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2004; c 12352.]

Domestic violence is at the high end of domestic abuse, to which other aspects of abuse can escalate. I have—as I am sure other members have—come across many cases in which there has been a snapping point at which the borderline into violence has been crossed and, once crossed, is likely to be crossed again.

Domestic violence is also closely linked to the excess consumption of alcohol. Donald Gorrie rightly touched on that point. Alcohol lowers inhibitions and increases the causes of domestic dissension. It remains the case that our investment in tackling alcohol problems is too low, although alcohol does more damage to individuals in society than drugs do. The scourge of domestic violence could be reduced if excess alcohol consumption was tackled effectively.

The victims of domestic violence are, without question, women. Statistics show that 92.1 per cent of all incidents recorded by the police involved a male perpetrator and a female victim. I accept that there are issues of under-recording and under-reporting, but the perspective is pretty clear. Only 7.2 per cent of incidents involved a male perpetrator and a male victim, some of whom would, undoubtedly, be teenage boys in the household.

There are, of course, some male victims, but the research study that members have spoken about, which was carried out by the Executive in 2002, suggests that male victims are usually more upset about the breakdown of the relationship than about the abuse. The research also found little evidence of a need to establish specialist organisations to deal with male victims of domestic violence. However, it made a stronger case that men, like women, should not be hindered from leaving an abusive partner because of financial

constraints or the absence of alternative housing or affordable legal assistance.

In short, the issues for policy makers centre overwhelmingly on the nature of support for women and children who are caught up in domestic abuse situations. I do not want to enter into the language of gender inequality and the struggle for women's equality, because I do not believe that most victims see their situation in such terms. However, such situations are undoubtedly about the abuse of power. Many women experience a sense of powerlessness, a loss of ability to change things and a loss of control over their lives and the lives of their dependent children that come with being a domestic abuse victim and with having no job or place to go.

This debate would have had value if it had concentrated on need, on the practical resources that the Executive was being asked to provide and on the sources and extent of demand. However, we have heard nothing about those matters.

Although we are taking many practical measures to support victims, more could and should be done. The biggest change that we could make would be to alter the attitude and culture of adults and young people to ensure that the domestic abuse of men, women, children or older people is no longer tolerated in the 21st century, that domestic abuse victims are supported and that work is started to remove contributory causes, such as alcohol abuse. The issue is far more complex than some have suggested.

17:46

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): Over the past month, the Parliament has sent a strong message to the people of Scotland that domestic violence is unacceptable and should not—indeed, must not—be tolerated. Today's debate will make an important contribution to the discussion about how we address the causes and tackle the consequences of domestic violence and I congratulate Mike Rumbles on securing it. Several members have already outlined what they see as the main causes and effects of abuse.

Like Mike Rumbles, I wish to make it clear that the motion is in no way intended to belittle, downplay or denigrate the issue of domestic violence against women. I strongly support the Executive's approach to tackling abuse and will continue to support its efforts to ensure that women can access the vital support services that they need to escape from domestic violence and to rebuild their lives and their family's lives. I will also continue to support the Executive's efforts in doing all that it can to change some men's view that domestic abuse is acceptable. I repeat that such abuse is not acceptable.

In 2002, the Scottish police recorded 36,000 incidents of domestic abuse and I am sure that behind each of them lies a personal story of pain, anguish and fear. Given that the victim in 90 per cent of those incidents was female, it is only right and proper that much of the attention has focused on addressing women's needs.

However, I expect that, just as those women and their children have experienced pain, anguish and fear, terrible stories are to be found behind the 3,439 incidents of domestic abuse in which the victim was male. The Keele University study for the Scottish Executive raised some interesting points. For example, in cases in which men were victims, the police seem to have been less likely to deem as crimes the actions of their female perpetrators. Men also seem less likely to report abuse, because they do not consider it to be a criminal offence, as Mary Scanlon said. The true number of abuse cases involving violence against men could be higher than statistics suggest. However, the same research found evidence of over-reporting by some men, so the number of cases might be fewer than the research suggests.

Whatever the statistics, there is a human cost to men and women from domestic abuse and we must ensure that we tackle the problem. The Keele University study suggests that there is no need for more services. However, its report was written before it became known that services were closing down, which was the evidence that Mike Rumbles presented. I encourage the Executive to look into domestic abuse and address the problems that affect not only female partners and their children, but male partners in any arrangement.

17:50

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): One month ago we debated fully the subject of domestic abuse in Scotland. Parliament then endorsed the Executive's motion and recognised the very serious and totally unacceptable problem of domestic abuse in Scottish society. It may surprise some, therefore, that Mike Rumbles has chosen to lodge his motion for debate when the issues have already been well aired. However, the reason that he has done so is not a secret. As he argued today, and on 4 November and on 25 November, he does not accept that domestic abuse is primarily a gender-based issue and that the nature and scale of domestic abuse perpetrated by men against women are totally different from that perpetrated by women against men and they require different solutions.

As Carolyn Leckie said, Mike Rumbles cannot escape the facts. Recorded crime statistics from 2002 show that, in over 90 per cent of cases of domestic abuse, the victim was female.

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister take an intervention?

Malcolm Chisholm: No, I will not because I am going on the march at six o'clock and I must get through my speech before then.

In addition, as Mark Ballard pointed out, research that the Executive published in 2002 shows that, in general, male victims are less likely to be repeat victims of assault, to be seriously injured or to report feeling fearful in their own homes.

As Carolyn Leckie said, men and women typically have different attitudes and perceptions concerning domestic abuse. Underlying that is the gender inequality and abuse of power that makes domestic abuse a gender-based problem that requires a gender-based approach. We must acknowledge the patterns of behaviour, challenge the attitudes that underlie those patterns and set domestic abuse within a wider context of violence against women, which was the subject of last week's debate.

I believe that Mike Rumbles has misrepresented the Executive's position because nobody is saying that some men are not victims of domestic abuse and nobody is saying that they should not receive services.

Mike Rumbles: Why did the minister not mention them?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will do so.

Nobody is denying that anyone who is a victim of domestic abuse should receive protection and support, to pick up on Donald Gorrie's point. It is wrong to say that the Executive is not funding services for men. I have visited the Central Scotland Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre in Stirling to which the Executive has given funding and which provides services for men. However, it is up to the Scottish Rape Crisis Network, which is an independent network, to make its decisions about who is affiliated to it. Moreover, the Executive funds Men Against Sexual Abuse through £31,000 of section 10 funding. That organisation is exclusively for male sexual abuse survivors and they typically offer helpline advice, support and counselling.

As Stewart Stevenson said in the previous debate on the issue, to talk of violence against women is not to ignore violence against men. The Executive has repeatedly made it clear that our approach does not mean that we disregard the small minority of men who are victims or for those who experience abuse within same-sex relationships. The domestic abuse strategy sets out plainly that

"The existence of violence against men is not denied, nor is the existence of violence in same sex relationships, nor other forms of abuse".

Moreover, the law protects men who are victims of domestic abuse. Various legal remedies are open to all victims, as appropriate, such as interdicts and court orders or non-harassment orders. The Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981 offers further remedies to spouses and opposite sex partners. The criminal law applies equally to criminal acts that are perpetrated by women against men or that are perpetrated within same-sex relationships. Similarly, when it comes to support, Victim Support Scotland provides a free and confidential service to all victims of crime.

The research that was carried out by the Executive, which has already been referred to, examined the prevalence of domestic abuse that was perpetrated against men in Scotland, gauged the nature, frequency and seriousness of that abuse, examined the perspectives of those men who had been abused and assessed the adequacy of levels of service provision for such men. It concluded that there did not seem to be a need for an agency whose specific remit was to support male victims of domestic abuse in Scotland. It also concluded that there did not appear to be a need for refuges for abused men, although some male victims would benefit from support and advice on housing and welfare. It suggested that men who were trying to separate from abusive partners might benefit from the provision of alternative accommodation for themselves and their children and better legal and financial support.

It is right that homelessness legislation in Scotland recognises that everyone who is fleeing domestic abuse should have a priority need for housing; that applies to men just as much as it applies to women, as do regulations that set out the advice and information that should be available to homeless people.

The research suggested that abused men were not making full use of the support services that are available to them, which perhaps indicates that some service providers need to publicise their remit more widely. As a consequence, ministers wrote to relevant agencies—local authorities and other service providers—to encourage them to make their services more visible to male victims.

In future, if evidence emerges that there are gaps in service provision or legal protection, of course we will consider them. For example, we are in the early stages of discussion with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organisations to identify whether there is a need for research into issues to do with abuse in same-sex relationships. However, the research on men and domestic abuse confirmed the position as we know it, which is that there is not a demand or a need for specific services to parallel those that are in place for women.

Although much of the available support is mainstream and open to all, it is women who require the specific additional support that is offered through refuge provision, support to Scottish Women's Aid and funds such as the domestic abuse service development fund. The structural nature of women's inequality and the relative positions of power of men and women provide the context for men's abuse of women and mean that the approach that is required is both singular and specific.

During the debate on 4 November, Mike Rumbles said:

"We must stop pretending that only men are violent and that women cannot be violent."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2004; c 11624.]

No one is pretending any such thing. Women can be violent towards men, but that violence is not rooted in a deeper gender inequality within Scotland. That does not mean that we should ignore it—we do not—but the solutions are different. I continue to believe that the Executive's approach is right. By virtue of its scale and nature, domestic abuse can be seen as gender-based abuse. If we do not acknowledge that fact, we cannot be serious about challenging the inequalities that allow it to continue.

I apologise for not taking interventions, but I hope that members will join me on the Edinburgh march against violence against women, at which I will speak. It is unfortunate that the march has to happen every year as part of the 16 days of action that are now so necessary, but we hope that, in the not-too-distant future, such marches will no longer be necessary.

Meeting closed at 17:58.

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

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

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Thursday 9 December 2004

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

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

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at the Astron Print Room.

Published in Edinburgh by Astron and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop
53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh

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

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

RNID Ttypetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5412
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by Astron