

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 4 May 2005

Session 2

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## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 4 May 2005*

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

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Father Raymond Jaconelli, abbot of Nunraw, Haddington.

**Father Raymond Jaconelli (Abbot of Nunraw, Haddington):** Our Creator himself has told us:

"It's not good for man to be alone".

That saying has far wider implications than as a mere comment on marriage. The existence of this building and this Parliament are living witness to the saying's teaching that man is a social animal: he thrives and finds his fulfilment only in society, with his fellows. This Parliament considers the interplay between the various members of our society. It harmonises their needs and functions, it establishes their various obligations and commitments to the common good and so aims to create a peaceful and smooth-working whole.

All the various groups of society have their own particular function. The milkman and the bus driver are as necessary as the teacher or the artist. We think of Paul's wonderful description of the society of the church: it is like a human body with all its various parts. The hand needs the foot and the eye needs the ear; every part, great and small, has its function.

That brings me to my main point; namely, to make the plea that, among the groups that play a valid role in society, there is a place for those who dedicate their lives to prayer, praise, intercession and thanksgiving on behalf of all. So many of God's people—even those who believe in him—give so little thought to those very real obligations of our race. Society has its debt to God, and it is on behalf of society and, indeed, the whole human race, that some people feel called to the profession of a life that is dedicated to that role. The doctor needs the milkman, the teacher needs the nurse and the monk needs them all. But they in turn need—and benefit from—the dedicated life of the monk. He, too, has his role to play in society.

We might say that even God himself is bound by his own word that it is

"not good for man to be alone."

He, too, has to look on us not just as individuals, but as a family. What one member of the family does benefits all, precisely because they are a family. Is not that how the plan of redemption through Christ works?

So, may God bless this Parliament in all its deliberations, and deepen in it the conviction of the place of prayer in the welfare of society.

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your advice about the revised guidance on time for reflection. The revised guidance states:

"The Presiding Officer will invite contributors to lead Time for Reflection",

but it also states that

"the text should be submitted in advance to the Clerk and the content ... should not deviate from the text provided."

According to a report in this week's *Sunday Herald*, the revised guidance is a response to Cardinal Keith O'Brien's address during time for reflection on 22 December when, according to the *Sunday Herald*, he claimed

"that gays and lesbians were 'captives to sexual aberration'",

an allegation that is also contained in motion S2M-2208, which also accused the cardinal of using

"the opportunity of Time for Reflection to make ... a gratuitous insult to a section of the Scottish population".

From reading the *Official Report* of Cardinal O'Brien's speech, it is clear that he made no reference at all to the gay community and I have ascertained that no such reference was intended.

The revised guidance appears to be an over-reaction that has been prompted by people who misinterpreted or distorted Cardinal O'Brien's remarks. We are now faced with a preposterous proposal whereby religious leaders and others who are invited to lead time for reflection will, apparently, be required to submit their speeches for approval by the parliamentary authorities. That raises important questions, which I would like you to address, Presiding Officer. Will future contributors to time for reflection have their speeches vetted by you or by a parliamentary clerk? Is not this degree of control freakery bringing Parliament into disrepute and are not we setting a dangerous precedent? There would be justifiable outrage if members were required to submit their speeches for prior approval. Surely, if people are invited to address Parliament we should trust them to do so responsibly, instead of demeaning them by submitting their speeches to any form of vetting procedure. I would be grateful if you would consider that when inviting people to lead time for reflection.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):**

Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you confirm that last week and again this week the Parliamentary Bureau made it absolutely clear that the revised guidance was part of a planned programme and was not a response to any comments that were made by Cardinal O'Brien or any other person?

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Marwick is quite correct: the bureau was clear that it was revising the guidance as part of a continuing programme of work across the whole Parliament to ensure that its communications comply with equalities legislation and best practice, and that the guidance was most certainly not revised in response to any individual or event. Any attempt to link the bureau's revision to Cardinal O'Brien is without foundation and is to be deplored.

On Mr Canavan's second point, draft texts of time for reflection contributions are submitted in advance to me, as Presiding Officer; that has been the practice since the start of the Parliament. I have a duty, as Presiding Officer, to ensure that nothing is said by an invited guest in this chamber that will reflect badly on Parliament or the wider community of Scotland.

**Dennis Canavan:** Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer, I thank you for that explanation, but I am still unhappy about the addition to paragraph 2(g) of the guidance. Will you therefore seek parliamentary approval for the guidance? If not, I would like my dissent to be recorded.

**The Presiding Officer:** I will reflect on that, Mr Canavan. I will not answer at short notice, but I will reflect on the matter and come back to you.

**Business Motion**

14:38

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of motion S2M-2757, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 11 May 2005

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Procedures Committee Debate: 4th Report 2005, Report on Private Legislation

*followed by* Justice 1 Committee Debate: 3rd Report 2005, Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation in Prisons

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 12 May 2005

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Executive Debate: Schools/Colleges Review

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—  
Finance and Public Services and Communities;  
Education and Young People,  
Tourism, Culture and Sport

2.55 pm Executive Debate: Veterans

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 18 May 2005

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Enterprise and Culture Committee Debate: 3rd Report 2005, Restructuring Scotland's Tourism Industry: Report on the Review of Area Tourist Boards

*followed by* European and External Relations Committee Debate: 1st Report 2005, An Inquiry into the Promotion of

Scotland Worldwide: The Strategy,  
Policy and Activities of the Scottish  
Executive

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 19 May 2005

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Executive Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—  
Health and Community Care;  
Environment and Rural Development

2.55 pm Executive Business

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

and (b) that Stage 2 of the Smoking, Health and Social  
Care (Scotland) Bill be completed by 15 June 2005.—[*Ms  
Margaret Curran.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### General Questions

14:38

#### Health

**1. Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to improve public health. (S2O-6618)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** The Scottish Executive is taking forward a number of actions to improve public health. A range of measures have been put in place. Central to those measures is, of course, the introduction of our smoke-free Scotland legislation. Other important measures include improvement of oral health, the sexual health strategy, development of work to tackle health inequalities, action to improve health and action on homelessness, problem drinking, healthy eating, physical activity, mental well-being and men's health.

**Mike Watson:** Does the minister agree that the provisions of the Smoking, Health and Social Care (Scotland) Bill, which Parliament approved at stage 1 last week, are an essential component in the Executive's overarching public health improvement strategy? Does he also agree that the provisions are every bit as important to the future health of the people of Scotland as are healthier eating and increased physical activity?

**Mr Kerr:** Absolutely. Central to Mike Watson's point is the fact that if we achieve what we want to achieve with smoke-free Scotland legislation we will see a reduction in the number of smokers in Scotland. In Glasgow, where the member has his constituency, cessation efforts in the past 18 months—without smoke-free Scotland legislation—have led to a 4 per cent reduction in the number of smokers. The additional work that I hope to achieve through Parliament's passing the Smoking, Health and Social Care (Scotland) Bill will further reduce the number of smokers in Scotland for the long-term interests of our health and well-being.

**Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** The figures that Dr Andrew Walker used in his study of obesity levels were based on the 1998 Scottish health survey. Given that the 2001 Scottish health survey could be used to update those figures and thereby to paint a more accurate picture of the increasing obesity problem in the country, why has the Scottish Executive not yet published it and when will it do so?

**Mr Kerr:** I will respond to the member in due course in relation to that point. However, let us talk about what we are doing to reduce obesity in Scotland. Our hungry for success programme in our schools is helping to change the diet of our young people. The World Health Organisation has commended our proposals for our physical activity strategy and our mental well-being strategy. Scotland is leading the way not only in the United Kingdom but in the world in relation to health improvement issues.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Although I endorse the importance of smoking as an issue, will the minister say what co-operation he has succeeded in having with his colleagues to ensure that there is adequate funding and other support for improving our physical activity, our cultural activity—which helps to improve many people's health—and our community activity such as local enterprise, which can create jobs and so on, all of which have an impact on health but are the responsibility of other departments? I hope that the Scottish Executive's departments are co-operating to provide those services.

**Mr Kerr:** I think that one of the great advantages that the Scottish Executive has over other Governments is that we are tightly joined up and can work across various departments. Our health strategy is based on the transition from early years to teenage years, to the workplace and to communities. That brings into play all the roles of ministers in the Scottish Executive. Health relates to life circumstances and lifestyles and to the various health issues that we know we have to address in Scotland. I argue that Scotland leads the way in relation to the action that we are taking on health improvement and in relation to what we are delivering.

### Teachers (Fife)

**2. Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with Fife Council regarding teacher staffing levels. (S2O-6573)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock):** The Executive has discussions with local authorities, including Fife, on a wide range of issues, including school staffing.

**Tricia Marwick:** Is the Minister for Education and Young People aware that, since 1999, there has been a 2.7 per cent drop in the number of secondary school teachers in Fife and that Fife is now 29<sup>th</sup> out of 32 local authorities in terms of attainment? Will the minister explain to parents in Fife how a further cut of 127 teachers over the next three years will help to achieve the improvements that are needed in pupil attainment?

**Peter Peacock:** Tricia Marwick is trying to paint a negative picture of education in Fife. Of course, it is quite common for the Scottish National Party to try to talk down Scottish education when, actually, standards across the system are rising. I point out that Fife has more teachers than it had in 1997. What is more, it will get even more teachers because of the policies of the Executive. Not only are we recruiting more teachers, but we are funding the places of those teachers in our training colleges. We are going to get more graduates from those colleges and will be able to cut class sizes across Scotland. Fife will play its part in delivering that policy, which will be good for the children of Fife and the rest of Scotland.

I know that that good news is disappointing to the SNP, but the people of Fife are wise and know that under the SNP's plans there would be a huge fiscal deficit in Scotland, which would mean that it would be impossible to maintain current numbers of teachers, let alone grow them as we intend to do. I am quite sure that the people of Scotland will this week cast their judgment on the SNP in that regard.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** Will the minister confirm that the reduction in the total number of teachers in Fife is in line with the reduction in the number of school children and that the staff-to-pupil ratio is being increased?

On supply teachers, does the minister agree that it is important that we ensure that all staff absences are adequately covered and that all local authorities have in place an adequate supply-teacher network? Will he ask Fife Council to re-examine its supply-teacher network to ensure that all schools can get supply teachers easily without having to phone round until they find one who has not already been booked by another school?

**Peter Peacock:** Scott Barrie is quite correct to say that the school rolls in Scotland are falling and that, in some parts of Scotland, they are falling at a dramatic rate. That has to have an implication for the number of schools and the number of teachers we have. That fact notwithstanding, Scott Barrie is also correct to say that pupil-to-teacher ratios can improve. He is absolutely right to say that since 1997 the pupil-to-teacher ratio in Fife primary schools has improved significantly, as it has in other parts of Scotland.

Local authorities across Scotland have different practices in relation to supply teachers. In some parts of Scotland, there are more problems than there are in others and we are encouraging local authorities to learn from one another, to consider best practice and to consider permanent retention of supply teachers in some instances so that we can ensure that gaps in provision are covered as quickly as possible.



### Tartan Day

**3. Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how tartan day will benefit tourism. (S2O-6597)

**The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson):** Tartan week this year provided an excellent opportunity to reach our most important overseas tourism market. This year's event generated more than £1 million of media publicity for Scotland as a place to visit and do business. VisitScotland's Scottish village in New York's Grand Central station was especially impressive. An in-depth analysis of tartan week is being undertaken and I look forward to reporting the results to Parliament as soon as they are ready.

**Janis Hughes:** I welcome the minister's commitment to an in-depth analysis, because it is important to have feedback. In the shorter term, does she have interim figures? I understand that a website publicised tartan day. How popular was the website?

**Patricia Ferguson:** Several statistics are available, not least the fact that the Minister for Health and Community Care managed to knock one minute off his personal best in a run through Central park. I am sure that he would regard it as being remiss of me if I did not mention that.

We know that 250,000 people visited the Scottish village during its short stay in Grand Central station and that about 74,000 individuals visited the website and inquired about VisitScotland's tartan week website. In addition, 22,000 people participated in competitions that VisitScotland organised. All the names of those people and all that interest will help to inform a database that will allow VisitScotland to market our country to people who have expressed an interest in it.

### M74 (Health Hazards)

**4. Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what preparations the national health service has made to address any health hazards to local residents arising from the M74 extension. (S2O-6553)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** No preparations are necessary. A health impact assessment of the air-quality impacts of construction and operation of the M74 completion scheme indicates that it will have no detectable effect on local residents' health. The scheme is also expected to cut road-traffic accidents by up to 50 a year.

**Rosie Kane:** Scientific evidence exists of the potential health hazards that chromium VI poses in the report on adverse health risks in the United

Kingdom by Drs Levy, Shuker and Rowbotham and in the report on the health of people in contaminated areas by Drs McCarron, Harvey and Brogan, which involved work in Glasgow. In the light of that evidence and of the fact that we do not know the levels of chromium VI or where the contamination is located, under the powers that are available to him in part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and by exercising the precautionary principle, will the minister designate the site of the M74 extension as contaminated land?

**Mr Kerr:** No. Dr Alison Searl of the Institute of Occupational Medicine, which is a leading UK provider of occupational health and safety services, advised us on the project. Other health investigations were also undertaken. The maximum plausible levels of community exposure to hazardous substances that could arise during construction work would be less than one thousandth of the lowest levels of exposure that are reported to cause adverse effects on health, such as kidney damage, or effects on children's intelligence quotient. We undertook the studies and we have the science. We are absolutely sure that the road's construction will have no ill-health effects.

### Nuclear Waste (Submarines)

**5. Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its approach is to the disposal of nuclear waste from redundant nuclear submarines. (S2O-6633)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** We welcome the Ministry of Defence's decision not to progress options for storage or disposal of radioactive waste from redundant submarines until after the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management has reported.

**Mr Ruskell:** Surely the best way to end the legacy of redundant nuclear submarines at Rosyth is to stop ordering new nuclear weapons, which is what we are meant to do under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Why is no Executive representative at the treaty talks in New York? Ken Livingstone is there to represent Londoners and Green MSP Chris Ballance is there to represent the 85 per cent of Scots who are against nuclear weapons. Why is Jack McConnell, the former Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament activist, not there to represent Scotland?

**Ross Finnie:** Having heard who is at those talks, I well understand why Jack McConnell has chosen to devote his energies to supporting his party in the general election.

On the member's question, what he suggested would no doubt be the proper course of action, but

he asked about the powers of the Scottish Executive and I carefully pointed out to him that the Scottish Executive is closely watching what the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management is doing. Once the Scottish Executive receives that committee's report, we will decide what we will do within our powers to treat that radioactive waste.

**Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Does the Minister for Environment and Rural Development believe that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive should be consulted in any way by the United Kingdom Government on whether the son of Trident should be based on the Clyde?

**Ross Finnie:** I appreciate that the member does not want Scotland to be part of the United Kingdom and that he wishes to close such naval bases—perhaps the SNP wishes to build its own naval bases. On the question that we are considering about the Scottish Parliament's powers, it is much more important to say that we must be consulted on regulation of radioactive waste under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, and to say that any planning matter relating to disposal of radioactive waste is, of course, a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

#### Public Services (Investment)

**6. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it intends to finance continued investment in public services. (S2O-6589)

**The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe):** Spending plans for the next three years are published in "Building a Better Scotland: Spending Proposals 2005-08: Enterprise, Opportunity, Fairness", copies of which are available in the Scottish Parliament information centre. In that spending review period, there will be an unprecedented level of investment in Scottish schools, hospitals, transport infrastructure, support for local government and other public services. Overall investment will rise to £30 billion by 2007-08. Decisions on funding public services for subsequent years will be made in the next spending review, in 2006.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the minister confirm that proposals for a £35 billion reduction in spending on United Kingdom services would have a massive consequential impact on the Scottish Executive's public service investment programme, which he ably outlined? In Edinburgh, for example, there is unprecedented rebuilding and refurbishment of schools and the largest-ever expansion in the number of child care places, as well as big reductions in hospital waiting times, particularly for heart, stroke and cancer patients. Will the minister recommend to us how we can

guarantee continued investment in those vital services?

**Mr McCabe:** I point out that it is the Conservative mob that proposes cuts on such a massive scale. Those cuts would first of all stop dead in its tracks the substantial investment that people throughout Scotland have seen in our schools estate, which has given our children unprecedented educational opportunities that will allow them to play their part in the modern world. I say to the people of Scotland that they should think long and hard about the consequences of even remotely considering voting for the Conservative party in the next 24 hours.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister acknowledge that Sarah Boyack's question was based on a fallacy? The fact is that the major investment to which she referred comes from private finance initiatives, which are a Conservative policy.

**Mr McCabe:** The fact is that public investment in Scotland is at an unprecedented level. That investment will increase to £30 billion by 2007-08, but the Conservative party is diametrically opposed to such levels of investment and is determined to halt such investment in its tracks. The people of Scotland should know that before they make any decisions.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I refer the minister to the latest public-private partnership/private finance initiative contract to hit financial difficulties. West Lothian College was a pioneering model in respect of such contracts, but it is currently £4 million in the red following the financial difficulties that resulted from the collapse of Ballast plc in East Lothian, which had a knock-on impact on schools. Is not it time to ditch the PPP/PFI model—which schools in the Borders are being forced to follow as being the only game in town—because that model is discredited, risky and costly to the public purse?

**Mr McCabe:** I refer the member to the massive successes in that programme the length and breadth of Scotland. I refer her to the fact that, on behalf of the Executive, I addressed a PPP global summit in the Czech Republic last year, where our experience in Scotland was widely received by countries throughout the world. Only last night, I met the Inter-American Development Bank, which works in Latin America and the Caribbean and is equally interested in the knowledge transfer that could come about from the expertise that we have gathered here in Scotland; the ways in which that can benefit countries such as those in Latin America; and the way in which the knowledge that we have gained will benefit the new accession states of the European Union. The SNP should raise its horizon and be less inward-looking. It should consider the fact that the very good things

that we do in this country can be of benefit to other people in other areas of the world.

## First Minister's Question Time

14:56

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues will be discussed. (S2F-1615)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** My next meeting with Mr Blair will be arranged as soon as possible after tomorrow's general election.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I will give the First Minister an issue that he can discuss. Is he aware that, as of March last year, only 46 patients in the whole of England had to wait more than six months for a first out-patient appointment with a heart specialist, whereas in Scotland 518 patients waited more than six months? By December, there were even fewer English patients waiting more than six months—just 18 across the whole of England. The First Minister has not published the Scottish figure for December. Would he care to tell us today what it is?

**The First Minister:** Obviously, if the figure is not published, I do not have it.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** How convenient is that? Does the First Minister realise that it is now nine weeks since he was asked to provide the most up-to-date information about waiting times for out-patient appointments with heart, cancer and other specialists? He still has not done so. Why is it taking so long, given that all the equivalent information about waiting times in England has been freely available for weeks? What is he so desperate to hide?

**The First Minister:** There is nothing to hide. An endless series of statistics is published not just by ministers, but by the national health service information and statistics division and by many others. The information to which I think Ms Sturgeon is referring—although, as ever, she is not very clear about these things—is, presumably, the information that we discussed in the chamber two weeks ago. As I said then, the information will be published as soon as it is available to be published.

A lot of hard work is done in our hospitals throughout Scotland to bring down waiting times for people who have heart conditions. Ms Sturgeon minimises that work and the achievements of people right across the sector—not just those who specialise in those operations, but the many others who make a contribution. The more she does that, the more unattractive she

makes the Scottish health service as a place for people to work. She should question her motives in relation to that.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Is it not funny that, when the same question was asked last year, it was answered within four weeks? This year, we are still waiting after nine weeks. Is it not the case that the First Minister simply does not want the Scottish public to know any more of the dreadful detail of the appalling health record of Labour and the Liberals in Scotland? Is it not a fact that the information is being deliberately and shamefully covered up by the First Minister until after the election? Is that not a sure sign that he knows what patients know—that he is failing the Scottish public and Scottish patients?

**The First Minister:** I am quite happy to quote statistics on the achievements of people in the health service in relation to heart procedures. The number of angiography patients who waited more than eight weeks was 98 in 1997; there was none in 2004. The number of coronary revascularisation patients who waited more than 18 weeks was 61 in 1997; there was none in 2004. The delivery date of the target for a maximum wait of 24 weeks for those requiring coronary artery bypass graft surgery was 31 December 2002; the target has been met on every census date since then. The delivery date of the target for a maximum wait of 18 weeks for bypass graft surgery was 30 June 2004. That target was met. Seventeen patients waited more than 18 weeks for angioplasty, but that target was met at the end of 2004.

That is the record of achievement of those who work in our health service, but it is regularly run down in the chamber by Ms Sturgeon and her colleagues. She does not mention that the so-called manifesto on which her party is going to the electorate tomorrow does not give one guaranteed waiting time or any guarantee for waiting lists. However, it does refer to the fact that she would cancel operations in Banff and Buchan, in Tayside and in Glasgow because they are being carried out by the wrong people who are employed by the wrong employers—she is not putting patients first. That is the choice between the nationalists and the Executive parties, which set targets—yes, they are challenging targets—and then set out to achieve them. We are prepared to put patients first and to ensure that patients' interests come before those of the providers, unlike the SNP, which wants to put the providers first.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I will tell the First Minister about waiting times for angiographs. In March 1999, the waiting time was 29 days; in March 2004, it was 39 days. In March 1999, the waiting time for angioplasty was 34 days; in March 2005, it was 55 days. Is it not the case that the First Minister is trying to pull the wool over people's

eyes? Is it not the case that patients throughout Scotland know that he is letting them down? That is why tomorrow they should choose to make Scotland matter and to serve on this failing Labour and Liberal Administration a notice to quit in 2007.

**The First Minister:** Many people will look at the nationalist party's results tomorrow and make their judgment, particularly on the way in which these issues are raised in First Minister's question time. In the past month, the work of officials in the Parliament has been distorted by Ms Sturgeon at First Minister's question time. That is a deplorable action and she has not yet apologised to those staff for the way in which she misrepresented what they said to her.

Not only has Ms Sturgeon quoted statistics that have not yet been published, but she has misquoted statistics that are already published in a consistent attempt to run down the hard work of those in our national health service. She does not properly challenge ministers in relation to the policies that she proposes. She does not have the courage to come to the chamber, put up her policies for debate and say that she would rather people had to wait longer so that operations did not have to be carried out in the independent sector. She does not come forward and argue that case; she picks a statistic week after week, distorts it here in the chamber and runs down the hard work of people in the national health service. That is simply not good enough and it is why her approach is being rejected the length and breadth of Scotland.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1616)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** At our next meeting, the Scottish Cabinet will discuss the next steps that we will take to build a better Scotland.

**David McLetchie:** The First Minister will recall that, two weeks ago at First Minister's question time, he told me that he was committed to ending the automatic early release of prisoners from our jails. Accordingly, I invite him to announce formally that the Scottish Executive has made a policy decision to end automatic early release for short-term and long-term prisoners. In doing so, will he formally amend the terms of reference that were given to Lord MacLean's Sentencing Commission so that it is quite clear to Lord MacLean and the commission that its remit is not to consider the principle of early release, but simply to deal with practical implementation?

**The First Minister:** Policy on that matter is quite clear; it has been stated in the chamber on several occasions. It is far clearer than the policies that are occasionally proposed by Mr McLetchie, who, just this week, described a policy that is not even reflected in the Conservative manifesto that goes to the electorate tomorrow. The Conservative manifesto refers to people having to justify early release, but yesterday Mr McLetchie said that there would be no such thing in the Scottish system. Politicians cannot have one policy one day and a different policy the next day—unless they are a member of the Scottish National Party. They must be consistent.

Our consistent position is that automatic early release must end, but that that should be done properly. It should be properly worked through by the judicially led Sentencing Commission; it should not be done on the hoof by politicians. Our approach will make the system effective in ensuring not just that offenders serve proper sentences, but that they do not reoffend when they are released.

**David McLetchie:** The policy was made on the hoof seven years ago by politicians in the Labour Government, supported by the First Minister, who introduced the system to Scotland. The First Minister has conspicuously failed to answer the question. I asked him whether the Executive was committed to ending that policy for short-term and long-term prisoners. He failed to answer.

The First Minister and his Executive are serial offenders on the issue. There is a total lack of clarity. He says that he wants to end automatic release when he has had six years to do something about it. How many more victims will there needlessly be in Scotland before he does something about a policy that lets people out of jail halfway through their sentences to go on to commit further violent crimes?

**The First Minister:** Although Mr McLetchie does not want to talk in rational terms about these matters, he knows that some offenders serve their full sentences and that some offenders who are released on licence commit further crimes or offences. It is right and proper that we look comprehensively at the whole system and that we tackle reoffending, which is the real curse at the heart of the Scottish justice system. That has been the case for far too long—for decades—and it is an historic task of the Executive and the Parliament to tackle reoffending and to ensure that significantly fewer people reoffend in Scotland in years to come.

There are three ways of doing that: first, by making the prison sentences that offenders receive more effective; secondly, by ensuring that prisoners are effectively treated for their behaviour and are convinced of a different way of life by the

time that they return to the community; and, thirdly, by making sure that those who serve their sentence in the community are seen to do so by the local community and are put in a position where they learn their lesson and are less likely to reoffend.

It is vital that we make progress in each of those three areas. We are achieving that and we will achieve it in relation to sentencing, as I have said in the chamber time and again. No amount of provocative language from Mr McLetchie in the chamber or in public during the election campaign will change that position. We will end automatic early release, but we will do so properly; we will do it with decent changes to the system that can be sustained in the longer term and we will do it in the interests of victims or potential victims of crime in Scotland.

**David McLetchie:** It is axiomatic that reoffending would be reduced if people were not let out of jail halfway through their sentences to go on to commit further crimes. There is a list as long as my arm of people who have been found guilty of serious crimes after being allowed out of jail early by the Executive. On this subject, all we have had is talk and more talk from the First Minister, just as we have had talk about dealing with waiting times, when they have gone up, talk about dealing with discipline in schools, when the number of attacks on teachers has rocketed, and talk about being tough on crime, when people are let out of jail to commit further and violent crimes.

Does the First Minister accept that, although the election tomorrow is to elect the next Government of the United Kingdom, it is also a judgment on the performance of the Scottish Executive? Does he also accept that, given the failures in relation to health, education and law and order, the Executive is guilty as charged?

**The First Minister:** We can be certain of one thing: the election will certainly be a judgment on Michael Howard and the Conservative party. It will also partly be a judgment on the kind of language that the Conservative party has used and the way in which it has conducted itself in the election campaign. Over the past month, the Conservative Opposition has had an opportunity to have a real debate about the future of our country. It has chosen instead to use appalling language about immigration and to try to create scares about this country being swamped by immigrants. As for crime and justice, instead of having a proper debate based on facts, evidence and real solutions in relation not just to tougher sentences, but to tougher action to ensure that people do not reoffend, the Conservatives have chosen to use ridiculous language such as Mr McLetchie used again this week about get-out-of-jail-free cards

and encouraging people to reoffend and to commit crimes in the community.

We have also heard ridiculous language used about our schools. Our schools have been transformed since the days when Mr McLetchie's party was in power. Our primary schools in Scotland are among the very best in the world and our secondary schools are getting close to being so, too. As I said in the chamber two weeks ago, even Alex Salmond admits that Scottish education is at least third best in the world at the moment. The Conservatives have an appalling record on education in Scotland. They try to scare people out of the teaching profession and out of classrooms by saying that people are being beaten up in classrooms in Scotland every quarter of an hour. That is simply not true. Mr McLetchie demeans his party when he makes those points and I hope that his party will pay the price for it tomorrow.

### Life Expectancy

**3. Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Executive will take to address inequalities highlighted by the report published in the April edition of the *British Medical Journal* which concludes that the gap between life expectancy in rich and poorer areas has not been wider since Victorian times. (S2F-1625)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** In addition to reducing the number of people in poverty, we have introduced legislation to ban smoking in enclosed public places. That legislation will be the biggest contribution that we can make to improving health in Scotland, as it will reduce the toll of preventable, premature deaths that result from smoking and that affect the poorer parts of our country most.

**Colin Fox:** Does the First Minister agree that it is totally unacceptable that life expectancy for a man in Kensington and Chelsea should be 10 years more than that of his counterpart in Glasgow, which is the widest gap for 100 years? The authors of the *British Medical Journal* report believe that, if current trends continue, growing inequalities will be transmitted to and magnified among future generations. Does the First Minister agree with the conclusions that the report draws about what needs to be done to turn the current situation around?

**The First Minister:** In looking at this question, I did a little research and it was interesting to note how difficult it is to compare the situation in Victorian times with the situation today. We have, of course, the figures on life expectancy that were quoted in the report not just for the United Kingdom or Scotland as a whole, but for individual constituencies. Even in the constituency of

Shettleston, which has the lowest life expectancy in the UK—63 years—people have a significantly better life expectancy than their counterparts did in Victorian times, when life expectancy was 40 years.

Given that Mr Fox was asking the question, I thought that it might be interesting to check what the life expectancy was when Robin Hood was alive. At that time, life expectancy was 24 years. The figures show that we cannot compare life expectancy and inequality centuries apart, but we can compare the reality in Scotland today with what was happening just eight years ago when the current Government came to power.

The reality in the UK and in Scotland is that there are now significantly fewer people living in poverty. Just here in Scotland, 110,000 children have been lifted from relative—not absolute, but comparative—poverty since 1997, which is a 25 per cent reduction. Some 170,000 pensioners have been lifted from absolute poverty, which is a massive 68 per cent reduction. Right the way through the statistics, we see massive reductions since 1997 in the numbers of people living in poverty in Scotland, in the UK and particularly in the poorer parts of Scotland. That is precisely why people should vote tomorrow not for some Trotskyist sect that promotes wacky ideas about the past, but for a party that is genuinely committed to tackling poverty, is doing so and will make further progress if we go forward and not back in the votes tomorrow night.

**Colin Fox:** All that bluster appears to prove that the First Minister does not have a clue about the conclusions that were drawn in the *British Medical Journal* report. I remind him that the report concluded that, if the situation is to improve, radical action is needed and

“far more potent and redistributive intervention by government”.

Either the First Minister agrees with the conclusions of those experts, who are on the front line of the national health service, or, as I suspect, Labour has simply reconciled itself to living with greater inequalities and has effectively abandoned the NHS's founding principles—to have a comprehensive, free health care system—in favour of privatised hospitals and further inequalities.

**The First Minister:** I am always happy to debate the statistics, including the fact that the proportion of children in relative poverty has decreased from one in three to one in four; that the proportion of all Scots in relative poverty has decreased from one in four to one in five; and that the proportion of pensioners in relative poverty has decreased from one in three to one in five. However, I suspect that Colin Fox does not want

to debate such statistics, because they clearly prove that our policies are making an impact.

So let us debate policies, by which I mean not just the policies that I am sure all parties across the chamber agree on, but the policies on which we have a choice. I am happy to mention not only the provision of free fruit to primary school children; the 500 community food initiatives that are operating across Scotland; the tackling and treatment of cancer and heart disease; and the smoking legislation that I referred to earlier. I am also happy to mention the Scottish Socialist Party's policy of providing free school meals and prescriptions to those who can afford to pay for them, instead of targeting that money on the children and other people in our society who need that assistance the most. That is why we are absolutely right to invest the money that Colin Fox would waste on those who can afford to pay in better, nutritious school meals and why we lead the rest of the UK in ensuring that children in Scotland have a better start in life. It is a shame that the so-called socialists in the chamber cannot back that policy.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I have an advantage over many members in that I have listened to the arguments about how to improve Glasgow's health. As a result, I believe that we should focus not on Glasgow's problems, but on the solutions that we can put forward. For example, Harry Burns and Phil Hanlon, who are the leading experts in the field, say that we need high levels of employment, affordable, safe and high-quality housing—

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** This is a speech, Mr McNulty. A question, please.

**Des McNulty:** We also need improved education. Does the First Minister agree that, in order to change the statistics, we need not only increased investment in health, but the sustained development programme that Labour offers?

**The First Minister:** I have absolutely no doubt that the best route out of poverty for those who can work is that they should be able to work. I am very proud to be the First Minister of a country that has the second highest employment level in the European Union and the highest employment level in the UK. We will maintain our pressure in driving towards full employment and ensuring that those who are out of work even now have the life chances, health, skills, education, training, encouragement and support to give them opportunities and to close the final gap between the current high level of employment and full employment. That has been the dream of our party for 100 years and it is closer to being a reality now than it has ever been before.

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does the First Minister agree that it is absolutely shameful that Glasgow has the worst levels of deprivation and the worst life expectancy in the UK? After suffering decades of Labour domination in the council, at Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament, thousands of Glaswegians are still living in poverty. Will he give a commitment today to set up a task force and invite all interested parties to examine the very real issues of poverty in the city?

**The First Minister:** The last thing that the good people of Glasgow need is another committee to look at the matter. They want action and that is what they are getting. They are getting regeneration down the Clyde and in the east end; they are getting new hospitals; and they are getting a massive housing stock transfer, which is leading to the biggest public sector housing modernisation programme in the whole of Europe. Sandra White opposed that. She has the temerity to come to the chamber and say that she represents the people of Glasgow when she was against them getting new houses and getting their houses repaired and renovated. She would rather have no investment than investment that meant that people had more control over their own affairs.

We are all about ensuring that, instead of being run by some centralised Scottish National Party bureaucracy, people in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland have a chance to take more control over their own lives. We want to ensure that people in Glasgow lead their own regeneration, that they have their own employment and that they can be proud of their city again.

#### **Housing (First-time Buyers)**

**4. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what measures the Scottish Executive is taking to assist young people and first-time buyers into the housing market. (S2F-1620)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We have increased our investment in the low-cost home ownership programme by 80 per cent as part of our £1.2 billion commitment to affordable homes over the next three years. That will support another 5,000 low-cost homes across Scotland. We have also launched the homestake scheme, based on shared equity, which is designed to help first-time buyers in particular.

**Christine May:** Does the First Minister consider that the low and stable interest rates that have persisted over recent years, thanks to Gordon Brown, have made a significant contribution to helping young people and first-time buyers to gain a foothold in the housing market and to enabling builders to provide those houses? What factors

does he consider would pose the greatest threat to our policies?

**The Presiding Officer:** Answer briefly, please.

**Members:** No.

**The First Minister:** I am happy not to be brief if members would like. I could talk about the subject for a while, but I will not. The biggest single danger to interest rates would, of course, be the election of the former Conservative minister who was in the Conservative Cabinet at a time when there were more repossession, higher interest rates and more people driven out of the housing market than ever before in the United Kingdom. The election of Michael Howard as Prime Minister on Thursday night would be the biggest ever disaster for potential home owners in Scotland, but I am very hopeful that it will not happen.

### Spending Review

**5. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's priorities will be in the 2006 spending review. (S2F-1627)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** During this session of Parliament, we will continue to give priority to delivering our partnership agreement for government by Scottish Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

**Iain Smith:** And very sensible that is too, Presiding Officer.

Does the First Minister agree that, if additional resources came to the Scottish Executive as a result of any future spending review, flexible child care, more opportunities for our young people, improving care packages for the elderly, faster diagnosis to get people treated more quickly and more police in our communities would be among the priorities that the Scottish Executive would wish to address? Does he also agree that those measures would come about more quickly if a Liberal Democrat Government were elected tomorrow, bringing £1.8 billion additional investment to Scotland over the lifetime of the next Westminster Parliament?

**The First Minister:** I admire Iain Smith's optimism. I wish him and Ming Campbell well in North East Fife. There is a fundamental choice available tomorrow—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** Some members are getting a wee bit desperate about tomorrow's election and what the outcome might be.

The reality is, as I am sure Iain Smith is aware, that there is a clear choice available tomorrow. That choice has become clearer as the month has

gone on and I hope that people will make the right decision tomorrow.

### Children (Detention in Prison)

**6. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's policy is in relation to the detention of children under 16 in prison. (S2F-1617)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Our Government's policy is to avoid, where possible, the detainment of under-16s in prison.

**Alex Neil:** I draw the First Minister's attention to the revelation last week that children under 16 are regularly held in Kilmarnock prison. Can he tell us how many children are being held, or have been held in the past year, in Scottish prisons? When will the Executive live up to the promise made by Jim Wallace when he was Minister for Justice that there would be an end to that practice long before now?

**The First Minister:** I know that Alex Neil cares about prison conditions, but it is a matter of some regret that his statements do not exude the same passionate concern for the victims of offenders, regardless of the age of those offenders.

**Members:** Shame.

**The First Minister:** In defence of what I have just said, I quote—[*Interruption.*] If I were an SNP member, I would wait to hear what I am going to say next.

I agree with the person who said:

"We need to see a major expansion of places and the worst offenders, those who are often the ringleaders, taken off our streets."

The same person said that the Executive's approach was based

"entirely on introducing more and more draconian and punitive measures against a hardcore minority of young offenders. Now nobody would disagree with that".

Both those remarks were made by Nicola Sturgeon, who is, of course, the leader of the parliamentary group of the SNP, and I agree with her. Our clear policy is—[*Interruption.*] SNP members should listen to my answer. Our clear policy is to avoid the use of prisons for under-16s. However, if a court says that a person who is under 16 must be locked up in a secure unit or temporarily in Polmont young offenders institution and there is no place for that person or they need to stay somewhere overnight, it would not be right and proper to put that person back on the streets—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** The SNP's concern for the victims of crime is shallow if its members do not



understand that. We must and do have a policy of not keeping under-16s in prison unnecessarily, even for a few hours. If a young person is kept in prison for a night or for a few hours, that happens only because the young person needs somewhere to go and is about to be transferred. The reports that Mr Neil quoted clearly refer to that, so he should not exaggerate the position and claim that young people are being held arbitrarily in Scottish prisons. That is not the case. When it happens, it does so only in the interests of victims and people on our streets, who need us to guarantee their safety and security.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)**

**(Con):** Does the First Minister accept that the sad reality of the situation is that the Executive's failure to have sufficient capacity of secure places in Scotland for people under 16, which has been caused partly by its decisions to close facilities and partly by its tardiness in providing new ones, has created a quite unacceptable situation? Does he know of the frustrations that confront many children's panels when they want to place a drug-dependent or alcohol-dependent youngster in a place of security for their own safety but no facility can be found at short notice? Is that not shameful, after six years?

**The First Minister:** Not at all. We are investing not only in more secure places, but in better secure unit places for young people, so that the young people are not only locked up and off the streets, but have a second chance and an opportunity to sort out their lives and to go back to the community as productive, successful, ambitious individuals, rather than as disillusioned individuals who commit crimes and are likely to do so for the rest of their lives.

No young person in Scotland is held in a prison unnecessarily. A young person would be held in prison only because they were being transferred and needed to be locked away until the transfer was organised. The claim that the situation is otherwise is simply not true. The Conservatives claim that there is something wrong with the current level of investment in Scotland's secure units, although they presided over a situation in which not only were there not enough secure units in Scotland or laws in place to ensure that young people could go to secure units when they had to, but there were no adequate education and training opportunities inside secure units to give people another chance when they were back on the outside. I will take no lessons from the Conservatives on how to turn round youth offenders, when the Conservatives' record was so appalling for so long. It is time to give those young people a second chance, while ensuring that the victims of crime are properly protected by locking up youth offenders in secure places.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Justice and Law Officers

15:29

#### Police (Recruitment)

**1. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to increase the recruitment of police officers. (S2O-6593)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** We expect to see an increase in police retirement rates towards the end of the decade. That is why we have committed an additional £4.5 million over 2006-08 to enable forces to bring forward recruitment. That will help forces to prepare for the main retirement years, which fall in 2009 and 2010. That extra recruitment will build upon the already record number of police officers that we have in Scotland.

**Helen Eadie:** On behalf of my constituents, I warmly welcome the unprecedented amount of new money that is being made available to provide new police officers in Fife. However, recruitment is just one aspect of maintaining a highly skilled police force. I ask the minister whether she will have early talks with Charles Clarke, who I am sure will be returned as Home Secretary next week, following the return of Labour for an historic third term in government. Will she discuss with Charles Clarke the retention of such highly skilled manpower? I ask that since I have the privilege of serving Cardenden, which, as the minister may know, is the birthplace of the world-famous writer Ian Rankin. On the BBC's "Page Turners" last week, Ian Rankin said that he may need to retire the world-famous Inspector Rebus because of the requirement for retiral at 55. He also said that he would be contacting the Scottish Parliament. I ask for the minister's help to help Inspector Rebus.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am tempted just to say, "Yes," but perhaps it would be useful for Inspector Rebus to think about the other options that are available to him, including the 30-plus scheme, which allows police officers to continue working so that we retain their skills. Alternatively, he may come back as a security consultant, someone in charge of antisocial behaviour in a local authority or as a secondee to the Scottish Executive. Who knows?

### **Motoring Offences (Sentencing Guidelines)**

**2. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will review sentencing guidelines for motoring offences that result in fatalities. (S2O-6588)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** I am very aware of the public perception that sentences for such offences are too lenient, given their tragic consequences. That is why, in 2003, following a review of prosecution practice, the Lord Advocate announced that motorists whose dangerous driving results in a fatal road traffic accident will normally be prosecuted in the High Court. Moreover, in February this year, the United Kingdom Government issued a consultation paper setting out proposals to create a tougher and more effective framework of offences and penalties to deal with bad or illegal driving. The deadline for responses is 6 May, and we will be keeping in close touch with the UK Government on taking that forward. Currently, no sentencing guidelines are issued in Scotland, but we tasked the Sentencing Commission with reviewing the consistency of sentencing for all offences, including motoring offences.

**Scott Barrie:** There are few events that distress and anger the families of victims more than when a loved one is killed by a motorist, particularly if the driver is speeding, is over the permitted alcohol level, is under 17, has previously been banned from driving, or is a combination of all of those. I have recent constituency experience of that, with a child death, and I know that other members have had similar experiences. I impress upon the minister the need to ensure that guilty drivers are dealt with under the full force of the law, that there can never be any excuse for any driver convicted under the aforementioned circumstances and that leniency should never be shown.

**Cathy Jamieson:** There are two issues here. First, there is the legislation, which the UK Government is considering. If members have nothing else to do this evening they may want to ensure that they get their responses in before the closing date tomorrow. However, there is also the question of consistency within the available legislation. The Lord Advocate has successfully referred a number of cases to the Appeal Court, which has resulted in sentences being increased.

### **Offending (Young People)**

**3. Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what initiatives are under way with other agencies, local authorities and education departments to reduce the levels of offending among young people. (S2O-6626)

### **The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):**

The Executive is committed to tackling offending and reoffending among young people through a range of measures covering prevention, intervention, diversion and enforcement. A wide range of focused programmes is available to meet the needs of young people who offend and to support the communities in which they live. We have increased funding from £3.5 million in 2000-01 to £63 million this year; and we have ensured that local authority and other agencies know what is expected of them, and that they have the tools and the capacity to tackle offending and reoffending. Those bodies have a responsibility to ensure that every young person who is involved in persistent offending is involved in an appropriate programme.

**Jim Mather:** What lessons are being learned from the Allander series of lectures that took place last year or from other external sources that could further help the process?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am always concerned to ensure that we consider best practice regardless of where it comes from. We will learn not just from what is happening in Scotland, but from what is happening south of the border and further afield. However, it is important to acknowledge what we are doing at the moment. The Executive has sometimes been accused of looking only at one end of the spectrum. The recent mapping exercise on what is happening in Scotland showed that there are 144 prevention schemes, 111 diversion schemes, 80 intensive provision schemes and 44 schemes involving victims and restorative justice. We have a number of schemes in place, but we are always keen to learn from elsewhere.

### **Sectarianism**

**4. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to eradicate sectarianism. (S2O-6590)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** Bigoted sectarian behaviour and attitudes have been a scar on Scottish life for far too long. Following the historic summit on sectarianism that was held in February, I established a ministerial delivery group to drive that work forward. We have already launched an anti-sectarian education resource and are working with key partners to take forward work in the areas of sport, interfaith and marches and parades.

**Bill Butler:** I thank the minister for her answer; I especially welcome the steps that are being taken to highlight to young people the unacceptable nature of sectarian behaviour. Members will be aware of the recently launched wristband campaign to promote that message and of its popularity among young people. What plans does the Executive have to extend that campaign and

other initiatives that are aimed at young people throughout Scotland?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am glad that Bill Butler is aware of the wristband campaign; if anyone has not seen the wristbands, I am wearing one, just as the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport and the First Minister did last week.

I congratulate Strathclyde police—in particular, Chief Superintendent Kenny Scott, who was the driving force behind the campaign. I was pleased to be at the campaign's launch with footballers from both the old firm clubs. So far, it has been a success. I am looking to assist Strathclyde police with the distribution of more wristbands—25,000 were issued in the first phase—and we are considering what else we can do. It may be a fairly simple idea, but if the 25,000 owners of the wristbands stop for a moment to think about the problems of sectarianism and try to do something about it, it will be worth it.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I refer the minister to the report of the cross-party working group on religious hatred, especially recommendation 11, which states that the co-ordinating group—which comprises the police, the Crown Office, the Scottish Executive, local authorities, voluntary organisations, the Scottish Football Association and the old firm clubs—should

“seek to encourage, sponsor and evaluate project programmes and research designed to change sectarian and other aspects of religious hatred.”

I return to a hobby-horse of mine and again ask the minister whether she will consider pursuing an awards scheme that will involve the co-ordinating group presenting awards to project programmes that prove successful.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I have had a number of discussions with my colleague the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport on how we can develop—not just in relation to football, but across the whole sporting agenda—the opportunities that exist to tackle racism, sectarianism and any other problem issues that involve people being excluded. I have not ruled out taking advantage of future opportunities, but at the moment we have a range of initiatives that we want to progress.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** In addition to the welcome efforts that are being made to foster the right attitudes in young people, to which Bill Butler referred, does the minister have proposals for helping to change attitudes among adults, which is far harder? That could include encouraging employers and managers of social clubs and other venues and events to which people go collectively to improve attitudes and to reduce the amount of sectarian banter that goes

on, which may be acceptable to some people, but is highly distressing to others.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I agree with Donald Gorrie that the problem often lies with adults, from whom children and young people learn their attitudes and values. There is sometimes an issue in getting adults to change their behaviour. That is why I was pleased that at the Scottish Trades Union Congress annual conference we were able to discuss matters such as how we can progress that work in the workplace. The ministerial delivery group will look at how to identify those areas across all the ministerial portfolios where the agenda can be taken forward to ensure that the problem is tackled. We recognise the long-term nature of the agenda; nonetheless, we have to make a start.

### Bail

**5. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will review the basis on which bail is granted for those charged with murder or culpable homicide. (S20-6549)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** I am very aware of public concern about bail being granted to those who are accused of serious crimes. In its recent report, the Sentencing Commission recommended various ways of tightening up the basis on which bail and remand decisions are taken. We have already made provision for electronic monitoring as a condition of bail in the case of charges of murder and rape.

**Brian Adam:** The minister will be aware that only three people who were charged with murder were granted bail in 1999 whereas 55 such people were granted bail in 2004. Does the minister consider that the repeal of the statutory exclusions to the granting of bail in 2000 for those charged with murder has been a success? If not, will she consider taking further action to increase public protection beyond that which she has described today?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am sure that the member is aware of the provisions of the European convention on human rights. I am therefore unsure whether he is suggesting that his party is in favour of completely repealing those provisions—perhaps he is; if so, we can have the discussion another time. The important point to make is that far too many offences are committed by people on bail. That is not acceptable.

There are, of course, a number of standard and specific conditions that must be put on bail orders. I believe that we should tighten up some of the conditions. I am looking closely at the recommendations in the Sentencing Commission

report and I expect to bring forward proposals in the not-too-distant future.

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** Is it not the case that the incorporation of the ECHR in Scots law means that there is now a presumption in favour of bail? The proper discretion of the court has been usurped, and that, in turn, has worked to the detriment of both victims and witnesses.

**Cathy Jamieson:** It is certainly the case that people have concerns in some instances about those who have been granted bail. That is why I asked the Sentencing Commission to look at a number of the issues as a priority. Some commentators and other people have chosen to portray the measures that we are taking, including electronic monitoring, as a softening of the approach to bail. I want to be clear that electronic monitoring is not an alternative to remand for those who ought to be remanded. Where there are concerns, the Executive is tightening up bail conditions.

#### **Criminal History System (Replacement Project)**

**6. Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what project management methodology was used for the project that was designed to replace the criminal history system database. (S2O-6584)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** The Scottish police information strategy, which has been developing the replacement criminal history system project, uses the Prince2 methodology, which is the Office of Government Commerce standard for information technology projects.

**Mr Maxwell:** I am surprised by the minister's answer. If Prince2 was used, as recommended in the Scottish Office publication "Getting 'IT' Right", will the minister explain how on earth it could have resulted in a situation in which no resources were planned, no budget was worked out and no time or people were allocated?

Clearly, as the minister identified in a written answer,

"a separate budget was not defined."

The document "Getting 'IT' Right", which was published in 1999, recommends the Prince2 methodology. It further says:

"It is recommended that each force and central service should have an annual IS/IT business plan, specifying the elements of the IS/IT strategy to be tackled in that particular year, and the resources allocated to each."

The report also states:

"It is crucial therefore that properly costed option appraisals be made available ... before a project is given the go-ahead."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** Can we please have your question, Mr Maxwell?

**Mr Maxwell:** I am just starting it. Given that that is part of the Prince2 methodology, why did the minister say in her written answer that no budget had been allocated?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I made it clear in my answer that that budget was contained in the overall Scottish police information strategy—SPIS—budget. Obviously, I will continue to look at the issue. That said and for the avoidance of any doubt, I confirm that the current process and system provide accurate information—information that can be used by the Scottish Criminal Record Office.

The project was set up to replace the criminal history system and to get additional functionality. I am extremely concerned at the delays, because of which the Executive is putting additional resources into SPIS to monitor the project. As we go through the process of examining how common police services are procured in future, we will continue to look at the improvements that can be made. I hope that we will have the support of the Scottish National Party. It may well be that we will be looking for better partnerships between the public and private sectors.

#### **Youth Courts**

**7. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what role youth courts can play in reducing youth offending. (S2O-6619)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** The youth courts apply an innovative approach to dealing with offending by 16 and 17-year-olds. Early evidence suggests that the fast-tracking into court and the rolling up of charges are encouraging those young offenders to take greater responsibility for their actions. I look forward to seeing the full evaluation of the Hamilton youth court soon so that we can consider what general lessons can be learned.

**Karen Whitefield:** Does the minister agree that, if youth courts are to be effective, there must be effective joint working between the police, the Procurator Fiscal Service, the social work departments and the courts? Does she further agree that the scepticism that some agencies expressed about the pilot project in Lanarkshire has been replaced by real enthusiasm, particularly from the police, who are witnessing at first hand the effects of the youth court in tackling offending in the communities that they police?

**Cathy Jamieson:** At the beginning of the youth court pilot project, some concerns were expressed about whether the project would have the desired

outcomes. However, the genuinely multi-agency approach has been critical to the success of the project. All the organisations are working together to ensure that young offenders are brought into the courts quickly. Sheriffs have welcomed that. They have also welcomed having the right information speedily in front of them so that they can dispose of cases properly.

The youth court pilot project is ensuring that young people face up to the charges against them—especially when they have committed a number of offences, because those can now be dealt with all at once.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I might surprise the minister by saying that I think that the pilot project in Hamilton has been encouraging. However, we know that persistent young offenders command a great deal of resource in the children's hearings system. If they really require special attention, would there not be merit in allowing a pilot in the youth court to consider 14 and 15-year-olds who are persistent offenders? That might greatly assist our children's hearings system.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Miss Goldie will be aware that, alongside the youth court pilot, we also had fast-track pilots in the children's hearings system for persistent offenders. In the youth court pilot, we made provision for the possibility of including 15-year-olds in some instances.

I want to learn lessons from both the fast-track pilots in the children's hearings system and the youth court pilot. We want to stop persistent offenders in their tracks, turn their lives around, get them into the right programmes and stop them offending.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 has been withdrawn.

### **Criminal History System (Replacement Project)**

**9. Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive how the criminal history system replacement project is being funded. (S2O-6627)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** The Scottish police information strategy, which is undertaking the criminal history system replacement project, is funded from the Justice Department's police central Government budget.

**Linda Fabiani:** Will the minister tell us whether the funding has come out of the capital or the revenue budget? Will she also clarify something that she said earlier to my colleague Stewart Maxwell? Did I hear her say that she would consider contracting out the IT services?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I did not specifically say that I had considered contracting out the IT services.

The project has been under way for a considerable time and there have been a number of changes in its governance and management. What I did say, and what I will repeat, is that my priorities are to get the system right and to ensure that we have a replacement project that does the job that it is intended to do.

Clearly, there are lessons to be learned. We have to get the best value for the public purse, so sometimes we will have to be prepared to consider public-private partnerships. I hope that the SNP will support that.

## **Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and Transport**

### **Retraining**

**1. Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure the retraining of workers who become redundant. (S2O-6550)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson):** Programmes such as the training for work programme assist those who are made redundant to acquire new skills.

The Executive's partnership action for continuing employment—PACE for short—helps those who are affected by large-scale redundancies. PACE ensures a rapid and comprehensive response from local agencies, which offer advice, support and guidance on retraining and employment opportunities.

**Ms Byrne:** Is the minister aware that, in light of the transitional funding package that is being offered to the Hannah Research Institute, many clerical, cleaning and catering staff will lose their jobs? Will the minister outline what is being done to aid those workers, what retraining will be offered and what safeguards will be put in place to protect all jobs in other institutions that are undergoing restructuring?

**Allan Wilson:** We have a commitment to maximising employment and an objective of securing full employment. One of the advantages of the flexible nature of the PACE approach that I outlined is that the support that is offered is tailored to individual needs as well as local circumstances. That support includes full jobcentre services, advice on welfare, access to high-quality training and retraining and one-to-one advice on career development for those who are faced with the unfortunate prospect of redundancy. All those services and others will be provided to any individual who faces that prospect.

### **Student Loans (Repayment)**

**2. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what proportion of graduates whose student loans are due to be repaid are either in arrears or are deemed to be defaulting. (S2O-6610)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace):** The concept of default refers to mortgage-style loans only, as repayments under the income-contingent-style loans are linked directly to a graduate's earnings. Twenty four per cent of Scottish graduates or borrowers who have withdrawn from their course have more than one monthly repayment overdue. That figure is based on the accounts that are still administered by the Student Loans Company, but I will write to Mr McNulty separately with a comprehensive figure including borrowers who are part of the sold debt portfolio, which is privately administered, because we were regrettably unable to get that figure in the time that was available.

**Des McNulty:** I appreciate that the responsibility for the administration of the loans lies with the Student Loans Company, but I refer the minister to table 6.03 of the draft budget, which refers to net new lending in student loans. The figures in that table imply a 20 per cent reduction, which, I presume, is contingent on the forecast income from repayments. If there was to be a substantial shortfall in that income, how would that affect the figure for net new lending?

**Mr Wallace:** I could have given Mr McNulty a more comprehensive answer with notice, but I do not have the budget before me. I assure him that, although those figures in the budget cannot, by definition, have pinpoint accuracy, they are based on experience and the best estimates that can be made. I also assure him that, if there were a shortfall, it would have to be addressed from other sources.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 3 was not lodged.

### **Scottish Enterprise (Employee Relations)**

**4. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with Scottish Enterprise regarding its relations with its employees. (S2O-6551)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace):** The Executive has encouraged both Scottish Enterprise and the trade unions to hold discussions in respect of differences on pay systems. However, the conduct and content of meetings is a matter for Scottish Enterprise as the

employer. Scottish Enterprise is keeping the Executive informed of developments.

**Dennis Canavan:** Will the minister be more active in trying to find a solution to the dispute between Scottish Enterprise management and Careers Scotland staff? Given that Unison is in favour of a fair pay system that incorporates performance-related elements but management stubbornly refuses to negotiate on that point, will he use his good offices in an effort to get both sides round the negotiating table to reach a fair settlement?

**Mr Wallace:** I confirm to Dennis Canavan that Scottish Enterprise is willing to discuss aspects of the performance pay award that has been offered, although it has made it clear that the basic principle of performance pay is not negotiable. I assure him that, on numerous occasions, I have encouraged both sides—Scottish Enterprise and the trade unions—to work together on meaningful negotiations to bring the dispute to an end. I have stressed to them the importance of that and will continue to do so.

**Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** I hear what the minister says on that point, but I, like many other members, have been lobbied on the issue, which is of public interest. Although it would normally be wrong for a minister to interfere in negotiations between employers and employees, I understand that the Careers Scotland performance pay scheme discriminates against women because it does not adequately reflect the fact that they tend to take career breaks and therefore often lose out on promotion or other career opportunities. Careers Scotland is refusing to review the scheme to take account of the situation as it affects women. Will he at least make representations to Careers Scotland on that specific point, so that it can be dealt with?

**Mr Wallace:** Mike Watson is right that to say that generally ministers would not interfere. The staff in question are not civil servants and it is up to Scottish Enterprise, as the employer, to resolve the dispute. I said in my answer to Dennis Canavan that Scottish Enterprise is willing to discuss aspects of the performance pay award, but the principle of performance pay has been in place at Scottish Enterprise for more than 10 years. I will ensure that the point that Mike Watson raised about women is drawn to the attention of the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise, who I hope to see next week.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 5 was not lodged.

### **Enterprise (Inverclyde)**

**6. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to promote enterprise and business in the Inverclyde area. (S2O-6608)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson):** The Executive's enterprise strategy "A Smart, Successful Scotland" provides strategic direction to the enterprise networks and the framework for direct support available from the Executive. The support to business that is provided, in Inverclyde as elsewhere, is in line with that strategy and contributed to the formation of 205 new businesses in the area in 2004. Our aim is to improve productivity and competitiveness so as to enhance the long-term growth rate of the Scottish economy.

**Mr McNeil:** In asking about business in Inverclyde it would be remiss of me not to mention and add my voice to the strong and consistent representation that my colleague Trish Godman has made on behalf of Ferguson Shipbuilders. I hope that ministerial colleagues will ensure that no stone is left unturned to secure the future of the yard. Its closure would have a severe impact on West Renfrewshire and Greenock—many of my constituents work in the yard.

The minister will be aware of the successful pathfinder projects throughout Scotland. Does he agree that the Inverclyde riverside regeneration action plans would benefit from the creation of an urban regeneration company for Inverclyde?

**Allan Wilson:** The member raises two important issues in relation to retaining jobs in Inverclyde and building the economy to create employment opportunities. On the first issue, in which I know that you have a personal interest, Presiding Officer—we debated a motion in your name on the subject—I give the commitment that Duncan McNeil seeks that I, along with colleague ministers with responsibility for environment and rural development and transport, will leave no stone unturned in order to secure fairness and equity in the awarding of contracts within European Union procurement rules.

On the second issue, I express support for the point that Duncan McNeil makes. I believe that urban regeneration companies are a suitable vehicle for the regeneration of areas such as Inverclyde and beyond. We are considering the outcome of the pathfinder studies to see whether the lessons that are learned can be rolled out to other areas, such as Inverclyde and other candidates for urban regeneration company status.

**Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP):** What efforts have been made to classify fisheries

protection vessels as grey ships, which are not subject to EU procurement regulations? That would greatly help yards such as Ferguson in Port Glasgow to survive.

**Allan Wilson:** The reason why the long-term future of shipbuilding on the Clyde is so secure is in large part because of the actions that the Government has taken to procure grey-ship contracts in indigenous yards. I assure Bruce McFee and other colleagues that every effort is being made to consider the conditions that apply to the EU procurement process, including the definition of grey ships, to establish that fairness and equity apply in relation to the awarding of the tenders.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** One of the things that would help Inverclyde and my area is the removal of the tolls on the Erskine bridge. Will the minister link up with his colleague the Minister for Transport to consider the transport strategy for Clydeside and the ways in which transport, as well as the areas for which he himself is responsible, such as enterprise and business support, can contribute to a comprehensive regeneration that would benefit areas such as Duncan McNeil's, as well as mine?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am being lenient in saying that you can answer that, minister.

**Allan Wilson:** I agree fundamentally that investment in transport infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth, and I am sure that the creation of the west of Scotland transport partnership as a strategic transport authority will facilitate that process. I look forward to discussions with the Minister for Transport to ensure that the outcome of those discussions and the strategic decisions that require to be taken in relation to transport and infrastructure investment are in line with the principle of economic growth as the priority. Any impediment to economic growth that relates to transport infrastructure, whether it be tolls and bridges or otherwise, will be part of that consideration.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 7 has been withdrawn.

### **State Aid (Reform)**

**8. Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government regarding the European Commission's plans to reform state aid and the potential impact on the Executive's ability to provide financial assistance to industry in Scotland. (S2O-6598)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace):** We have been closely engaged with the United Kingdom Government to seek to improve on the Commission's proposals for regional aid post-2006 and to ensure that Scottish interests are reflected in the UK responses to the Commission. Full consideration will also be given to the Commission's reform proposals once they are published, including consultation with key stakeholders, and we will continue to work closely with the UK Government to ensure that Scottish interests are fully reflected in the developing UK line. However, until such time as the European Commission's proposals are developed and turned into new frameworks and guidelines, it is too early to assess the impact.

**Gordon Jackson:** Is the minister aware of the Commission's proposals for new regional aid guidelines, which, with the reduction in population coverage from 68 per cent to 3 per cent, could have a severe impact on economic development in the many disadvantaged areas of the west of Scotland? Given the fact that those guidelines are due to come into effect in January 2007, is he convinced that the Department of Trade and Industry is fully aware of the potential effects of the proposals and that it will safeguard Scotland's interests?

**Mr Wallace:** I acknowledge the point that Gordon Jackson is making. The Commission's initial proposals for regional aid post-2006 would give assisted area coverage only to the Highlands and Islands, which would reduce population coverage from around 48 per cent to around 8 per cent. The Executive is concerned about that loss of coverage.

We support the more general aim of the Commission to deliver less and better targeted state aid in order to focus on the Lisbon agenda, but we are concerned that the proposals prevent aid from being targeted at some of Scotland's most underperforming areas. That is why we will continue to argue for more scope to provide regional aid in more of our underperforming areas that are not covered by the proposals.

I can reassure Gordon Jackson not only that our officials are regularly engaged with the DTI on these issues but that I have had discussions with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the specific matter that he raised.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister accept my congratulations on his and the Executive's standing firm against the European and External Relations Committee's recommendation that would have seen payments to Europe for regional assistance increase massively? Would he further accept that the

present Government's current plan to renationalise regional assistance is a wise step?

**Mr Wallace:** I think that Phil Gallie is talking about the future of structural funds as opposed to the future of regional aid assistance.

I point out that the Enterprise and Culture Committee recently carried out a fact-finding visit to Brussels as part of its investigation into state aid reform. The report of its visit concluded that the considerable amount of work that had been undertaken by the Scottish Executive to influence the Commission's proposals had had a significant impact in that regard.

**Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** In the context of state aid, can the minister tell me why our major European competitors seem to be able to have the vast majority of their publicly funded ships built in their own shipyards? Can he also tell the chamber whether he believes that there are lessons to be learned from those countries that could help Ferguson Shipbuilders to gain the publicly funded orders that it desperately needs, which would help to grow our economy?

**Mr Wallace:** The question that Jim Mather asks about other European Union countries' shipyards is one that I, the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Environment and Rural Development have also been asking. We have been trying to gather information as to why that is the case. I assure Mr Mather that, whenever we hear allegations that unfair advantage has been given to certain shipyards, we take them seriously and make such inquiries as we can.

### Transport (Fife)

**9. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions have taken place with Fife Council and the Forth Estuary Transport Authority regarding transport issues in Fife. (S2O-6604)

**The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen):** The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with Fife Council and the Forth Estuary Transport Authority on a range of transport issues. I met representatives of FETA last Thursday and agreed that the Scottish Executive would underwrite up to £24 million of funding to allow the A8000 dualling project to proceed as quickly as possible.

**Christine May:** I welcome the minister's announcement, because the A8000 is a severe bottleneck for Fifers and others.

The minister will be aware that recent proposals for improving transport and access within, to and from Fife include a new multimodal bridge across the Forth, reopening the rail link to Leven and a cross-estuarial ferry. At the weekend, the use was proposed of the ports on the east coast of



Scotland, including those in Fife, for freight transport—I wrote to the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning about that last year. Will the Minister for Transport agree to discuss with me, with other interested members from Fife and with Fife Council ways in which those projects might be funded?

**Nicol Stephen:** I would be pleased to do that. It is clear that significant transport issues need to be addressed. I am pleased that Christine May described the long list of transport proposals that are under consideration. The focus is not all on road transport.

I take the opportunity to nail an unfortunate story in the press recently about the condition of the Forth road bridge. It has been suggested that the bridge's life expectancy is severely restricted, but that is not the case. Testing of the cables is still at an early stage and it will be some months before we can begin to make a proper and full assessment of the long-term position. Until the full results of the testing are known and analysed, it will be impossible to estimate the bridge's lifespan, as has been done in the media. Neither FETA nor the Executive can do that.

We emphasise that early testing work shows few problem wires. Of 11,600 wires, 32 were snapped. That is not a lot of damage, in contrast to what was reported in the press today. FETA has assured the Executive and the travelling public that no safety issue affects the bridge at present, and that remains the case today. Irresponsible reporting from whatever source is extremely unfortunate and seriously undermines FETA's message.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** A new bridge will undoubtedly be required at some stage. When the minister has the final details of the assessment, will he say how much time would be required to take a replacement bridge from initial design to completion while keeping the existing bridge open?

**Nicol Stephen:** It is important to examine options. We have encouraged FETA to consider the possibility of a second bridge and it has done that. The project is major and long term. An early indication is that it would take about 10 years to progress such a project. That is why FETA has done initial work. It is proceeding to a further stage of examination and will report to the Executive in due course.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** The minister will be aware that the Forth rail bridge is due to close for repairs for a week in July. That will place added pressure on commuting traffic across the Forth road bridge. What discussions has he had about minimising the already increasing

delays for commuters who will have to head to Edinburgh in that period?

**Nicol Stephen:** I discuss such issues regularly with Network Rail and ScotRail. Maintenance of the rail bridge has knock-on consequences for other forms of transport. Similarly, when the number of lanes that are in operation on the road bridge is reduced to only two, as in recent months, that has a significant impact on traffic that is trying to enter and leave Edinburgh. It is important to manage those major challenges. I do not underestimate the scale of the challenges that face us for the movement of traffic across the Forth road bridge and of passengers across the Forth rail bridge.

We must do more to free up capacity. The Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine rail project is part of what we are doing and it will make a significant difference, as will the longer trains and the longer platforms, which will significantly improve the capacity for rail travel across the rail bridge. All of those things will address the problem in the short-to-medium term, but we need to consider longer-term solutions and I emphasise that the Executive is encouraging such consideration. It is absolutely wrong to suggest that there are immediate safety concerns or that we know that either of the bridges has a definite and limited lifespan. We are doing work on the road bridge and we will report back to the Parliament on that work as information becomes available.

### Community Enterprises

**10. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action Scottish Enterprise is taking to help community enterprises to provide recycling services. (S2O-6562)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace):** Scottish Enterprise is one of a number of bodies that provide support to community enterprises. Its specific role is to identify social economy organisations with growth potential and offer them appropriate business support services that will enable them to realise that potential. It has actively supported a number of community enterprises that provide recycling services through its network of local enterprise companies.

**Donald Gorrie:** That is encouraging. The recycling world offers particularly good opportunities for the voluntary or community sector as a result of the mixture of paid and voluntary people involved. Will the minister encourage Scottish Enterprise to support enterprises that need encouragement and help to start up? Will he encourage councils to ensure a fair contest so that local community groups can successfully compete for the recycling services for which councils are looking?

**Mr Wallace:** I certainly hope that local community groups get fair opportunities to bid for work that is to be done on recycling and to progress our waste strategy. I confirm to Donald Gorrie that I am certainly willing to encourage Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to provide support, but doing so would be pushing at an open door in many respects. There are many examples of practical support that is already being given to community enterprises to provide recycling services and I would be happy to give Donald Gorrie a note of those examples if he wishes.

## Supporting Local Producers

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-2726, in the name of Shiona Baird, on supporting local producers. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the launch of the new farmers' market at Stonehaven as a welcome addition to the many thriving markets in the north east of Scotland; acknowledges the continuing popularity and growth of farmers' markets, "box" schemes and community-supported agriculture initiatives across the whole of Scotland; recognises that many consumers are becoming increasingly selective about what they eat and are now consciously rejecting mass-produced, remotely-sourced food in favour of fresh seasonal produce that is grown or reared locally; congratulates local farmers and producers for establishing a range of enterprising initiatives to respond to growing consumer demand for such produce in their areas, and considers that shoppers should actively support Stonehaven's initiative and other examples of sustainable local enterprise which benefit the local producer, the local consumer and the local economy.

16:13

**Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):** I am delighted to have secured this debate in support of local producers and farmers markets.

I was brought up in the market town of Hereford, in the centre of which the butter market was located. The market would be in an old, covered arcade and some stalls would be present throughout the week. It came alive every Wednesday as farmers' wives sat at long trestle tables selling their home-made produce of butter, cream, cakes, jams, pickles and in-season fruit and vegetables. Their husbands sold their stock at the weekly cattle market. Environmental health and safety rules and regulations put paid to that age-old tradition, but good ideas do not die—indeed, they have resurfaced in the highly efficient and compliant farmers markets that are springing up throughout Scotland. Stonehaven farmers market is only the latest in a long line of farmers markets that respond to consumers' interest in and concern about knowing the provenance of the food that they eat.

The first farmers market in Scotland started in Perth in 1999 and the idea has spread dramatically. Figures from the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets show that there are between 40 and 50 markets throughout Scotland, from the Borders in the south to Shetland in the north and from Stornoway in the Western Isles to Stonehaven in the east. Many more—more than 100, it is estimated—are not registered with the

association, many of which, from small beginnings, are now being held every week.

Farmers markets fulfil the need of consumers to know more about their food, including where and how it is grown and, crucially, how far it has travelled. They also open up a real dialogue with farmers and growers, who often have had little or no direct contact with the consumers of their products. That link is vital in ensuring that we farmers and growers provide the product that the consumer wants. Such dialogue is completely lacking with the major supermarkets, which tell both sides that they know what we want.

A well-known organic farmer, Ian Miller of Jamesfield, in North Fife, said recently:

“Many farmers had never seen a customer in their lives. Farmers’ Markets represent a new era for the industry.”

Farmers markets are not the only method of connecting people and growers directly. Schemes such as community-supported agriculture, farm shops and box schemes play a part in ensuring, as much as anything, a fairer deal for the grower. The Soil Association describes community-supported agriculture as a

“partnership between farmers and consumers where the responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared.”

There are a growing number of such initiatives, taking a variety of forms, but I will mention just one in my region. HOPE—the Hospitalfield Organic Produce Enterprise Trust—in Arbroath, is an increasingly popular project of dedicated people that provides horticultural training and work experience for people with learning disabilities through growing a huge variety of fruit and vegetables for the local community.

I received an e-mail from Andrew Newstead, the chair of Orkney Farmers Market Association, wishing us luck with the debate and issuing a plea for more support and recognition from “above”, as he put it—I do not think that he was referring to God. These initiatives need recognition and support for the wealth that they create locally, which is spent locally, and for the vital role that they play in supporting enterprising local economies. That role will become more vital as action is demanded of us all to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and our use of energy in the face of rising oil prices as demand exceeds supply.

To maintain the opportunities that are afforded by these local enterprises, we need local facilities, such as local abattoirs, to be retained. In the past few weeks, Scotland’s food and drink processing sector has faced a worrying reduction in facilities on the larger scale, with the closure of a pig-processing plant in Buckie and a lamb-processing plant in Bathgate. The vegetable grower Kettle Produce, in Fife, has also cut back. If such bigger enterprises contract, how much harder will it be for

smaller abattoirs and butcheries to keep going in the face of all the red tape, bureaucracy and expense?

The Executive must consider the broader picture and recognise that intervention is necessary to maintain the infrastructure that will be required to serve food production and distribution in the more local context in the years to come. Much of the local food market is developed and supported by volunteers, and funding—or, more appropriately, investing—is an issue in maintaining and expanding services. As a former vegetable grower and now a mere weekend helper in the collecting and packing of organic eggs—as well as a lamher at Easter time—I know the amount of work that goes into the growing and producing of most crops. On top of that, marketing and selling the produce are extra, heavy and time-consuming burdens.

I hope that all customers, throughout Scotland, understand the dedication and sheer hard work that go into the produce that is available at different outlets. I know that customers appreciate the quality, freshness and flavour of local produce. By cutting out the middle man, farmers markets and other schemes also offer really good value on everyday items such as vegetables, bread, meat and eggs. I offer my thanks and appreciation for all the hard work that is done even before products appear for sale, and I urge the minister to offer his appreciation in a tangible way by ensuring a more level playing field, so that outlets and the facilities that are needed to support them are given every assistance to be maintained and grow, despite the dominance of the big players in the food retail sector.

I thank all the visitors in the gallery who have taken the time to come here today. I wish them and all their colleagues throughout Scotland every success and a prosperous future.

16:20

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I begin by declaring an interest as a stallholder and chairman of Ayrshire farmers market, as chairman of the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets and, indeed, as a farmer.

I, too, welcome to the gallery the supporters of farmers markets who have joined us today, specifically Douglas Watson of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, who has done so much for the development of markets throughout Scotland. I also congratulate Shiona Baird on securing the debate and I congratulate Stonehaven and Balerno on holding their first farmers markets.

During the five years that I have been in Parliament, I have tried to avoid speaking in

debates about subjects in which I have a financial interest, but today I must break that rule and I do so with the greatest of pleasure. Often members' business debates reflect constituency or health issues, but today's debate is a celebration of a success story that began six years ago. As Shiona Baird said, the first farmers market in Scotland, organised by Jim Fairlie, took place in Perth on 1 April 1999 and my late wife and I set up the second market, in Ayr, with the help of South Ayrshire Council, on 24 July 1999. It is tempting to say that the rest is history.

Today there are approximately 55 markets operating throughout Scotland and farmers markets have been one of the big success stories in rural Scotland in the past six years. Farmers markets came into existence at a time when Scottish farming had never been more challenged, following the BSE crisis, the E coli 0157 outbreak and the enforced closure due to the foot-and-mouth crisis. In 1999, Scottish farming confidence was at an all-time low, but that confidence is gradually returning and farmers markets have played a huge part in that, delivering benefits to consumers, declining town centres and farmers themselves. It is truly a win-win situation for all concerned.

To our surprise and, indeed, delight, town centre shopkeepers welcome us on market days, because we bring increased footfall as our customers often spend the rest of the morning or the day in town centres. We have not just put a positive public face on the farming industry in Scotland; we have also given confidence to many of our stallholders, which is vital. That new-found confidence is turning many of our operators into significant rural entrepreneurs. Specifically, it means that stallholders are expanding their businesses by opening farm shops and butchers shops and supplying the catering trade. That is why I am so proud of Scottish farmers markets today.

At a time of the greatest challenge to Scottish agriculture and declining job opportunities in rural areas, we have been creating new jobs in what are often the most deprived areas. People such as Walter and Annette Young at New Cumnock now employ 19 people in their butcher business. Jim and Ann Smilie at Corrie Mains in Mauchline now employ two people in their egg retail business. Others are giving farming family members a reason to stay at home on the family farm rather than to seek employment elsewhere.

In addition to the farmers markets, such virtual communities are also in the right place at the right time to supply fresh, locally produced, unprocessed food to our ever-more discerning customers. As we all properly become more conscious of what we should be eating, farmers

markets have created in only six years a brand that is identified with healthy eating, quality food and the supply of fresh, locally produced food.

Despite the creation of that niche market, only one in 20 people in Scotland has attended a farmers market, so we still have 95 per cent of the market to aim for, which is an enormous future opportunity. The minister might want to explore with Ross Finnie the possibility of providing further developmental support to the industry, which, thus far, has received little or no financial support, yet is delivering on the healthy eating agenda and is creating jobs in rural areas.

In the longer term, the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets will have to address the continuing expansion of the farmers market brand. The market opportunities exist to develop further our website into a full-blown retail outlet. We should also consider opening up town centre shops using local farmers market brand images, and our distribution networks could and should be expanded.

The industry estimates that Scottish farmers markets collectively are turning over £20 million annually, and we have only just begun. With the help of the minister, this provider of fresh, healthy, local food can grow much more. We can supply not just the niche market catering trade but also mass-market local authority schools contracts, hospital contracts and other public service contracts. With more than 300 producers in Scotland, we have the critical mass to do that.

Local food networks are developing around farmers markets, and Howard Wilkinson has played a big part in that. His networks could and should involve public sector procurement officials.

I thank the minister for attending the debate and look forward to his comments. I hope that they will be supportive of this new brand in wholesome food retailing, which is also a good news story.

16:25

**Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(LD):** I thank Shiona Baird for lodging the motion. The introduction of farmers markets has been one of the few bright spots in the agricultural world in recent years. It has been wonderful to see food producers meeting consumers and to see producers who are successful in their marketing being supported by buyers. In the Mid Scotland and Fife area, there are excellent examples of farm businesses that have been transformed by their involvement in direct selling at farmers markets.

However, a reality check is needed. Even with the continued expansion of farmers markets, only a small percentage of all food produced in

Scotland will be sold at such markets. John Scott indicated that last year some £20 million-worth of food was traded at such markets, whereas the total output from Scottish agriculture last year was close to £1.6 billion. The value of the market must be kept in perspective. For example, only a small percentage of lamb produced in Scotland is consumed here. While I fully support questions being raised about food miles, we in Scotland must remember that we need to use food miles to sell our beef and lamb in other countries. We do not have the population to consume all the food that we produce.

I am surprised to note that I am the third stallholder to speak in the debate. In a previous life, I produced strawberries and sold them direct to customers from a market stall in St Andrews. It was hard work. A friend who had a fruit farm near Birmingham pointed out to me that there was a bigger population within 20 miles of his farm than in the whole of Scotland. That point highlights one of the difficulties faced by Scottish farmers.

While I fully support farmers markets, they are not the whole answer. I urge those who are involved in such markets to take up some of the issues raised by John Scott in the second part of his speech. They must be prepared to take their marketing forward, from selling from individual stalls to co-operating so that they can access markets that they currently do not have the time or energy to access. As politicians, we have an obligation to ensure that small-scale producers are not swamped by bureaucracy, which brings to mind the amount of paperwork that is involved in getting a small slaughterhouse approved under the Meat Hygiene Service regulations. Overall, I support the motion.

16:28

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I draw the attention of members to the entry in my register of interests: I have a three-acre field. I do not farm the field but my neighbour keeps Soay and Suffolk sheep in it. I have never operated a stall at a farmers market so, unfortunately, I break the sequence set by previous members. However, I am an avid supporter of farmers markets.

Last Saturday I was at the farmers market that operates in Macduff fish market. I had a particular purpose in mind: I felt a cold coming on and I wanted to buy honey to address it. I found the honey and my cold is now in remission. Many of the products that have a direct link with nature provide a natural remedy for life's ills.

Andrew Arbuckle said that we must be cautious when considering this subject and I agree with him in some respects. The motion appears to reject

mass production, but I do not go as far as that. On the contrary, we can have excellent-quality mass producers of food in our country and excellent-quality food produced en masse. We can also have small producers who produce poor-quality food. Scale is an issue and it is easier to manage small enterprises, but we should not be captivated by the idea that scale is the essence of the matter.

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** Does not Stewart Stevenson recognise that the motion notes that it is consumers who choose to reject mass-produced food? If consumers want to reject it and choose locally produced food, surely they should be encouraged to buy locally produced food that comes from Scotland.

**Stewart Stevenson:** I certainly accept that point and acknowledge what the member says. However, implicit in some of what has been said so far is the idea that big equals bad and small equals good. If only it were so simple, we could run the world.

Farmers markets are efficient in shortening the supply chain and that is excellent. However, we should not imagine that that leads to CO<sub>2</sub> efficiencies, as the contrary happens: we transport small amounts of food using relatively large amounts of fuel. Therefore, the case is uncertain and we need to consider the matter further.

It is possible for large producers to have excellent ways of indicating the provenance of food. For every piece of its chicken in a supermarket, Grampian Country Foods can tell people where the particular piece of meat came from as far back as two generations of chicken. Good systems can operate well in large companies when they choose to use them.

When I go to John Stewart's in Banff to buy my meat, he tells me which field it came from, which farmer it came from and sometimes, just to tease me, the name of the beast that I am about to eat.

This is a new era for the food industry, but farmers markets are, in essence, a niche industry and will remain as such, not least because, unfortunately, we have a huge hill to climb if we are to persuade the majority of consumers to go elsewhere than supermarkets.

Some supermarkets do relatively well. Some of my local producers have had excellent experiences with Asda since it opened its store in Peterhead and there is a range of local products—

**John Scott:** Notwithstanding Stewart Stevenson's remarks about farmers markets being a niche organisation, I presume that he is not against their expansion.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Good heavens, no. I am absolutely in favour of their expansion, but I am not sure that I can yet see the day when everyday

staples are bought at a local farmers market every day. Many of the markets are held once a month, fewer are held once a week and I do not think that any of them are held every day. Shops are supplied directly by producers and I give my support to such shops wherever possible, but access to good value veg, bread and meat every day is a little way off.

We should give financial support where appropriate. Farmers markets have the advantage of not having shop premises, so the business rates burden is rather less, but they make a valuable and key contribution to building enterprise in the countryside. Such enterprises are a key way of building new jobs and the answer is one at a time.

I congratulate Shiona Baird on lodging the motion for debate.

16:34

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** The motion is an excellent one on a subject for which we should show support. It is obvious that farmers markets alone will not feed the world, but they are doing a good job and can do a lot more.

I have experience of the Edinburgh farmers market, which has been going for some years, as a shopper and as a politician. I try to support the Kilsyth farmers market, which has some problems with local regulations, bureaucracy and traffic. Some farmers markets could do with political support to sort out their problems. Andrew Arbuckle mentioned the very important issue of co-operation. A lot of continental European farming and marketing is based on such an approach, which we have been slow to take. If local producers co-operate, they can achieve greater market penetration. Politically, we could encourage organisations such as community councils or local community development trusts to develop farmers market activity and to set up co-operatives.

As far as persuading people to buy such products is concerned, good progress is being made with individual citizens. However, we need to apply some pressure with regard to public procurement. As far as I know, the Women's Royal Voluntary Service gets all its sandwiches from deepest England or Wales. Surely it could use local produce. Moreover, schools buy produce en masse and even the Parliament gets much of its food from wherever Sodexo can find it most cheaply. I suggest that the minister should consider encouraging public procurement to give more attention and encouragement to local suppliers and to give them a fair chance to compete successfully.

I find it disturbing that, in many parts of Scotland, it is impossible to buy good-quality local

Scottish produce, especially seafood. It is all exported. I am all for exporting—after all, it makes money—but surely there must be a market in Scotland for the good-quality food that we produce.

**Stewart Stevenson:** One very real difficulty is the fact that in Norway, for example, herring fetch twice the price that they fetch in Scotland. Until consumers in Scotland are educated in paying higher prices, we will not see our excellent food on the shelves in the quantity that we want.

**Donald Gorrie:** That is a fair point. We have to encourage people to pay for good quality.

I am disappointed to find that what could be called the pick-your-own-fruit industry, certainly in this part of the world, is in decline. Surely that is a kind of farmers market. Picking one's own fruit is an excellent activity; it makes for an excellent family outing and is very good for grandchildren, who can eat what they gather. It is a win-win situation, and I cannot understand why fewer and fewer people are taking up such activities. I am not sure whether some form of regulation or simple encouragement would help the matter.

I hope that all of us can encourage farmers markets. They will not solve the world crisis, but they can—and have started to—make a significant contribution. Collectively, we can do a lot more.

16:38

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I congratulate Shiona Baird on securing this members' business debate. I realise that the debate is probably not the most hotly contested, but it is certainly well attended, which reflects the fact that we are all interested in farmers markets.

I should say that I have nothing to declare. I have never produced anything for such markets and I suspect that I never will; I am a simple consumer of their goods. However, I appreciate the opportunity to buy the goods that are sold at farmers markets. Indeed, in my constituency, the market in the Grassmarket in Edinburgh city centre has become a very popular institution that regularly takes place and attracts people. Not only is the market popular with many city residents, but visitors to Edinburgh find it to be a very good advert for Scottish produce. The Edinburgh city centre partnership supports the market because it represents something different that adds to the city centre's vitality.

Farmers markets raise a number of issues, some of which are covered in Shiona Baird's motion. For example, one unique feature is that farmers are able to market directly to consumers. Another important aspect of the relationship with consumers is the stewardship of land. We expect

to be told where the meat has come from and exactly how long ago the vegetables were grown. We also expect somebody to be able to tell us how long it will be before they are past their best—not a sell-by date, but when it is best to use them.

Awareness about healthy eating could come from farmers markets. The motion mentions seasonal produce, which is an idea that many consumers have lost touch with. When we buy something that is cling-wrapped and has a sell-by date on it, the point in the year when it has been produced and the place where it has been produced are not so important. We would do well to build a better relationship with food producers to promote healthy eating. I know from friends who have allotments that their perspective on vegetables is totally different from mine, because they know what is available when. Farmers markets could be part of a wider movement to encourage people to think about what they are eating. The Scottish Parliament should definitely encourage that.

How does the minister see farmers markets as part of the Executive's strategy for agriculture? We have debated the issue of organic produce many times. A high proportion of the produce at farmers markets is organic, and I would like to see how the Executive is taking on that issue, because it is some time since the strategy for agriculture was published.

Common agricultural policy reform poses a lot of challenges. Again, it lets us think about the quality of produce and the environmental implications of produce being brought to us. Marketing is critical; quite a few members have mentioned that. A small local co-op may not have access to the expertise or marketing that big farms can take for granted. I am keen to hear what the Executive is doing to promote better marketing and better support for farmers as part of a whole approach to supporting rural communities.

The CAP reform issues that the Environment and Rural Development Committee discussed were about the use of food co-ops, access to farmers markets and diversification. We considered how rural development instruments could be used in a more proactive way. Members have mentioned abattoirs and finishing produce locally; we could tap into that. The committee looked particularly enviously at some of the farmers co-operatives in Germany, where farmers have managed not only to produce the food in reasonable quantities for a reasonable price but to market it effectively. There is a lot that we can learn.

We should not think of farmers markets as being only for agricultural produce. One of the things that makes the markets interesting to consumers is the range of rural projects that turn up, such as crafts

and cosmetics made in Scotland. Such things add interest and value to the markets.

The debate is about how we support smaller producers, and farmers markets are a tangible and effective way of bringing the issue to our attention. Colleagues have reflected on the issue of economic scale, and I believe that that is an area in which the Executive can step in. The support of the city centre partnership in Edinburgh has helped the farmers market through some of the hoops and difficulties that Donald Gorrie described. We need a proactive and supportive approach, and the Executive could send a positive message through a refreshed strategy for Scottish agriculture. I would like very much to see support for smaller producers, so that they can access not only farmers markets but our supermarkets and shops.

16:43

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** I add my congratulations to Shiona Baird on her motion and I endorse the importance of supporting local producers. In the light of climate change and global warming, it is good that the public are increasingly aware of the issue of food miles. It is also good for local economies to keep money within them.

As other members have said, farmers markets are increasingly taking place in marketplaces and market squares across Scotland. Those are the places that were actually built to accommodate them—why otherwise would they be called marketplaces or market squares? Farmers markets are building a regular customer base, as I have seen in my home town of Inverurie, where the monthly farmers market is now solidly established and expanding. The only declaration of interest that I have to make is that I am a regular customer there. I recommend the home baking.

Farmers have access to other forms of direct selling, from fairly crude stalls at the roadside to highly successful farm shops, of which there are some in my area. Those shops are proper retail outlets, marketing and selling produce from the farmers themselves; often they sell locally grown beef, which is excellent. However, we should not forget the high street shops. A good example, which I commend, is the greengrocer's in Inverurie, which sells fresh fruit and vegetables that are sourced from local growers and operates a box scheme. The butchers in our market town source their meat locally and it is worth mentioning the fish vans that operate out of our local ports and bring fish off the boats to communities. The businesses that I described are small businesses that are doing their bit to encourage us to eat fresh fish and other good food.

John Scott mentioned the catering trade. Tourism is a major industry and tourists look out for local produce, because they want to enjoy eating something that is distinctive to the place that they are visiting. There is much scope for the catering trade to do more to support local producers. During an interesting presentation at the Parliament's cross-party group on food, the speaker, who procures food for Aberdeenshire Council's school meals, pointed out that if certain varieties of vegetable or fruit are specified, local produce will be supplied.

I highlight an initiative whereby participating retailers market produce from Aberdeenshire under a distinctive sign that shows that it is from the county. The initiative is very effective in encouraging visitors to take locally produced goods home to their friends and family. Once they have tasted shortbread from Dean's of Huntly or products from Isabella's Preserves, I am sure that they seek out those products in their local stores, which brings me to my final point. We must also support local producers who are food exporters and support as much value added as possible as near to the primary producer as possible.

16:46

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank my colleague Shiona Baird for securing a debate on supporting local producers. I also thank the many members in the chamber, who have resisted the joys of election leafleting to spend a couple more hours in these hallowed halls.

There is a serious crisis in our food culture, not just in Scotland but throughout the western world. Much of that crisis results from the divorce between producers and consumers that has taken place, which Sarah Boyack mentioned. I am sure that all members have heard shock stories about children who do not know where potatoes and milk come from. However, if children do not have access to farms and contact with producers, how can they understand about their food? The challenge in Scotland is to recreate our food culture and the re-establishment of the direct link between producers and consumers is vital. If we are to achieve that, we will have to start sharing responsibilities between producers and consumers, as Shiona Baird said. For example, consumers have a responsibility to pay a fair price to the producer, as Stewart Stevenson said, but farmers and producers have a responsibility to be responsive to the customer's needs and to consider how food is produced.

It is extremely difficult to mediate the relationship between consumers and producers, because our supermarket system involves complex monopolies and food supply chains that often extend for

thousands of miles. Supply chains are opaque and do not bring together producers and consumers. There are examples of good practice by the Co-operative supermarket movement, but many more face-to-face, direct relationships need to be established.

During the debate it has been a joy to hear about the range of direct marketing initiatives that are flowering in Scotland, from farmers markets, farm shops and box delivery schemes to subscription farming systems whereby consumers pay up front for a share in the harvest. I pay tribute to the many initiatives in Mid Scotland and Fife. The first farmers market was established in Perth in 1999 and one of the newest farmers markets has been established in Bridge of Allan. The direct marketing of our food culture is flourishing and we should support it.

I will make a few points to the minister. We need to ensure that city regional planning does not design our marketplaces out of our towns and cities, so that we have those spaces for the future and can grow into them and develop a local retail culture.

We need to be ambitious. I realise that farmers markets form only a small niche in food retailing at the moment, but when I go to France I see covered markets where small artisan producers share the space and lots of people do their weekly shopping. We need to think big. We need to think about how we can develop a genuine local retailing sector. I urge the minister to support small producers.

**Mr Arbuckle:** Does Mr Ruskell think that it would be appropriate for the major supermarkets to be made to allocate a certain percentage of their shelf space to local produce?

**Mr Ruskell:** One way forward would be to examine the Office of Fair Trading's report on supermarkets and to examine the complex monopoly under which supermarkets operate. We need to put more conditions on mainstream retailers, but we should not ignore what we have at the moment. We should expand the local retailing sector. We can be ambitious.

We need to examine how we support small producers, many of whom are concerned that they do not qualify for the single farm payment. There needs to be a level playing field for existing producers and for producers who are coming in, particularly in areas such as horticulture and deer farming. We also need some creativity from the Executive. The option of paying farmers to get involved in local marketing schemes has been rejected in the trial land management contract. We need to see support for local marketing in 2007. As Shiona Baird said, it is not easy to change one's business to ensure that one can slot in to



the initiatives. Farmers need support to do that. They are delivering public goods and rural development.

We need co-ordination from the Scottish Executive to develop local food economies. That includes procurement, but also co-operative ventures. We need to celebrate our local food economies, but we need to develop them further. We need to develop a real food culture that can deliver a healthy population and a healthy environment, but we also need some imaginative thinking from the Executive on how we can do that.

16:52

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald):** I congratulate Shiona Baird on securing the debate and highlighting the new farmers market at Stonehaven and other farmers markets throughout the north-east and the rest of Scotland. As a regular customer of the monthly Aberdeen country fair on Belmont Street in my constituency I can, like others, vouch for the quality and variety of the produce that is available and the contribution that such markets make to promoting choice for consumers.

Farmers markets are good news for consumers. They also contribute to the kind of change that we look to farmers to make. Sarah Boyack mentioned the agriculture strategy. In that context, we look to farmers to make changes as a result of reform of the common agricultural policy. Farmers in future will need to be more responsive to the requirements of the market. Farmers markets provide an ideal opportunity for producers to meet customers face to face. There is no better way to reconnect agriculture with the market than through direct contact. Hopefully, that will also contribute to increased understanding of the food production process among children and adults who live in urban Scotland.

We welcome farmers markets in principle, but we also support them in practical ways. We provide funding in excess of £300,000 a year to the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, which in turn supports the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets in providing practical advice to those who are setting up new markets, such as those at Stonehaven and Balerno. We also support many individual businesses through our food grants schemes, with more than £28 million of grant assistance to agricultural food businesses in the past four years. Shiona Baird mentioned Jamesfield farm. Organic Meat and Products (Scotland) Ltd, which is based there, is a good example, as it has received grants of more than £350,000 to help to meet consumer demand.

Procurement issues have been mentioned. We are taking action to encourage the use of local food in schools, hospitals and other public services. Our guidelines on public sector procurement encourage public bodies to ensure that suppliers meet appropriate farm assurance standards and to secure local fresh and seasonal produce of high nutritional quality in the interests of Scottish consumers.

**John Scott:** The minister mentioned the Executive's public sector procurement policy. An announcement was made on the enhancement of that policy last summer. What increase has there been in public sector procurement of locally produced food as a result of that?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I point Mr Scott in the direction of the research that we published last week, which he should be able to access fairly readily on the Executive's website. As well as estimating that that market is worth some £85 million, it highlighted some of the trends in the market and some of the obstacles that prevent local producers from getting access to it. The research was clear and we accept its conclusion that it is key that we increase awareness among producers of the opportunities that exist for tendering and competing in the marketplace, as that could make a serious difference.

Those who award public contracts cannot discriminate between Scottish produce and food that comes from elsewhere purely on the basis of country of origin, but there are significant opportunities for Scottish suppliers to compete with other suppliers on an equal footing, on the basis of quality, value, freshness and reliability of supply. Our priority is to ensure that Scottish suppliers are as well informed as possible about those opportunities.

We are exploring the possibility of giving consumers more information by introducing country-of-origin labelling for beef that is sold in restaurants and other food-service outlets. We also want to give consumers elsewhere a greater choice of Scottish produce and more opportunities to enjoy it. Everyone knows about the value of outstanding exports such as whisky and salmon, but the farmers markets offer good examples of other types of Scottish produce that we would like to export, for which there are ready markets elsewhere in the UK and abroad. As well as encouraging local producer-to-consumer direct marketing, farmers markets are relevant in the context of efforts to promote opportunities for Scottish producers nationally and internationally.

If we are serious about consumer choice, we need to recognise that consumers will continue to choose to shop at supermarkets and convenience stores, as well as at farmers markets, which represent a growing sector. In that regard, there

are some important issues to be addressed. Quality and traceability matter, but so do quantity and range. We want retailers of all kinds—not only in Scotland but throughout the UK—to stock as much Scottish produce as possible. My colleagues and I speak to supermarkets and other retail interests to reinforce that message and the more general message of sustainability.

Regardless of how successful our local producers are, we will continue to need to bring some foods into Scotland, both so that we can eat more fruit and vegetables to improve our health and so that we can enjoy a wider variety of produce than can be obtained seasonally in Scotland. We should not underestimate the importance of providing consumer choice. At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned the Aberdeen country fair. I should also mention last month's international market in Aberdeen, which attracted some 70 stalls from different parts of Europe and some 70,000 shoppers, who typically bought speciality produce from continental countries that would not otherwise have been so readily available. That is another example of producers selling directly to consumers, even if in that case the producers were not local. That, too, should be welcomed for some of the reasons that I have outlined.

The Executive's view is that farmers markets can make a significant contribution to providing what consumers want. We welcome their contribution and that made by farm shops—which some members have mentioned—and local food initiatives. Through direct selling to consumers, they all play their part in cutting the length of the supply chain between producer and consumer.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Is the minister aware that there is now a small farmers market—the new Leith market—in the car park of the Scottish Executive at Victoria Quay? Will the Executive smile on that new development?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I have not yet had the opportunity to sample the produce at the market to which Mr Harper refers. I imagine that the civil servants at Victoria Quay who are kept hard at work but who have the occasional opportunity to venture outside will take advantage of the opportunities that the market offers. I am happy to applaud the growing success of farmers markets.

**John Scott:** To encourage farmers across Scotland to actively sell locally, will the minister, together with his colleague Ross Finnie, consider Mark Ruskell's suggestion of including local marketing schemes on the menu of options for the land management contract? That would attract the support of the land management contract for such activity.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I do not want to go into the detail of the discussions that are taking place on

the land management contract. I know that John Scott is well aware of the process of negotiation that is going on internationally on the subject and also of the Scottish Executive's efforts to ensure that the process brings environmental and health benefits to producers and consumers in Scotland. I suspect that his suggestion is one of the options that Ross Finnie is considering.

Clearly, farmers markets are a vital part of the spectrum of activity that makes up the thriving Scottish food industry to which I have referred. On behalf of the Executive, I am happy to applaud the best efforts of all those involved in the farmers market movement and more generally in the production, marketing and selling of Scottish food.

*Meeting closed at 17:01.*

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