

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 18 May 2005

Session 2

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2005.

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

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

CONTENTS

Wednesday 18 May 2005

Debates

Col.

TIME FOR REFLECTION	16897
TOURISM INDUSTRY (RESTRUCTURING)	16899
<i>Motion moved—[Alex Neil].</i>	
Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)	16899
The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson)	16901
Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	16903
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	16904
Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green)	16907
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)	16908
Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP)	16910
Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)	16912
Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind)	16914
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	16915
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	16917
Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)	16919
Patricia Ferguson	16921
Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab)	16923
PROMOTING SCOTLAND WORLDWIDE	16926
<i>Motion moved—[Mr John Swinney].</i>	
Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)	16926
The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe)	16929
Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)	16930
Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)	16932
Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)	16933
Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)	16935
Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)	16936
Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)	16937
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	16939
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	16941
Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)	16943
Mr McCabe	16945
Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)	16947
DECISION TIME	16950
PLANNING PROCESS (M74)	16951
<i>Motion debated—[Rosie Kane].</i>	
Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)	16951
Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)	16954
Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)	16955
Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)	16957
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	16959
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	16960
Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)	16962
Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con)	16964
Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)	16966
Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)	16967
The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm)	16969

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 May 2005

[THE DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:31*]

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, for which our leader today is Pamala McDougall from the Religious Society of Friends.

Pamala McDougall (Religious Society of Friends): Thank you for listening to me today.

What canst thou say?

When I was thinking about what I should share with you today, I thought “So much to say—so little time!” I expect that you can empathise with that.

Quakers—or, to give us our full title, the Religious Society of Friends—are known for silence and silent worship but also for action arising out of that silence. To help our faith into action we have our Quaker testimonies to peace, truth and integrity, equality and simplicity and to the earth and the environment. A testimony is not a form of words but an expression of actions characteristic of Friends.

I stand before you a modern Quaker but with what are deemed now in certain circles to be old-fashioned values: a sense of duty, vocation, love of fellow human beings, civic and national pride and care for the world. Do those qualities resonate with you? I am far from alone in holding those values, but how difficult it is sometimes to hold on to them and acknowledge them in a changing world.

What canst thou say?

It was George Fox, our founder and spiritual leader, who made that challenge. Yes, we can listen to other people’s experiences, read insightful books and use history, but it is our own experiences, good and bad, plus imagination that should lead us to discern the right words and actions.

When I worked for the national health service, one of my duties was to assess the development of young children. I asked one wee boy to draw a wriggly worm to demonstrate his ability to control a pencil. His worm was a straight line. When I asked why, his reply was “It’s deid!” Children’s imagination never fails to amaze me, but that was one child’s way of answering what he could say.

We—you and I—are challenged every day on what we know, what we believe, what facts we

have, what conclusions we reach and why. How do we do that and remain true to ourselves? That process of discernment, and especially of spiritual discernment, can be difficult, but there are helpful pointers.

First is listening and really hearing what the other person has to say, without interruption or just waiting to put our own point of view. That takes time.

Then there is listening to the inner voice—what we Quakers also call the inner light—which helps us to see what could be the next step. That takes time.

And there is also giving ourselves time to reflect, even in these few precious minutes, on our own spiritual leader and guide. For me, that is Jesus Christ.

Another Quaker, Isaac Pennington, wrote some beautiful lines in 1667 on what we can all aspire to. This is not a soft option, as anyone who has tried this way will testify.

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness;
and bearing one with another,
and forgiving one another
and not laying accusations one against another
but praying for one another,
and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

Thank you for listening to me today, but what canst thou say?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members to welcome the presence in the gallery of the Swedish ambassador, His Excellency Staffan Carlsson. [*Applause.*]

Tourism Industry (Restructuring)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2796, in the name of Alex Neil, on behalf of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, on its third report of 2005, "Restructuring Scotland's Tourism Industry".

14:37

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I remind all members of the importance of the tourism sector to the Scottish economy. It contributes between £4 billion and £5 billion a year to Scotland's gross domestic product, employs about 197,000 people in Scotland and is one of the highest-growth industries that we have. For the past three or four years, it has outstripped many of the other so-called high-growth sectors. Rightly, VisitScotland and the Scottish Executive have set a strategic target of increasing the size of the industry by 50 per cent by the year 2015.

The subject of our report is the reform and reorganisation of the area tourist boards and the contribution that that reorganisation can make to achieving the strategic objective of a 50 per cent increase in the size of the tourism sector. I think that there is universal agreement in principle in all the major parties that the old area tourist board network was outdated and was not fit for purpose in the 21st century, not least because a membership-based system, relying on very small businesses for much of its funding, was not the way in which to market Scotland to the modern world. There is also general agreement in principle that it is right to have an integrated national organisation that promotes Scotland as a whole, as well as every corner of Scotland, both inside Scotland and, more important, to the wider world. I do not think that there is any disagreement about those points.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I thank the convener of the committee of which I was formerly a member, and that I am about to rejoin, for giving way. Will he concede that one of the points that I made during the committee's inquiry was that the different facets of the Scottish tourism product, which reflect the qualities of the different parts of Scotland, must be recognised, and that one homogenised whole is not necessarily best for marketing the wonderful facets of Scotland's diamond?

Alex Neil: Absolutely. Although we recognise the need for homogeneity in the organisation, that integrated organisation offers a diversified product to the wider world, including cheese factories,

Caithness and Sutherland and all that is good north of Inverness, as well as south of it.

Mr Stone: I will ask the member to give way a second time.

Alex Neil: I will refuse.

The principle is not in dispute. The inquiry by the Enterprise and Culture Committee addressed the nuts and bolts of the reorganisation and reform of area tourist boards. I will mention some of the issues that arose, more from the point of view of looking to the future and learning any lessons that need to be learned than from that of going over the coals of the past. The past is the past, and although we recognise that many aspects of the reorganisation could have been done better, we owe it to the industry and everybody in it to concentrate on where we go from here, rather than going over the history of the past two years.

There were four or five key issues that were addressed by the committee that will require to be continually monitored until the completion of the reorganisation process. First, we dealt with the process. At times, the level of communication between VisitScotland and members of the private sector—particularly those on the boards of the area tourist boards—was not perhaps all that it should have been. That led to a great deal of frustration, as was articulated by Robin Shedden, the chairman of the area tourist board network. There is a lesson in there for the future about how VisitScotland communicates with those in the industry, as well as with the industry's clientele.

Secondly, at times, many members of staff felt that they were not given adequate information at key stages of the process. It is always difficult to get it absolutely right when people's jobs are involved, but the committee felt that, at times, communications with staff could have been substantially better than they were. As a result, I know that in some areas we lost one or two good staff who would have been a major asset to the new organisation. Again, there is a lesson to be learned.

Thirdly, we looked at communication with wider Scotland. Sometimes people felt that they were in the dark about how far and fast the reorganisation was going.

The next major issue concerned cost. The original estimate of the cost of the reorganisation was about £2 million over two years or so, but the cost is now £6.5 million. Although that is a significant amount of money, in relation to the size of the sector it is a drop in the ocean. However, it is an indication of the need for much more detailed planning in such exercises.

Another major point, particularly for the future, is the need to ensure that all the stakeholders

involved in the reorganisation and in the delivery of services—including the private sector operators in particular, as well as the enterprise network and the local authorities—are properly consulted by VisitScotland at every stage as we move towards completion of the process. To be fair to VisitScotland, it has set up special machinery to ensure that that happens.

In the light of Eric Milligan's report on people's first impressions of Scotland, I hope that the debate concentrates on where we go from here and, having learned the lessons of the reorganisation, on how we make sure that we achieve the strategic objective of increasing the size of the sector by 50 per cent in the next 10 years. If, at the end of the day and despite all the difficulties, the reorganisation contributes to that, it will have been well worth doing.

On behalf of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, I move,

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Enterprise and Culture Committee's 3rd Report 2005 (Session 2): *Restructuring Scotland's Tourism Industry: Report on the Review of Area Tourist Boards* (SP Paper 305).

14:44

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): I am very glad to take part in today's debate, which provides us with an ideal opportunity to reflect on the great things that Scotland's tourism industry has achieved over the past year. I thank Alex Neil's committee for its very careful consideration of the matter; I thank Alex Neil in particular for his fine advert for Scottish tourism at the beginning of his speech. We can look forward with confidence to another year of growth for the wide range of businesses that make up the industry. As they grow, they will be strongly supported by VisitScotland's integrated tourism network.

After the outcome of the ATB review was announced in March 2004, much hard work went into ensuring that the tourism network would be ready for business in April. I congratulate everyone who made sure that it was ready.

Looking back for a moment, I should make it clear that the decision to merge the 14 ATBs into an integrated network was largely based on what people told us during our consultation exercise. Whatever else they thought, most respondents stressed the need for much better integration of national tourism policy with local delivery. Another important issue for the Executive was that, when taken as a whole, the ATB network was in a precarious financial state. Change was needed. However, that change was to keep the best of what was already there while providing a

seamless service to visitors and businesses that was based on a sound financial footing.

I am glad to report that, after some hiccups last year, the transition to the VisitScotland network has been relatively smooth. That success is due to the huge commitment of all the partners and their staff who have been working together to deliver it. The early performance of the network is encouraging. VisitScotland's 2006 marketing opportunity package was sent to businesses throughout Scotland at the end of February and the current 39 per cent response rate is fully in line with the level of response at this stage last year. In fact, the number of businesses buying into the package, which is the replacement for ATB membership, is ahead of the rate at which businesses bought into ATB membership in previous years. So far, so good.

Another very encouraging aspect is the important role played by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities in supporting the development of the VisitScotland network. Indeed, the funding commitments that VisitScotland has now received from local authorities for this year are in excess of the budgeted level. That augurs well for the future, although future funding from local authorities will depend on the development of good tourism partnership plans in each area of Scotland.

It goes without saying that all of that has been achieved at a cost. The Executive provided additional funding to VisitScotland last year and this year to cover the costs of planning and developing the network. As I have already confirmed to the committee and as Alex Neil pointed out in his speech, the final figure for those costs is £6.5 million over the two years. I can also confirm that substantial additional funding was not diverted from the VisitScotland marketing budget, but was secured from elsewhere within the Executive's budget. The tourism network is expected to achieve savings from next year, and VisitScotland will retain that money for marketing.

The VisitScotland network has made a strong start and tourism businesses are seeing real benefits from our increased investment in VisitScotland's marketing budget. Last year, Scotland experienced a 20 per cent increase on the previous year in the number of overseas visitors. Furthermore, occupancy figures for almost all types of visitor accommodation are at their highest levels for the past five years or so. We are getting the message out there that Scotland is the best small country in the world and is a must-visit, must-return destination.

As I said in my recent letter to the convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, I very much welcome the committee's report to the Parliament on the restructuring of the ATBs.

Although there are lessons to be learned, I was pleased to note that the committee supports the general principles of an integrated support structure for the tourism industry in Scotland. I have already made a commitment to the committee that I will regularly report to it on the outcomes.

I am absolutely convinced that the decision to merge the ATBs with VisitScotland was right and that it will underpin our shared ambition to grow the value of tourism by 50 per cent over the next decade.

14:49

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I suspect that few issues will divide us today, which is to be welcomed as we debate a key industry for Scotland. The industry will make an even more significant contribution in the future, especially if we can get it right.

It is fair to say that considerable concerns arose over the process of changing the area tourist boards. Some of those concerns have been addressed, but others remain—in particular, those that were expressed by Mr Shedden. I am delighted that the threatened disappearance of local authority funding has not happened. I welcome the evidence that the committee heard that local authority funding has been at least maintained and, in some areas, increased. I also welcome the minister's comments that the private sector is getting directly involved.

As the committee convener suggested, we should be moving beyond the committee's report and considering how to create mechanisms to allow the development of this most important industry. Opportunities are arising now, and will arise in the future, and we will have to be nimble in order to achieve the growth that we seek and to get our share of the 4 per cent per annum growth that is predicted for the world market over the next decade.

I commend "The Da Vinci Code" tours, which are capitalising on one of our assets to the benefit of everybody involved. However, I have some concerns about the challenge-funding approach to marketing, which requires a lot of time and effort and the engagement of lots of partners in order to arrive at a solution. That is fine when we are talking about a long-term project, but if we want to react quickly to a situation, we need to have quick mechanisms in place as well.

There has recently been a significant growth in direct flights from a number of Scottish airports to important markets. For example, I recently met representatives of Aberdeen hoteliers who are trying to capitalise on the new flights between Belfast and Aberdeen. They were engaging with

local partners to try to develop the marketing of the city. We could help such projects by making our procedures less bureaucratic and by ensuring that funding mechanisms are available locally and that decisions can be made locally. We must have flexibility to allow us to react to what are often quick changes in the market. Often, we do not have a lot of notice that new flights are coming.

The minister will forgive me if I exercise one of my hobby-horses. One of the Executive's niche markets is genealogy tourism. We have opportunities to make our new system work to our advantage. Specialists in niche markets could work closely with local hubs. A way of helping that from the centre would be to ensure that we have as many records available in Scotland as we can.

World war one records held by the Ministry of Defence were under some threat but I gather that the Western Front Association now has access to them. The minister and her colleagues in various departments could talk to the MOD and the Western Front Association to find out whether we could bring the records of the Scottish regiments or Scottish military personnel back to Scotland. They could be placed in Edinburgh Castle, the regimental museums or even the new family history centre that is being created in Edinburgh.

The minister may wish to work with her colleagues—in particular, Mr McCabe, who is sitting on her left—on census returns. Our census records should not be closed for 100 years. We are discussing whether new questions should be in the 2011 census, and I suggest that we should invite people to allow their records to be opened up so that family historians can get access to them. That would be another way of broadening our market.

I think that I have used up all my time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: And some additional margin.

14:54

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate the Enterprise and Culture Committee on its report and tend to agree with its criticism of tourism policy since devolution.

In the light of the extensive upheaval that our Scottish tourism industry has faced over the past five years, it would be in no one's interests to go back to square 1 now, but we Scottish Conservatives remain deeply concerned about the centralisation of structures and the corresponding loss of local knowledge and expertise. That concern was highlighted in comments to the committee from the Scottish area tourist board network, which branded VisitScotland's management style as

“centralist and hierarchical with no ability to meet local needs.”

That must improve.

We are particularly anxious about the future status of local tourist information centres because, especially in rural areas, they are focal points for tourists on the ground. It is ironic that, in its reorganisation, the English Tourist Board is moving away from a centralised system, in an effort to give back power to the shires.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): We are in Scotland, not England. I am familiar with what has happened in my area since the reorganisation and with the measures that have been put in place. What is taking the place of the area tourist board in the member's area?

Mr McGrigor: All I know is that we were under an excellent tourist board—the Argyll, the Isles, Loch Lomond, Stirling and the Trossachs Tourist Board, which was known as AILLST—which was run by James Fraser. There was no need for change.

I agree with recommendation 41 of the committee's report, which states that the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport should

“ensure involvement at the highest levels within the new network from the private sector”.

It is paramount that industry operators feel engaged and that the Executive fully recognises both that tourism is Scotland's biggest industry and that tourism operators play a vital role in our country's economy.

The private operators tell us that they need a playing field on which profits can be made so that reinvestment can take place. Recent wage increases and increases in gas and electricity prices of between 40 and 50 per cent have made life difficult enough, but the excessive regulations—which are typical of a Government that seems to think that private business can always bear the costs of its politically correct schemes—have made the situation even worse. The industry wants practical help that is delivered with speed, rather than endless top-down strategies on which it has not been properly consulted.

I ask the minister what VisitBritain is doing to market Scotland and why the Executive persisted with visitScotland.com, which respondents to a poll for tourism businesses that the Scottish Chambers of Commerce conducted last November said had had no visible effect on Scottish tourism. Ten years ago, the same experiment was tried in southern Ireland with an operation that was called Gulliver. That did not work either, because practical tourism operators were not involved in the strategy. We should learn lessons from

Ireland, where the situation has improved since the Government and the industry started working together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: One minute.

Mr McGrigor: Scottish tourism, the vast bulk of which consists of smallish hotels and bed and breakfasts, cannot charge over the odds. The question on the lips of everyone in the tourism industry is: what will happen to that market—in which short breaks play an important part—as a result of the recent downturn in the retail trade? The crucial question is whether people who are deciding to cut back on items such as new clothes and other non-essential items will also cut back on short breaks. I have talked to industry players who think that they know the answer. We should ensure that a short break in Scotland is seen to offer value for money and to represent a saving for hard-working families. Any market focus should be on dealing with current obvious setbacks such as the one I have mentioned, rather than on strategies that affect only a few.

Under the Government's strategy, 14 area tourist boards have been abolished to be replaced by 14 hubs. What was the point of that? The answer would have been to examine the strengths of the existing system, which lay in some of the tourist boards, such as AILLST, Perthshire Tourist Board and the tourist boards for Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Patricia Ferguson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McGrigor: Am I allowed to, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As the minister wishes to speak, I will allow her to. We have a minute or two in hand.

Patricia Ferguson: I find it hard to put together the two opposing arguments that Mr McGrigor seems to be making at once. He argues both that everything is being centralised and that we have replicated 14 ATBs with 14 hubs but, regardless of what he thinks, it is a fact that 90 per cent of VisitScotland's work takes place outwith the centre.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute to wind up, Mr McGrigor.

Mr McGrigor: What is happening at the moment is that English headhunters are on the prowl in Scotland; they are looking for people to run their new area tourist boards. It would be a great shame if Scottish expertise were to be lost because a Scottish Executive process was dogged by uncertainty, indecision and consequential delay.

The Conservatives think that tourism is far too important to be dealt with by the Education Department and to be bundled together with culture and sport. When we come to power, we are committed to the creation of a new department of enterprise that will incorporate tourism. That will put tourism at the heart of Government enterprise policy, which is where it should be.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Four members wish to speak in the open debate. I can allow five minutes per speaker.

15:00

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I support and welcome the comments that my convener, Alex Neil, made in opening the debate.

Huge mistakes were made in the review of the area tourist boards and in the restructuring: we saw real mistakes in communication and management. I hope that lessons have been learned. Now is the time to move on.

We must move into a world in which our aim is to grow the Scottish tourism industry by 50 per cent in the next 10 years. That is a goal that we all support and we should do that by focusing on the staff who work in the tourism industry. VisitScotland's research briefing, "Tomorrow's World, Consumer, Tourist", which I think was published this week, says:

"For employers, encouraging, pampering and nurturing their star talent (being employee-focused) will become a pre-requisite."

For all the current talk of customer-focused companies, perhaps in the future it will be seen as of equal and critical importance for a company to be employee focused. It is perhaps ironic that that research briefing emanated from VisitScotland. I hope that the VisitScotland management has read it and has taken on board the comments that it makes. For companies to focus on their employees is absolutely key to building our tourism industry.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): Does the member agree that, in order to have a good tourism industry, we need to look after the people who are employed in it? Does he agree that we need to pay people decent wages and ensure that they are professionally trained? Should not we up the ante and start to respect the industry more?

Chris Ballance: I agree very much with those comments. Indeed, what Rosemary Byrne asked leads on to the next point that I want to make, which is about the problem of jobs in the industry often being low paid; in fact, they are frequently as low paid as it is possible to be because tourism industry jobs are often seen as being unskilled,

short term and casual. We must train high-quality staff and we must train management in how to look after high-quality staff. We must also pay staff properly and, above all, we must create a year-round industry as far as it is possible to do so. The shortness of the tourism year is the real problem in creating a highly skilled workforce.

Mr Stone: Although I accept the point that Chris Ballance makes about low wages, which should not be the case in the industry, does he agree that staff at all levels must in return deliver the highest-quality product? After all, internationally, we face an increasingly competitive industry.

Chris Ballance: Absolutely; the future for Scotland's tourism lies in providing a top-end, high-quality product. For that we need high-quality staff who are recompensed properly for doing their jobs.

Extension of the length of the tourism season is the key to getting this right. Given that we are tied to a tourism season of only five months, it is inevitable that we will have all the problems of casualisation and short-term working and of staff who are not valued enough. We also have to remember that our core tourism market is in short-break Scottish tourism and in tourism from northern England, both of which are markets that it would be easy to grow during the seven quiet months of the tourism year. We must focus on that market in terms of the year-round capability of our tourism industry.

I will make two more points in my last minute. First, I congratulate the tourism and environment forum on producing—with VisitScotland's assistance—the "Wildlife Scotland" brochure, which was published this week and which I expected the minister to mention; perhaps it will come up later. Secondly, I appeal again for VisitScotland to spend more money on promoting the green tourism business scheme, which its members feel has for a long time been largely ignored by VisitScotland. In a recent survey, something like 75 per cent of its membership felt that VisitScotland was not adequately promoting the scheme. To promote the scheme, we are looking for a brochure that lists every hotel that is part of the scheme and for a real partnership between VisitScotland and the GTBS. VisitScotland should not view the GTBS as a niche item, but should enter fully into partnership with it as a real partner.

15:06

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Tourism in Scotland is already a success story, but our aspiration in Parliament is that it should be more successful. The target of 50 per cent growth in the industry is ambitious, but with a 20 per cent

increase in the number of overseas visitors last year—greater than in the rest of the UK—and the £14 million extra that has been provided by the Executive to market Scotland abroad, we can afford to be optimistic. Jamie McGrigor does not seem to be keen to share in that optimism, but the rest of us are. To achieve the success that we want, those positive signs and the extra investment must be backed up by successful reform of the way we market Scotland and support our tourism businesses.

It is four years since ministers took the first steps to begin the process of reform and the Enterprise and Culture Committee has monitored the process closely during that time. As with most change and reform in major organisations, lessons can be learned from how it has been carried out. However, the committee report rightly focuses on the questions that are of overarching importance: how will the new integrated network promote Scotland better abroad? How will it support tourism businesses better in every part of Scotland? How will it bring more people to Scotland to enjoy an excellent tourism experience that will bring them and others back?

One concern that was expressed by the committee was about how moving to a national integrated network will help to deliver local tourism strategies, which was referred to by Jamie Stone. I am confident from what we have heard that the reforms will deliver for every part of Scotland. We heard about a gateway strategy to encourage tourism from the cities into other parts of Scotland; that has encouraged tourism outwith the cities, but a gateway strategy alone will not deliver the increase in tourism that we want in each part of Scotland. That is why it is so important that the new network will take into account regional needs, with specific service agreements with local authorities, and that VisitScotland hubs will be based throughout the country. They will deliver services that are tailored to local tourism businesses and will continue to work on regional strategies—the local tourism action plans. That kind of service is vital for the network to attract the buy-in and investment that it needs from councils and local businesses, whose support and funding are key to its success. As we have heard from the minister, that buy-in is taking place, and we can be confident that it will continue in the future.

There is evidence that such an approach can work. One example is EventScotland, which has been successful throughout the country. For example, in my region the seniors golf tournament has come to Aberdeen. VisitScotland itself has now twice brought its own expo event to the city and Aberdeen has Scotland's fastest growing airport. People will have to be reassured that the new marketing strategy will incorporate more than just a few of our most famous landmarks, but the

building blocks are there for it to work for the whole country.

VisitScotland is well placed to deliver on its national goals, some of which the previous Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee identified in its work on tourism over a number of years, for example to encourage high quality throughout the industry, to provide support for businesses to develop—including, as Chris Ballance said, developing staff skills in the sector—and to share best practice throughout the network, which we clearly could do much better. I have spoken to many people in the industry who welcome that approach and who believe that a new organisation will be easier for them to work with, that it will provide them with services and that it will cater more for their needs.

As VisitScotland is already having notable success—for example, its website is doing well and the increase in tourist numbers suggests that it is making a contribution—it is well placed to provide the leadership and unity of purpose that will ensure that the tourism industry in Scotland reaches its full potential and plays its full part in delivering the objective that Labour members have for economic growth in Scotland.

The Enterprise and Culture Committee will, rightly, monitor progress closely, but it is no surprise that other countries are now looking to how Scotland has reformed its tourism sector to see how they can improve theirs. I point out to Jamie McGrigor that one of those countries is Ireland, which is examining our reforms to see how it can improve tourism.

Mr McGrigor rose—

Richard Baker: Sorry, but I am in my last minute.

Ireland realises not only that we are having success now, but that we have put in place the right structures and strategy to achieve our goal of even more people coming to Scotland to enjoy excellent visits and all that our great country has to offer.

15:10

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): As the convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee said, tourism is probably our first business in Scotland. That is true in areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, where tourism is certainly the first business, although it is perhaps first equal with agriculture. It is interesting that many people who are in agriculture seek to diversify into tourism.

Clearly, as Alex Neil said, the previous structure was unsatisfactory. Two examples of that come to mind, both of which predate devolution—Jamie

McGrigor should note that the problems did not start in 1999. First, the chairman of Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board was once replaced at an annual general meeting simply because his opponent, who was in another group in the board, managed to bus in more people to the meeting. I make no comment on whether the chairman should have been replaced, but deciding on the head of the board on the basis of the number of people who turned up to a meeting was no way in which to run the single most important business in Dumfries and Galloway.

A second example is a substantial town in Scotland that withdrew its funding from the local area tourist board because it thought that the board was putting too much emphasis on the rural hinterland of the town, rather than on the town itself. That town obviously had no concept of a gateway and did not realise that, to get to the countryside, people usually have to go through a town. There will always be conflict and tension between a national strategy and local interests, but we need an organisation that addresses that tension.

It was easy to spot the problem—although if members listened to Jamie McGrigor, they might be forgiven for thinking that there was no problem at all—but the solution was by no means as obvious. At the risk of incurring the wrath of the convener of the committee, I want to think a little about the past. The review of the tourism structure was announced in May 2002 and the results of the review were announced in March 2004. The delay might have been acceptable or understandable if something of real substance had emerged but, as the report points out, the committee said in its interim report on the matter—when I was the convener—that it was

“surprised and disappointed at the great deal of uncertainty as to the structure that would replace the Area Tourist Boards ... despite the fact that the issue had been under review for 2 years”.

That uncertainty and the fact that issues were unresolved after two years contributed to some of the problems with communication and staff morale that arose subsequently, to which the committee's report rightly refers.

We must ensure that those problems are not repeated in the subsequent two stages of the process, because tourism, more than any other industry, depends on its staff. Therefore, it is important that we retain staff and do not lose them because they are uncertain about their future or because their morale is depressed. As Richard Baker said, many strides have been made towards making our industry much more professional. It was curious that Jamie McGrigor seemed to think that our future in tourism lies in the low or cheap

end of the market—I cannot think of anything more contrary to the truth.

Mr McGrigor rose—

Alasdair Morgan: I will give way to Mr McGrigor, as I have mentioned him so often.

Mr McGrigor: Is the member referring to small hotels and bed and breakfasts as

“the cheap end of the market”?

Alasdair Morgan: I think that those were Mr McGrigor's words, although I will be glad to check the *Official Report*.

Mr McGrigor talked about the low end—in terms of price—of the market, but that is not where the future of the industry lies. Neither does it just lie in the short-break market, as Chris Ballance suggested, although that market is important and is capable of expanding throughout the year. Business tourism—conferences and so on—is perhaps even more important, and that market is also capable of extending throughout the year. A purely local structure would struggle to cope with that type of tourism.

In the report, Peter Lederer is quoted as saying that the tourism network Scotland project

“is a framework; it is not the answer to all our prayers. TNS in itself will not bring a single visitor to Scotland.”

Later in the report, however, we learn that the transitional costs are £5 million. In his speech, Alex Neil uprated them to £6.5 million. We have spent £6.5 million, which has not brought any extra visitors. I am therefore glad that the committee will continue its work and continue to monitor the success of the project.

15:16

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Like other colleagues, as a member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee I have sat through many long hours considering the lengthy gestation that has brought us to where we are now in the organisation of the area tourist board network in Scotland. Having been party to that discussion, I want to sum up with a few conclusions and observations.

First, there is the question whether structural change was necessary. I am often critical of our rush to structural reform as a proxy for other types of improvement and change that need to take place, but I am persuaded that structural change was necessary in our tourism network. Could it have been handled better? Of course it could. There is not a change management project in history that could not have been handled better and from which lessons could not have been learned. It is particularly difficult to manage

change, especially in a public sector context, with the public gaze and the scrutiny that that entails.

That said, it is important to ensure that the transition continues to be managed effectively, and it is right that the committee and the Executive—and indeed others—monitor progress. However, I firmly believe that it is time to move on. Some of the observations and concerns that many of us expressed at an earlier stage in the committee's investigations have, to be frank, been dealt with. The key now is to exploit the potential of the new structure. Before I move on, however, I have an observation to make about the new arrangements in VisitScotland. It is a point that is perhaps quite different from points that others have made. If I have one genuine disappointment, it is that when I picked up the VisitScotland magazine that told us the story of the new arrangements and which included a series of pictures of the new top team, there was not one female face to be seen in that top team. In an industry in which women play such a significant part at a range of levels, that ought to be addressed.

There are enormous opportunities to be exploited in the new arrangements. The debate about the balance that is to be struck between national and local strategies is interesting. Alasdair Morgan used variously the terms "conflict" and "tension". He is right to say that there will always be a certain tension in that regard, but I hope sincerely that we do not view it as a conflict. At the end of the day, Scotland's strength is the sum of our parts: genuine integration within the network will give us a real opportunity to build upon all of those parts.

I want to use Edinburgh to illustrate how we can move forward under the new arrangements. People are often sensitive when Edinburgh or other parts of the country are singled out for mention, but I will live dangerously and do just that. Edinburgh has a special role; it is not the only gateway to Scotland but it is—statistically, factually and objectively—the main gateway to Scotland. About half of all overseas tourism trips to Scotland include an overnight visit to Edinburgh. It generates 18 per cent of United Kingdom tourism spend, and a third of overseas tourism spend in Scotland. However, I would be the first to say that we need to make a reality in culture and practice of what a gateway really means. Edinburgh—and, indeed, other gateways—should be the beginning, not the end, of a journey in Scotland; we are surely a small enough nation to be able to co-operate to ensure that that is the case.

The scope for partnerships in Scotland is immense. I will give one example: the emerging partnership between Edinburgh and Glasgow. We

often hear a lot about the tension between those two cities, but not about the partnership between them in, for example, conference business tourism. About 90 per cent of that market is shared between the two cities and the market's continued development depends on co-operation between them. There is immense potential to build on that. None of us should be sensitive about, or jealous of, the strengths or unique selling points of different parts of the country; rather we must ensure that we sell those different parts effectively.

I will end with an enthusiastic comment on my own experience of holidaying in Scotland in recent years so that I can play up the very positive story that we have to tell. Like many people, I made the shift in recent years to holidaying closer to home, not least—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Can you tell your story a wee bit more quickly, please?

Susan Deacon: Yes.

I made that change not least because, to be frank, it is less stressful than travelling abroad with young children. I am astonished by the quality and range of, for example, self-catering cottage accommodation that is available at an affordable price in Scotland and I am proud of the vast array of visitor attractions that one stumbles upon in almost every corner of the country. We have everything to play for. Parliament is already a major visitor attraction for Scotland; let us ensure that, as parliamentarians, we work to attract visitors to Scotland.

15:21

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Susan Deacon was the nice cop from Lothian and Borders police; I am the nasty cop, because I am quite willing to say that Edinburgh is the main gateway into Scotland because at least 50 per cent of visitors to Scotland spend one night of their stays in Edinburgh. I am happy to see that Mr McCabe is sitting on the front bench because, as he knows, I would like Edinburgh to be acknowledged with capital city status, which would mean that the additional responsibility that the city bears—magnificently, I think—is recognised in the Executive's spending programme. I will say no more about that at the moment, but he knows what I am talking about and I will come to talk to him more about it.

Jamie McGrigor mentioned high-end tourism. I am not up with the jargon, but I think that "high end" means expensive and luxurious. I am all for that, because it means lots of folk with lots of money coming to spend it in Scotland. However, Chris Ballance, who agreed with Jamie McGrigor, talked about short breaks from the north of

England. I ask members to correct me if I am wrong, but I am sure that the bulk of the folk who come to holiday in Scotland from the north of England are not the sort who go for luxurious, expensive accommodation; they are looking for a more modest holiday. I say that not to disparage in any way the people who come from the north of England, but rather because I wonder what the strategy is for development of tourism in Scotland. Alasdair Morgan got close to questioning that. Is it to focus on short stays, second or third breaks or the main, luxurious and expensive high-end holiday? I will wait to hear the minister's closing speech before I make up my mind.

Chris Ballance *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but Margo Macdonald is in her last minute.

Margo MacDonald: I have one local question. I have been contacted, as I am sure Susan Deacon and other members have, by bed-and-breakfast owners who complain not about the grand plan, but about their particular and personal access to the VisitScotland website. It costs one lady, whose letter I have in front of me, less to be on four or five other websites than it costs her per annum to be on the VisitScotland website. She knows from where she gets most of her business. I realise that that is a detail, but it is an important one. Who is responsible for ensuring that bed-and-breakfast owners, who are the backbone of the tourism industry in many areas of Scotland, are pulled into the planning process? I feel that they might not have been until now.

15:24

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I used to be a member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, and shall be again shortly, as I mentioned in an intervention. I was involved in the committee's discussion on tourism. I whole-heartedly endorse Mr Alex Neil's remarks. He said that the past is the past, and he is right to wish to draw a line under it. From my point of view, however, coming from a singular part of the Highlands and of Scotland, the past is a rich heritage that we can mine for the future. That is what I meant when I said in my intervention on Mr Neil that Scotland is like a diamond that has many facets.

Mr Neil was quite correct when he said that communication has not in the past been all that it could have been. The committee heard evidence to suggest that there had been some communication breakdown, and that some messages had been delivered clumsily. That is not to say that there was malice aforethought, but it is important that we brush up and improve our communications in the future.

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport spoke about increases in funding and in occupancy figures. There is a favourable trend there, to which I will return in a minute. I think that it was Brian Adam who mentioned the challenge funding approach. There is some sense in that, and members would do well to pay heed to his words on the subject. Perhaps we want to get away from an accountant's type of approach, but I shall return to that, too. Brian Adam's comments about genealogical tourism were music to my ears.

Jamie McGrigor spoke about the loss of local expertise and knowledge and hinted at the role of tourist information centres. Chris Ballance spoke about the vital role of staff in the industry. My intervention during his speech was about high-quality reward for staff's endeavours and about their delivering high-quality work.

I suspect that the increasingly universal worldwide market, if I can put it that way, is becoming more and more thoughtful about the product that it wants in respect of both the low and high ends of the market. When people go on a holiday, whether it is a short break or a long break and wherever it is in the world or, indeed, in this country, they want to see something singular and different. Variety is, after all, the spice of life. It is important, while having one main route or motorway to delivering the tourism product, that we offer tourists different things in a variety of different destinations, from Dumfries and Galloway to the northern Highlands.

On TICs, I suspect that what really matters to tourists is the quality of information that they get. They are not particularly interested in the structures. I have never been persuaded by the argument about structures. If tourists go into a TIC in Bettyhill, in my constituency, or in Kirkcudbright, what counts is what they are told over that desk about what they might like to see. The committee and Parliament as a whole have been quite correct to move away from the structural approach to a debate about quality of delivery.

Here is a warning, however. I attended a tourism conference in Inverness not so long ago, at which we heard about the quality of the product that emergent former eastern bloc countries such as Slovenia can deliver. Such countries can underprice us and can overshoot us in terms of quality. People can now get short breaks of three or four days in Slovenia that will leave them slack jawed in amazement at the quality of the food and of the stay as a whole. We face a real challenge. The quality of the product that we present, at whatever level of the market, is crucial. It is all about the visitor experience. If we take our eye off that, we will lose our way.

I believe there is within the human spirit a quest to find something interesting and something different. The past is the past, as Alex Neil said, but it is of huge interest. We have spoken about genealogy, but there is also archaeological tourism. Let us think of the singular nature of Scotland's history, with all our kings, our battles, our castles, our villages and our communities: they are fascinating. All of us—not just Scots and patriots such as myself—feed off those things. Whenever people go abroad, they are fascinated by the things that they see—in wee countries or in big countries—that make that country different. There is great potential in archaeology and genealogy.

Chris Ballance was quite right to draw our attention to green tourism. As we go into a period of global warming—sadly, or however one looks at it—the fact is that tourism is all about what we can see and what we can look at. People visit my constituency to see the golden eagles that fly high not far from my house and to see the buzzards and all the wonderful animals. The arts also offer enormous potential. The Edinburgh festival brings many people to our capital city, as does our great Parliament building, which has been mentioned. If we can present a superb artistic product, that, too, will play its role.

What matters is the individual facets of Scotland's diamond. We need one main trunk route that deals with people most efficiently—they should not hear a tape-recorded message that gives them the wrong answer. We need to fire people out into different parts of Scotland. For goodness' sake—we must remember that the more we can take people beyond the capital city into other parts of Scotland, the more local economies will benefit. I support the committee's report.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Murdo Fraser, who has four minutes.

15:30

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer—I am a little taken aback by that.

In this short debate, many issues have been raised. I will address matters that relate to the report and the tourist board shake-up. Given the interest in the debate, it would be worth while for the Executive to schedule another debate on the tourism industry in the near future, because it is clear that many opinions need to be expressed and because tourism is our most important industry.

I approached the shake-up with some scepticism, because the area tourist boards in my region worked well. Perthshire Tourist Board,

Angus and Dundee Tourist Board and Kingdom of Fife Tourist Board, which I dealt with, all seemed to perform and to serve their purpose. However, I appreciate that that was not the case throughout the country. The strength of the area tourist board system was membership involvement. The industry bought into the structure, which was responsive to industry requirements and involved some local decision making.

In deference to the committee's convener, I will not spend too long on criticisms of the process, but several important points require to be made that emerge from the committee report. The first is about the time that the process took. It was one of the longest pregnancies in history—the new hub structure seemed to have the gestation period of a woolly mammoth. The review was announced back in May 2002 and it was March 2004 before its outcome was made public. That period created uncertainty, which was unhelpful to the industry and to the staff of local tourist board organisations.

Concern was expressed about lack of consultation with staff, stakeholders and local authorities, which also have an important role. Paragraph 25 of the committee's report draws attention to that. The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport gave evidence to the committee and acknowledged that lessons had to be learned from that phase of the process about communication and the impact on staff morale.

Much concern was felt about funding, because the new structure will be funded differently from the previous system. It will rely on the industry buying packages from the new hub structure. The committee was unconvinced that much evidence showed that the industry would automatically do that. Much work remains to be done on that issue. The committee's interim report dealt with that.

There is no doubt that we have lost key people from the tourism network. The chief executives of tourist boards have moved on. I do not know whether they have gone to England, as Jamie McGrigor suggested, but the concern is that they have been lost from the tourism industry.

Mr Stone: Does Murdo Fraser agree that the key people are those who are across the desks in the TICs, to whom I referred? Chief executives come and go, but surely the people who know the local ground are the key people, and they remain.

Murdo Fraser: I will speak about tourist information centres if I have time. However, the chief executives—certainly those with whom I interfaced—had much experience and local knowledge. They were instrumental in ensuring that the staff who work in TICs are well trained and knowledgeable. Many of those staff are not Scottish. In my experience, many are from overseas and work here on temporary contracts,

which places the key knowledge base in the organisation's management structure.

What needs to be done? We have the new structure, which the committee and stakeholders have welcomed. We need a viable financial model. We must ensure that the system works and that the industry buys into the new structure.

Tourist information centres are hugely important, because they are many visitors' major interface with VisitScotland and many visitors' first port of call. Of course people will use the internet and will book holidays by telephone, but the first port of call for many people when they arrive in a geographical locality will be the tourist information centre. Tourist information centres must be preserved—I would be nervous about any suggestion to remove a number of them.

We must ensure that the purchasing of goods and services is not centralised under the new structure. Local businesses in different parts of Scotland should still have the opportunity to benefit from the purchasing power of the organisation. We also want jobs to be relocated out of Edinburgh to the local hubs—indeed, that has already happened.

Tourism is our key industry and the debate is important, but we must reconsider the issues in the near future.

15:35

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): The debate is on the area tourist boards and I pay tribute to the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board. That board has been led by David Noble, who always displayed friendliness to one and all and who has joined us this afternoon. I pay tribute to the tourist information centres throughout the Highlands and Islands, particularly in smaller places such as Strontian and Ballachulish, which are in my constituency, and also to those in larger places such as Inverness and Fort William. They all play a part. They greet and meet people and they can make a difference to people's enjoyment of Scotland as a destination.

Alasdair Morgan was right to say that the focus of the debate is on the committee's report and is narrow, but Alex Neil was correct to invite colleagues to speak to the wider industry. Alasdair Morgan quoted Peter Lederer, who has stated that the exercise, with all its costs, has not in itself led directly to extra visitor numbers. Despite that, it is clear that there is consensus among virtually all the members who have taken part in the debate that many good things are happening that all of us can welcome and support. I said "virtually all" because I listened attentively to Jamie McGrigor. When I was doing so, it suddenly became clear to

me that the answer for me was definitely no when I saw the poster during the election campaign with the slogan:

"Are you thinking what we're thinking?"

The positive contributions to the debate are to be welcomed. Jamie Stone and other members echoed what Brian Adam said about the importance of genealogy. Dennis McLeod's work in promoting the Scottish diaspora is an untapped source with huge potential for visitors to Scotland.

Chris Ballance was right to spell out that tourism needs to be an all-year-round business for Scotland. If a business must be compressed into six, seven or eight months, trying to make a reasonable return on it is extremely difficult and prices will be pushed up. I am pleased that Chris Ballance recognises the corollary. Cheap flights, direct access and access for people from other countries are needed to bring people to Scotland. I am delighted that the Green party supports such air travel.

Chris Ballance: Did the member also hear that the internal Scottish tourism market and the internal English market—particularly the northern English market—are the core part of the market and that we ought to focus on those first and foremost?

Fergus Ewing: We should invite everybody to come to our country, wherever they hail from. The Greens are trying to have things two ways, which is a grey approach to politics, if I may say so.

Members are correct to highlight the importance of conferences, not least in Aviemore, which is in my constituency. I hope that the minister, although the matter is not within her purview, recognises the consensus that exists among virtually all members that the Inverness airport private finance initiative should be bought out, as that would allow the moneys from revenue—which are currently £2 million a year—to be unleashed to bring more people to Scotland. All members—except perhaps one—would be pleased about that.

I hope that the minister will take on board the industry's comments on the problems that migrant workers face in learning English. After the pilot scheme is over, there is no opportunity to go on longer schemes, although the enterprise net is charged with that. There are problems in that respect. People cannot even open bank accounts. Small businesses in my area are taking on workers from many parts of the European Union, but they cannot get bank accounts for them. That is a serious practical constraint, and the banks need to engage directly to a greater extent with the Scottish Executive in that respect.

I conclude, as always, by saying that the SNP is absolutely committed to Scottish tourism business.

We think that the Executive's target of increasing visitor numbers by 50 per cent by 2015—which is in eight years' time—is too modest and that we should aim for higher targets for an even better tourism industry for our nation.

15:40

Patricia Ferguson: We have had an important debate about Scotland's tourism industry and the restructuring of the support structure. I will deal with some of the points that have been raised in the debate. I apologise to members if I do not address the point that they raised, but I suspect that I will be a little bit short of time.

Both Brian Adam and Jamie Stone spoke about the challenge fund being too bureaucratic. The first round of the challenge fund was a pilot scheme, and many lessons have been learned from that. From now on, a team of locally based business relationship managers in area offices will be in place to work with businesses and to support good applications to the challenge fund. I was very impressed by the excellent work that has been done by some of the businesses that are already involved in the challenge fund, which I met earlier this week.

Brian Adam: Will the minister give way on that point?

Patricia Ferguson: Very briefly.

Brian Adam: I welcome any mechanism that will speed up the process. The point that I was trying to make is that there may well be some decisions that cannot wait for any kind of bureaucracy. I am not suggesting that we should not have the fund, but we should have a local alternative.

Patricia Ferguson: I accept the point that Mr Adam makes, but I point out to him that that is not the only way of attracting marketing moneys. There are other mechanisms that can be used. If the member writes to me with a specific problem, I can try to help him to address it.

Like Fergus Ewing and other members, I do not recognise the argument that Jamie McGrigor put forward. It is important to remember that the approach that we have taken to restructuring has taken account of international expertise. In fact, a recent report that was commissioned by Fáilte Ireland, to which Richard Baker alluded, prepares the way for an integrated structure that is similar to ours to be put in place there.

Mr McGrigor: Will the minister give way?

Patricia Ferguson: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

To Mr McGrigor, I say that I accept entirely—as other members have said—that there have been

difficulties with visitscotland.com. Nevertheless, it has generated £27.7 million of business so far, and many of the early problems have been ironed out. The site will continue to be monitored so that any residual problems can be addressed.

I was surprised by some of Chris Ballance's comments about green tourism. VisitScotland works closely with the tourism environment forum to promote the green tourism business scheme. That is Europe's largest green tourism accreditation scheme, and the aim is to raise the environmental performances not just of green tourism businesses, but of all tourism businesses. VisitScotland aims to increase the membership of the scheme by a third each year for the next three years.

Alasdair Morgan was right to mention the importance of business tourism. As well as being very lucrative, business tourism has a spin-off as far as the business incentive element of it is concerned. In that context, Susan Deacon was entirely right to mention the fact that Edinburgh is a gateway to the rest of Scotland, although there are other important gateways.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Will the minister give way on that point?

Patricia Ferguson: I am sorry, but I am really tight for time.

Susan Deacon made the point that there are no women in the cadre of directors at VisitScotland. However, six of the 12 area directors who have been appointed so far are women, and six of the 17 heads of department are women. I am hopeful that we will see those women progress. I would add that the minister with responsibility for tourism is definitely a woman.

Margo MacDonald asked what our strategy for tourism was—whether it was for short breaks, budget breaks or luxury holidays. The member is no longer in the chamber, but I say to her that Scotland has a range of attractive offerings and VisitScotland has segmented its marketing strategy to appeal to a range of visitors. VisitScotland's current city activity campaign emphasises the role of cities as gateways and encourages city break visitors to enjoy rural areas through the easy accessibility to the countryside from our cities.

I just have time to address Fergus Ewing's point about year-round businesses. That is where EventScotland comes in. It is important to attract such events as the mountain bike championships that will take place in Fergus Ewing's area; it is also important to have local festivals and use them to market Scotland. In response to one of Jamie McGrigor's earlier points, I point out that that is the cross-cutting element of my portfolio, which is very important. We cannot take the cultural and

sporting aspects out of tourism in this country. They contribute hugely to the tourism businesses that we have.

Everyone in Scotland has a part to play in making our guests welcome: every restaurant and hotel worker, every shop assistant, every cab driver and, indeed, every MSP. Our visitors think that this is a great country to visit and they value the contact with local people. Tourism is everyone's business and we all have a part to play in its success.

15:46

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): In rising to close for the committee, I remind everyone that, as Susan Deacon said in committee, the reorganisation of the ATBs was about process and we have to ensure that that process has positive outcomes. To that end, I echo Alex Neil's comments about the value of tourism to Scotland, and about the numbers of people who are employed in the industry. To break that down to my area of Fife, for the last year for which figures are available, almost £206 million-worth of income was derived from tourism, and almost 6,000 people were employed in tourism. That is a significant element of Fife's economy, and a significant contribution to the economy of Scotland.

Susan Deacon referred to the importance of the cities and said that they are the gateways to and the beginning of the tourism experience, not the end. That is important. As the gateway strategy is developed, I hope that the minister will give us regular updates. That will be important not just for the gateways, but for the areas of Scotland that serve as the hinterlands for those gateways.

There were problems; they have been aired and I will not go through them again in the short time that is available to me. However, the committee will want to keep an eye on the situation and get reports on communication, staffing issues, and how the costs, if they are to be additional to what has been identified, will be met.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): The whole chamber would agree that communication is important. Does the member agree that it is totally unsatisfactory to give the tourism industry only one month to respond to the Executive's current consultation on the draft Private Water Supplies (Scotland) Regulations? Does she also agree that it is necessary to extend that timescale, given the importance of those regulations to many parts of rural Scotland?

Christine May: There has been extensive consultation throughout the country on water, water supply and related issues. If there is a

problem for businesses, I am sure that the Executive will be as generous as always in extending the timeframe.

In a well-argued speech, Brian Adam made an important point about the future of archives and their importance to ancestral tourism. If the archives come under another part of the minister's portfolio, I hope that she will ensure that they are available, as far as possible, for public consumption and reference. That is very important.

Everyone has referred to Mr McGrigor's speech and, on that basis at least, his contribution was successful. However, I recommend that Mr McGrigor go back to his local authorities and local enterprise companies and talk to them about what has been done. Others have referred to the arrangements that are now in place and to the success of those arrangements in their local areas. I cannot believe that the situation is different in Mr McGrigor's area and I hope that he will find that it is not.

A couple of other important aspects that I must mention briefly are, as I said, tourism connected with genealogy—now called ancestral tourism—and, as Susan Deacon and others mentioned, business tourism. Indeed, business tourism contributed £900 million to the Scottish economy last year. I am gratified to see from a recent Royal Society of Chemistry briefing that Glasgow will host a convention for thousands of chemists later this year. That is not only because of Glasgow's superb convention and hotel facilities, but because the city's universities and academic institutions have a reputation for cutting-edge chemistry that is beyond compare. That shows that it is important that tourism remains firmly within the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department. Tourism is a key part of the Scottish economy.

Whenever we open our mouths, especially if we hold an elected position or other position of influence in which our words are reported, it is important that we think about what we say. I read with real concern the comments of someone in St Andrews who said that the town was too small to host the open championship, which is potentially worth £70 million to the local economy. It was claimed that St Andrews could not host the open, but the town has done so successfully for years and will do so successfully this year. I also read about the refusal to grant an honour to Jack Nicklaus, but we need not say any more about that.

Murdo Fraser: Blame the Liberals.

Christine May: I do not know who to blame other than those narrow-minded people who do not have the interests of Scotland at heart.

However, let us flag up the positive things that are being done, such as the way in which a guesthouse owner in Burntisland has lauded broadband for the benefits that it has brought to her business.

Picking up on Murdo Fraser's gestation theme, I believe that, if the area tourist boards review, which the member described as a long pregnancy, results in our producing from the previous Cinderella that was our tourism industry a glittering princess that plays its part in the economy, the process will have been worth while.

I thank members for their contributions and for their largely supportive comments. Does Scotland do tourism well? Yes. Could we do it very much better? Absolutely. Increasing the industry by 50 per cent will be challenging, but it may be too little of a challenge. However, I challenge the industry and all members present to better that so that we can ensure that tourism really makes a contribution.

It was somewhat sad to see that tourism, which had for many years exceeded all other sectors in its levels of growth, was knocked into second place this year by the financial services industry. I was glad to see growth in financial services, but I would like the growth in the two sectors to be on a level pegging because both sectors are important to the Scottish economy and supportive of one another.

I thank members for supporting the committee's report and I thank my committee colleagues and all who gave evidence to us. I support the motion.

Promoting Scotland Worldwide

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2806, in the name of John Swinney, on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee, on the committee's first report of 2005, "An Inquiry into the Promotion of Scotland Worldwide: the Strategy, Policy and Activities of the Scottish Executive".

15:54

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I welcome this debate on the report of the European and External Relations Committee inquiry into the promotion of Scotland worldwide. The committee decided on its extensive inquiry in September 2003, before I became its convener, so I pay tribute to the committee for its vision in embarking on such a task. I also thank the committee's members and clerks and the witnesses who contributed so much to the final outcome. The committee's decision to approach the task in such detail over 18 months is a mark of how concerned it was about the nature and scale of the Executive's approach to the promotion of Scotland.

At paragraph 7 in the report, the committee characterises its conclusions as "constructive criticism". In his published response, the minister acknowledged the spirit in which our views were expressed. However, I am disappointed that he chose to reject a number of the committee's central recommendations, which were made in that spirit of constructive criticism. Nonetheless, the committee takes the view that the establishment of the inquiry acted as a catalyst for the development of the Executive's thinking in this key area of policy. In short, the committee believes that the Executive would not have moved as far or as fast as it has on the issue had it not been for the way in which the inquiry focused minds.

Generally, the committee's report welcomed the Executive's initial work on the promotion of Scotland worldwide, including the publication of its European and international strategies during the inquiry. Despite the publication of the two strategies, the committee had two main, significant criticisms of the Executive's approach in this area. First, it concluded that there was a need to tighten the focus of and co-ordination among the various agencies involved. Secondly, it believed that there was scope for the Executive to demonstrate greater ambition in the promotion of Scotland.

The committee welcomed the progress that the Scottish Executive has made, especially the development of the international strategy, but recommended that the strategy be reviewed after

general consultation and that a revised strategy be published before the summer recess. The committee believes that a revised strategy, putting greater emphasis on co-ordination among agencies, strengthening the delivery of initiatives and achieving higher ambitions is required. Ministers have chosen not to take that course. I hope that Mr McCabe will set out why the Executive takes the view that a review of the strategy is not necessary.

To assist in the development of the strategy and to give much-needed focus to the Executive's international activities, the committee recommended that, without increasing the number of Executive ministers, the responsibilities of existing ministers should be reallocated to enable the appointment of one minister with responsibility for all European and external affairs issues. At present, seven Executive ministers have some responsibility for an aspect of external relations issues, with Mr McCabe in the lead. The problem is that Mr McCabe's remit is not sufficiently comprehensive and that other ministers have significant leadership responsibility for major activities that fall within the area of external relations.

The committee finds it difficult to accept the defence of the current position offered by Mr McCabe, who told us that

"it is important that we retain within one portfolio the ability to take an overarching look at all those activities and to assess the total sum of that activity."—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee, 7 December 2004; c 1016.*]

Given the significant domestic responsibilities that the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform has, we do not believe that he can provide the necessary focus in such an important area of policy, no matter how hard he works.

The committee recommended that ministers undertake a review of civil service and agency structures, with a view to improving co-ordination and implementation of policy in the area. Part of the lack of focus in implementing the Government's strategy comes from a lack of focus in the civil service and agency organisation, where complexity often comes ahead of streamlined, effective decision making. The same point was made in relation to the Scottish international forum, which, to be charitable, includes absolutely everyone imaginable who could be involved in external relations. To describe it as a talking shop would be a generous compliment. I am glad that the minister has signalled his desire to re-examine the forum. We look forward to monitoring progress in that area.

The committee recommended that the Executive review all its current overseas offices and representations over a two-year period, to create a

more inclusive structure that enables greater co-ordination. We see opportunities to build a greater common identity and platform for the promotion of Scotland by comparable marketing and promotion through offices, regardless of whether those are led by the Executive, Scottish Development International, VisitScotland or another agency. I am pleased that the minister has signalled that the Executive intends to travel in that direction. The committee is also pleased that the Executive has welcomed our view that, where additional representative offices can add value and be a cost-effective means of implementing the Government's international, European and economic development strategies, consideration should be given to putting them in place. The committee extends a warm welcome to the establishment of an Executive office in Beijing, to build on the experience and achievements of the Washington office.

No debate on the promotion of Scotland would be complete without some remarks on Scotland's image. The committee was keen to ensure that the Executive settled on the use of an identifiable logo that would promote Scotland in a consistent fashion throughout the agencies of Government. We recommended that the logo should consist of the saltire or incorporate it into a contemporary statement. I am glad to see that the Executive is pursuing that. Without getting into a stylistic debate about logo design, which is an immensely dangerous prospect for any of us, I welcome the direction that the Executive is taking.

Some of the fruits of that work emerged in the past few days, in Councillor Eric Milligan's report of the review of first impressions of Scotland, published by the Executive. I hope that the steps that have been taken and announced by the minister in the past few days will be entrenched by further initiatives in due course.

The committee felt that more ambition could be demonstrated in the promotion of Scotland in the field of external relations. We have a heaven-sent opportunity to promote Scotland. We have an historical identity that is much admired around the world. We have traditional icons that other countries would die for. We have a new Parliament that attracts worldwide attention. We have contemporary icons in the fields of industry, innovation, sport, culture and the artistic world that can create a tremendous blend. We hope that those great virtues will be given focus and support by the Executive to guarantee the effective promotion of Scotland worldwide. That is the task on which my committee has focused and I hope that the Executive will now act to deliver for Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the European and External Relations Committee's 1st Report 2005 (Session 2): *An Inquiry into the Promotion of Scotland Worldwide: the Strategy, Policy and Activities of the Scottish Executive* (SP Paper 297).

16:01

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): In this second session of our new Parliament, Scottish ministers have made it a priority to promote Scotland's place in the world. We have shown our determination to build on the confidence and enthusiasm that our maturing constitutional arrangements have created in Scotland and to take advantage of the interest that has been generated outwith our border. So we have aimed, and we will aim higher. We have taken and we will take action to make our activity more strategic. We have worked and we will work hard with partners to make it more effective.

I give just three specific examples that benchmark our activity not even as far back as 1999, but since the European and External Relations Committee launched its inquiry into the promotion of Scotland worldwide in 2003. We have published strategies showing how we will pursue Scotland's interests in Europe and internationally. The First Minister has launched the Scotland's international image initiative to promote modern Scotland overseas, as well as the fresh talent scheme to attract talented people to live, work and study in Scotland. Most recently, as John Swinney rightly mentioned, on Friday last week, the First Minister and I launched a new advertising campaign for airport and other arrival gateways, designed to promote Scotland to visitors arriving here and to ensure that Scots know that tourism is everyone's business and that we all have a duty to welcome visitors to Scotland.

Scotland has great international advantages. We have a powerful international image, which is the envy of many other countries. We have a reputation for international engagement and achievement and a tradition of trade and international investment. Those advantages serve Scotland well, but we know that there is no room for complacency. We need to tell the world about our traditions, but we also need to promote contemporary Scotland. In so doing, we need to demonstrate that a devolved Scotland is increasingly outward looking and engaged in Europe and the wider world.

The range of activity shows how internationally engaged Scotland is. The breadth of the activity undertaken by the Executive and its agencies ensures benefits for Scotland. That is demonstrated in a number of ways: by our co-operative relationships with other countries and regions of Europe; by our offices in Brussels and

Washington and the forthcoming office in Beijing; by the increased presence of staff in SDI offices overseas to develop Scotland's business relationships; by the plans that we have developed to show the best of Scotland to the delegates and journalists attending the G8 summit in July; by our work with British embassies and consulates to celebrate St Andrew's day on every continent; and by an intensified focus on tartan week in the United States, including events to promote Scottish science, business, education and culture.

As members might know, we have commissioned an external analysis of our activities during tartan week, and are actively considering how we can sharpen our focus within the United States. That means thinking about how we improve the profile not just of our country's traditions, but of what our country can offer academia and business in the US.

Further afield, we have allocated £12 million over the next four years to promote the traditions of Scotland's involvement with sub-Saharan Africa and will ensure that that money is used to best effect in complementing the United Kingdom Government's on-going work. As the First Minister's forthcoming visit to Malawi demonstrates, the process has already begun.

The European and External Relations Committee's report is a constructive contribution to the process of finding out how we can do more—and better—in this area. As John Swinney has rightly acknowledged, we are acting on a number of the committee's recommendations and look forward to continuing to work with the committee and the Parliament towards achieving the high ambitions for Scotland that they share with us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Before I call Richard Lochhead to open for the Scottish National Party, I advise members that time is now much tighter and that four minutes in this debate will mean four minutes.

16:06

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate the committee on its report. As I sat on the committee for much of the evidence taking, I have paid close attention to the matter. However, it is a pity that we have been given only four or five minutes to speak on a report that has taken a year and a half to put together.

There is cross-party agreement that we must promote Scotland effectively. As has already been mentioned, doing so has huge benefits for tourism and the wider economy; enables us to foster cultural and social ties with other nations around the world; and gives us political influence over some of the decisions that shape our lives. Moreover, having a positive image overseas can

help to foster self-confidence and give us a positive self-image in Scotland.

Of course, the SNP believes that independence is the best way of supporting our country overseas. After all, that would give us status, respect and a voice on the international stage and would allow us to build an overseas infrastructure through which to make representations on behalf of our national interests. However, now that we have our own Government and Parliament, the SNP and others agree that devolution offers us tremendous opportunities to promote Scotland overseas.

The key is to capitalise on the enormous international good will that exists towards this country. Indeed, members who travelled overseas to take evidence for the inquiry were struck by the reservoir of warmth that they encountered in the countries that they visited. I visited Paris and Dublin and other members visited other places. The great warmth for Scotland is clear to anyone who travels overseas.

However, there is a feeling that, as far as representing Scotland overseas is concerned. Government ministers over the past six years have been too timid, overcautious and willing only to put their toes in the water. Much of the feedback that the committee received suggested that we are not capitalising on or exploiting the good will that I mentioned. For example, people sense that there has been a lack of co-ordination among many Government initiatives. Up to now, we have had Scotland in Sweden, Scotland in the Netherlands and Scotland in Catalonia and low-key, low-level trade agreements have been made with places such as Tuscany, Bavaria and other German Länder. During the inquiry, many organisations, particularly those in the business community, asked the committee about the overriding theme of all these initiatives; what they were trying to achieve; what has been achieved; and who follows up these visits and agreements. I am pleased that the committee report addresses those questions in some detail. Now the minister, too, must do so.

As John Swinney said in his opening speech on behalf of the committee, the sensible way of addressing that lack of co-ordination is to have a dedicated European and external relations minister. Heaven knows what overseas representatives think when the minister with responsibility for these matters and his deputy are introduced as the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform and the Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform. Indeed, our minister with responsibility for international development, who I believe is Patricia Ferguson, is the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. Instead, we should follow other sub-national countries or stateless nations such as Flanders

and have our own ministers for European affairs or external relations. Such a move would offer political leadership and co-ordination.

If we want to have a distinctive message and image, we need a distinctive overseas presence. That is what stateless nations elsewhere do. In the same way as there are Ireland houses and Flanders houses, there should be Scotland houses that would act as a one-stop shop, raise our profile and bring together everyone who represents Scotland overseas.

The overwhelming feedback is that, over the past six years, we have been too cautious. Huge opportunities for Scotland remain untapped. We can exploit them to the full, for the good of our economy and our own self-confidence. I urge ministers not just to dip their toe in the water as they have done in the past six years, but to jump in and make a splash on behalf of Scotland overseas. If ministers choose to do that, even with the limited powers that they have under devolution, they will have the SNP's support.

16:10

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): As John Swinney and Richard Lochhead have said, this was a protracted report, worked on over a fairly lengthy period—16 months. Much happened during that time, but perhaps nothing was more important than the publication of the Executive's international strategy. John Swinney mentioned that too. I believe that the work of the committee hastened that strategy. However, the strategy is not set in stone; if it is to have value, it will have to be continually monitored and revisited.

I want to use my time to concentrate on some evidence that the committee heard that was not greatly highlighted in its report. One evidence session dealt with the demise of Scotland the Brand. That organisation was doing quite well. It had 400 members and was promoting around 19 million items. The committee heard that the reason for the organisation's demise was that there was an overlap with Government thinking. A change of direction at the centre undermined Scotland the Brand's ability to continue in its role. We lost something pretty successful, and that seems a shame. Perhaps the organisation was promoting Scotland's traditional image, but it was finding value in so doing.

In evidence to the committee, Alan Wilson of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry asked:

"Are we making the most of our limited resources and obtaining value for money? Are project and initiative objectives clear and outcomes openly evaluated? Are projects and links openly evaluated in monetary cost and economic value terms? Do all stakeholders ... fit into the

process? Being kind, the answer is we don't know. Being realistic, the answer is no."

Those comments, coming as they do from the SCDI, are cause for concern. However, if the committee's report and the minister's reaction to it lead to something concrete, and if we can work together to set realistic objectives that bear fruit, the work will have been worth while.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh noted that there was a need for more co-ordination among organisations across the board.

I was most interested in the evidence that was given by Shirley Bell of the Robert Burns World Federation. She was looking towards 2009 and the 250th anniversary of Burns's birth in Alloway. She complained that there was no joined-up thinking on the event. Mr McCabe says that he has decided not to promote the idea of having a minister for Europe, and he justifies his comment by saying that the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport has a role to play in that area. I hope that in the not-too-distant future we will have some reward for our recent interest in Burns's cottage in Alloway and I hope that people will get their act together by 2009.

I have much more that I would like to say but other members will no doubt pick up on various points. I will make a final point on the fresh talent initiative, which our report refers to. There may be no need to go into detail at the moment, but the committee is determined to continue an investigation into fresh talent. I welcome that and hope that the minister will too.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Four members wish to speak and they have a strict four minutes each.

16:14

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): When it comes to the subject of how Scotland is promoted, certain things stand out. First, the Executive is undoubtedly moving in the right direction. It has a European strategy and it has an international strategy. Like all such documents, sometimes they can be long on platitudes and short on detail, but they show a welcome awareness that the promotion of Scotland is an issue that we need to tackle in a positive way. We should welcome the Executive's stated objective

"to position Scotland internationally as a leading small nation."

Secondly, there is a challenge in fulfilling that objective—the challenge of how Scotland, as a small nation that has a parliamentary legislative body, but which operates within a devolved framework, can find its place in the world. That is a new challenge.

The example of Ireland is often cited; I think that Henry McLeish dealt with it at some length in the evidence that he gave to the committee. I do not mean to be confrontational but, as soon as Ireland is mentioned, people who have a different perspective on nationalism sometimes suggest that the Irish case proves that objectives to do with a country's promotion can be properly achieved only within the framework of independence. I do not accept that, although I understand the argument's superficial attractiveness. If, for a variety of reasons, nationalism is not the right way forward—which, of course, is my belief—I hope that we will all accept that the challenge for us now is to improve the promotion of Scotland in the existing situation; in that regard, I was glad to hear what Richard Lochhead said. All of us accept that that can and needs to be done.

Thirdly, even within the existing strategy, it must be accepted that we could do more and that we should do what we do better. The criticism that we received from a number of sources is worth considering. There were complaints about a lack of proper evaluation and a lack of control. Some people complained that the strategy was too bitty and a general criticism ran through the evidence—which I re-examined today—that there was an absence of proper joined-up thinking. Oddly enough, I do not take all that as being major criticism. I accept that we are making a start, although I am sure that the minister and the Executive would in turn accept that much requires to be thought through and put into practice. I hope that the minister will also accept that all the criticism that we received in evidence was genuinely constructive and was made with a great deal of good will.

What can be done? There is my boring, oft-repeated request for a dedicated minister; I am not suggesting that Tom McCabe is not dedicated, but I agree with our committee's convener that we should have a minister who is responsible solely for such matters rather than one who tries to deal with them as part of a massive portfolio. I do not expect Tom McCabe to agree with that, but he knows that that is what I think.

There are ways of giving encouragement outwith the Executive. I will make a 20-second plug for the Scotland Funds, which is a company of which I am a director, so I declare an interest. The Scotland Funds is a non-political company that seeks to tap into the Scottish diaspora. If members want to know how non-political it is, I can tell them that its directors go from Alex Neil to Murdo Fraser—one cannot find a much more non-political outfit than that. It is unashamedly copying the hugely successful Ireland Funds, which has raised huge amounts of money for projects in Ireland from the country's wealthy diaspora. The Scottish diaspora in America is the wealthiest group of immigrants in

that country. Our efforts are being made with the blessing and the help of the Executive and with the support of private industry based in Scotland. I think that the Scotland Funds will make an important contribution to the work of promoting Scotland. The company is an example of how Scotland must advance using a variety of initiatives.

Positioning Scotland in the wider world is a difficult task, but I believe it to be important and worth while.

16:18

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):

When the G8 comes to Scotland in July, two things will happen within seven days. The first is that Scotland will see an influx of hundreds of thousands of people into Edinburgh, other cities and the countryside; however, my point is not about the protests. Simultaneously, millions of people around the world will log on to websites to find out what is happening in Scotland. They will go to all sorts of websites, including those of ZDNet, Indymedia UK, Democracy Now! and the BBC. During that week, Indymedia UK will provide live stream from Gleneagles, Dungavel and the streets of Edinburgh, where we hope there will be a carnival atmosphere.

A preoccupation of the report is the angst-ridden crisis of identity—the preoccupation with how people see us. It is fair to say that most of the millions of people who will log on to the websites will not have heard of Scotland—they will not know where Scotland is.

I have been in the same position when logging on to find out what is happening in other parts of the world where events or protests are to take place. In fact, given the publicity that the G8 protest is getting on the websites I mentioned, perhaps VisitScotland should take a pop-up advert on them with a wee map that shows where we are and the VisitScotland e-mail address.

When I was part of a group that met the minister to discuss the matter, I was pleasantly surprised to hear that, although VisitScotland might not be totally on the ball, it is offering a package to protesters. Certainly, we seem to be moving with the times.

In his opening remarks, the minister said that we must answer the question of what Scotland's place in the world is. We need to show people what contemporary Scotland is like. I want to ask how Scotland will be seen during and after the G8 summit. As yet, the penny has not dropped about how much focus will be on Scotland in the seven days of the summit.

I hope that Scotland will be seen as a progressive country that welcomes the type of people who will come to our country at that time. I hope that our reputation will be that of a country that is progressive on issues such as justice and world poverty. It is important that we are seen in that way. Indeed—dare I say it—the people who will come to Scotland in July are part of an emerging market. They are part of a movement that numbers millions of people and makes pilgrimages to places in the world that are viewed as being progressive, whose people fight for poverty and welcome the ideas that the movement represents.

I am thinking of cities where the world social forum has met, such as Porto Allegro, Mumbai, Paris, London and Athens, all of which now have that recognition factor. I would like to think that Scotland will come out of the G8 with that recognition factor, too. I hope that we will be seen as a welcoming place that this huge umbrella of a movement will want to visit. I also hope that Scotland will be seen as a place that can host and organise the sort of event that the movement needs.

Who belongs to the movement? It includes Nobel prize-winning writers, scholars, scientists and ecologists—all sorts of people are involved in it. I make the serious proposal that Scotland should consider holding the next meeting of the world social forum. One hundred thousand people were in Mumbai and in Porto Allegro—indeed, the meeting that was held in Porto Allegro put it on the map internationally; people know where it is on the map and they want to go there. I want Scotland to emerge as that sort of place. The 21st century presents Scotland with the big opportunity of taking its place as a country that has embraced that type of progressive identity.

16:23

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I am sure that Gordon Jackson and others will be pleased to hear that I will not go down the constitutional route in my speech. My views are well known in that respect; I do not have to rehearse them in the debate today.

I want to address my remarks to the report, which is one of the most significant that has been placed before the chamber in the history of the Parliament. Some of its recommendations are essential for the reputation of the Parliament, including what may happen at the G8 summit, to which I will return.

The committee started with the question how we should promote Scotland in the international community. I became fed up with some of the witnesses who kept saying that we have to get

away from tartan, shortbread, haggis and whisky, the producers of which happen to be major employers in my constituency.

I am proud of the fact that, everywhere I go in the world, produce from my constituency is sold at airports. The question is how we combine tradition with the new. Tom McCabe was accurate in saying that we need to combine our traditions with what is new. We should be proud of what is happening in Scotland and of our vibrant contemporary culture.

We are the newest Parliament in the whole of the Commonwealth and yet we have already made a major contribution to the international debate. The combination of the traditional and the new is the real challenge to which all of us—not solely the Executive, but all of us—must rise. We do not want a Brigadoon image, nor do we want to ignore new opportunities. We have to combine them.

I pay particular attention to the recommendation in paragraph 218 on page 29 of our report, on international development. I am glad that the minister with responsibility for international development is in her seat. All of us who attended the meeting in the chamber on Monday realised what a watershed it was for this Parliament, not just because of Sir Bob Geldof—emotional and inspiring though he was—but because of the contributions that were made by representatives of civic society from throughout Scotland and the world.

We can make an improvement. The previous debate was about structural changes. John Swinney and Gordon Jackson referred to the fact that seven ministers have various responsibilities in the international field. It is important that we examine that and try to tighten it up. We have an excellent external liaison unit in this Parliament, whose people work hard and do a great deal with inward and outward delegations.

In the context of the G8, this Parliament should recognise that the countries that have already donated 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product are small northern European nations—Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. I hope that this Parliament will give the minister additional powers to ensure that we achieve that objective too.

16:26

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): In his covering letter to the Executive's response to the European and External Relations Committee's report, Tom McCabe stated:

"The work of promoting Scotland is not a project we can ever regard as complete."

That is the proper attitude, and it obviously pervades the Scottish Executive. While we should never feel that we have completed the project, our collective efforts must never be diminished. Time will tell, but we have already demonstrated that the committee's inquiry and production of a report were useful exercises. The report should not be read in isolation, but in conjunction with the Executive's response.

There is no need to revisit the points that members made in the previous debate about the importance of properly promoting Scotland—in a hugely and increasingly competitive marketplace—in such a way that all our communities benefit. However, one highlight should be mentioned in relation to recent success in promoting Scotland as a must-visit and accessible destination, and that is the air route development fund. That fund has been welcomed by all parties, with the noble exception of the Green party, which frankly was all at sea in the previous debate.

The air route development fund is a substantial fund of around £13 million and we are already reaping its fruits. We must continue to invest in our air links to ensure ease of access to our main hubs. As the numbers who come through the hubs increase, all parts of Scotland benefit. As a member who represents a constituency that is a few hundred miles west of this place, I know that it is essential that Glasgow and Edinburgh—I had better include Prestwick, as I am in the presence of Irene Oldfather—are increasingly busy gateways to Scotland.

I bring to the minister's attention the fact that the air route development fund has never been used for intra-Scotland routes, but that is actively being pursued as a means of opening an air link between Aberdeen and Stornoway. That is of primary importance to my constituents, but it would also benefit the tourism industry. If the main hubs are busy and continue to grow the number of people who come through their arrival gates, by definition more people can potentially be dispersed to all parts of Scotland. I endorse what Susan Deacon said in the previous debate about the importance of Edinburgh and Glasgow in that regard.

I turn to our recommendation

"that Ministers review the relationship between VisitScotland and VisitBritain and the agreement on their respective roles in the promotion of Scotland overseas."

That matter is well in hand. We appreciate that VisitScotland's marketing budget increased by 28 per cent last year. International passenger surveys for 2004 show that European Union and non-EU visitor numbers have increased by 13 per cent more than the UK average. A few members are always squeamish when they hear the words

“Britain” or “British” in the name of any organisation that is charged with promoting the United Kingdom and Scotland, but I am delighted that VisitScotland and VisitBritain have agreed their new arrangements, which came into effect last April. VisitBritain is right to focus its promotion on the emerging long-haul markets such as China and India, which allows VisitScotland to focus on promoting our distinctive Scottish brand in mainland Europe and other places that are closer.

I will make a brief reference to Richard Lochhead's obsession with offices and headquarters, which was a feature of his convenership of our committee—thankfully that feature has not continued under John Swinney's convenership. Given that we need a prudent and commonsense approach to spending valuable resources, we must continue to make good use of the 234 Foreign and Commonwealth Office embassies throughout the world.

It is heartening to note that the Executive's response to most of our recommendations began with the word “agree”. I cannot think of a better way of bringing my speech to a close.

16:31

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I have listened to the debate with considerable interest. The reason why I am on my feet is this debate's link to the previous one. I put on record my praise for John Swinney and the other members of the European and External Relations Committee for what is a thoughtful report—it is clear that a considerable amount of deliberation went into it.

As a highlander, I sometimes, in my darker moments, resent the fact that our tartan, whisky, hills and glens are used to advertise Scotland. On the other hand, I think, “Why not?” If Scotland wants to stand tall—as we should—the world should see us as a liberal, international, generous and thoughtful nation. We have great foundations on which to build. In the city of Mumbai—or Bombay, as it was—in India, one of the central streets is Lamington Street, which is named after Lord Lamington, who was governor-general of Bombay in his day. In my home town of Tain, we have a Lamington Street. I mention that because it shows that Scotland's imprint is all over the world.

Frances Curran said that many people will ask, “Where is Scotland?” or “What is Scotland?”, but, with all due deference to the member, I am not sure that that is the case. As other members have mentioned, we have an invaluable cast-iron image. When people hear the word “Scotland”, they think of whisky, tartan, silver bagpipes, music and the hills and glens. That is fine in my book, but we should work and build on that image. I suspect

that, given the gist of the debate, that sentiment is shared by all members. We agree that it will not do to look back and present an image of Scotland based on Harry Lauder with his crooked stick. However, we also agree that, if we build on the foundations of the past, we can forge ahead.

My one comment about John Swinney's excellent speech is that, although I understand the Scottish National Party's wish to brand Scotland with one logo, one saltire and one map, as a highlander from the north of Scotland, I take issue with that. That goes back to my argument in the previous debate about the facets of a diamond. People in Caithness take issue with people who lump them in with Scots speakers, because the Caithness dialect is different. If the Scottish National Party recognised the differences, I would be better disposed towards that idea.

Mr Swinney: I ask Mr Stone to reflect on the fact that I was merely representing the conclusions of the European and External Relations Committee, which were unanimously agreed by members of all political persuasions. I was not making a point on behalf of my party.

Mr Stone: That is a worthwhile reply—I applaud it in the spirit in which it was offered. However, to become the more feral member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, I must ask where Scotland is within the world community. I point out to the members of the Scottish National Party that my comment that we should be liberal and international flies in the face of the independence movement. We live in an increasingly one-world situation with an increasingly international or global community—it is a bit like chaos theory in that whatever is done on one side of the globe can affect what happens on the other side.

If mankind and the world are to survive and prosper, the nations must link hands and work together—that might not be music to Phil Gallie's ears, of course. That is why, I am afraid, that the jury is out on the Scottish independence movement. I have worse news for my friends in the Scottish National Party. They should ask themselves which way the young people they met on the doorsteps during the election campaign were going. They might not necessarily have been going in the direction of the Liberal Democrats but they were certainly not going for separatism. That is something that will have to be readdressed by the SNP. I know that we should not believe everything that we read in the papers—just look at the debate that is being had around the Scottish Liberal Democrat Party leadership situation—but the issue that I raise is a valid one.

If Scotland is to have a context in the world, it is to do with holding out the hand of friendship and co-operation to other nations. That is, possibly, a debate that we should all have in due course.

This Parliament and, indeed, all Scots have a habit of selling ourselves short. For example, Mr Salmond used a great Scottish word when he said that he was scunnered with the Scottish Parliament building. Why can Mr Salmond not just rest that issue? As has been rightly said by members of the SNP benches, this is a building of which we should be proud—look at the visitors that we have had this very day. We should not sell ourselves short or cheapen the product. What we have is excellent and first rate. We should be bold enough to live up to what we inherit and what we shall have in the future. That is Scotland's future in the world.

16:40

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

To come back to the issue of Scotland's image abroad, I take the opportunity to thank all those who have contributed towards the preparation of this report. Not being a member of the committee, the issues in the report were new to me when I read through it briefly in advance of this debate. Perhaps what I take from it is somewhat different from what is taken from it by those who have applied themselves to its preparation over a considerable period.

The first thing that I take from it is that no political party or organisation has a monopoly on the solutions to the question of how we ensure that Scotland is perceived as a modern, dynamic nation. Yes, we have our tartan and shortbread image, which is something that we must play on; we can turn our back on no advantage. At the same time, however, the Conservative party has always believed that, to make Scotland's presence abroad as strong as possible, we must have an image of being a modern and dynamic economy. That is why I will return to the criticism that we have levelled in many other debates on many other subjects and suggest that the best way to ensure that we have that image is for the Scottish Executive to ensure that Scotland has that modern and dynamic economy, which we all want it to have.

Some of the recommendations in the report are things that we should all understand. Having listened to Richard Lochhead's contribution, much of which I agree with—although I will never agree that independence would make things better for Scotland because I suspect that it would have exactly the reverse effect—I believe that it is important that we and the Executive accept the report's recommendation that we actively encourage United Kingdom organisations that have a significant part to play in how Scotland is perceived to understand what there is to promote about Scotland and to go out and actively promote it. We need to ensure that those organisations do

that because, as an active participant in the UK, Scotland pays its taxes and should expect such bodies to work for us as well.

There is always an argument against duplication. In the context of this debate, I would say that duplication can be a problem when we seek to promote Scotland in ways that should really be managed by the UK Government. Again, I do not believe that Scotland needs an embassy in every capital and perhaps some more besides, but we need to concentrate on how Scotland is promoted abroad. I was interested to read an article in the Daily Express that concerned Jack McConnell's attempt to promote Scotland by claiming that it is the best small nation in the world. I am happy to support Jack McConnell in that—we aspire to be the best small nation in the world, even if we are not quite there yet. The irony is that that story highlighted some of the ignorance that exists abroad. I was interested to read that a Mike Tait, a spokesman for the Jersey Tourist Board, suggested that Jersey was also an important place because it had some great cows and some very tasty potatoes. My experience is that Scotland also has some great cows and some very tasty potatoes; perhaps we need to promote those in Jersey as well as the other way round.

Mr Stone: The potatoes are rubbish.

Alex Johnstone: I object to the intervention from the man seated in the centre of the front bench today, saying that our potatoes are rubbish.

Mr Stone: No, I was referring to the Jersey potatoes.

Alex Johnstone: I thank him for that clarification.

As we have gone through the debate, we have covered not only a number of issues that are relevant to the report, but a number that, although they are not in the report, are equally relevant to the subject. In particular, I mention Frances Curran's comments on the G8 summit. She went to great lengths to suggest that Scotland's image might be affected by what goes on during that summit. I am particularly concerned about that too, but perhaps for a slightly different reason.

As a member of the Church of Scotland and one who believes that it has done some excellent work over the years, I believe that Scotland's image is pure when it comes to work on poverty, particularly in places such as Africa. We have an awful lot to offer on that subject during the G8 summit and the debates that it will stimulate, but I worry that the image of Scotland that is portrayed during the summit might be one of loud reactionaries out on the streets making points that are more relevant to their own prejudices than to the traditions of the country. For that reason, I hope that we will take advantage of the summit in

the right way and not end up damaging the image of Scotland that we want to portray abroad.

16:42

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): The Scottish National Party came into the debate fully supporting the report and it still does, but I am rather surprised that some members have spent more time attacking the party's policy, which is not on the agenda, than supporting the committee's work, which is on the agenda. Our position was outlined eloquently not only by my colleague, Richard Lochhead, who advanced it, but by John Swinney, who put forward a consensus to which we are happy to sign up. The committee's work is not the Scottish National Party's view per se, but we are happy to support it as it is an advance on the current situation.

John Swinney was right to point out two key matters: we must be tighter, better focused and more co-ordinated; and, perhaps most important, we need greater ambition. I was disappointed that we had from the minister a mantra of further strategies, more advertising and the fresh talent initiative. Those are all praiseworthy to some extent, but I remain to be convinced that they will deliver. Even if the minister is not prepared to accept the view that the SNP expresses, I ask that he take into consideration the many valid points that Mr Jackson made. Those points were part and parcel of the committee's report and we are happy to sign up to them.

Mr Jackson also commented on the SNP's position, which is clear: we believe that Scotland would be better as an independent nation and would be better served by being represented abroad, as are the Republic of Ireland and other independent nations. However, that is not currently on the agenda. The SNP is a democratic party and accepts the current constitutional basis, but it believes that the country can and should do better and considers the activities of other legislatures, such as those on which Mr Lochhead commented, that are doing far better—whether that is Quebec with its *légations* or Flanders with Export Vlaanderen.

Some of Mr Stone's speech was rather bizarre. He mentioned our chamber, which is a wonderful auditorium, but it should be much more than simply a venue for Sir Bob Geldof, much as we welcome him.

Mr Stone: Will Mr MacAskill give way?

Mr MacAskill: Not at the moment, I am sorry; time is constrained.

Neither should the chamber simply be an auditorium for the leaders of the G8 to parade around. The minister and I have debated the cost-

benefit analysis of the G8 summit, but it is coming and we must get the benefit of it. It is not simply about the venue that we provide; it is about how we as a nation participate in the world.

Mr Stone: Will the member give way?

Mr MacAskill: Not at the moment.

Our responsibility as a nation is not just to do what we can within the devolution settlement to make Scotland a better nation at home; it is about how we allow our nation to participate abroad. We must enhance what we have at home in the way of export and trade because we are a small nation that requires to trade to survive and we are situated on the periphery of western Europe and of a major trading bloc. Our responsibility is also about how we participate in the matters that were highlighted this week by Sir Bob Geldof. We cannot simply be spectators in the 21st century. It is our duty and obligation to participate in such events. We must raise our game. We can and do accept the constitutional arrangements—those are subject to debate at future elections and constitutional referenda or whatever other occasions—but we can do better.

I accept some of the points made by the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform that there has been progress. As far as Scotland is concerned, the glass is certainly half full, not half empty. Mr Morrison was quite correct to say that the air route development fund has been an exceptionally good thing for Scotland. There has been an enhancement to tartan day—it is getting better. We can dispute its Brigadoon image, but it is clearly a magnet for bringing in people from the Scottish diaspora. There have been improvements, but we can and should be doing more. We can do things better and we should be reaping the rewards; other countries do so, and benefit, from a far lower juncture.

It is about being able to participate. We do not have to recreate offices here, there and everywhere but, leaving aside the influence of Susan Stewart, structure and strategy are clearly important. One of our major failings in the United States is that we do not have the structure in place there. We do not seek to expand the bureaucracy per se, but one person cannot operate in isolation. The Executive should consider the points made by the former First Minister, Henry McLeish. Structure is as vital as strategy. We need to have a strategy, but we also need the structures to allow it to operate successfully. Susan Stewart was isolated. I believe she was much maligned—I never saw her do anything wrong. We must ensure that we have the apparatus that goes, perhaps not with a nation state, but with a devolved legislature that wishes to play a successful role in the modern world.

16:47

Mr McCabe: As is usual on such occasions, we have not had enough time to discuss a very important subject. The European and External Relations Committee was particularly thoughtful in drawing up its report, which took so long to produce, and the committee's deliberations were themselves thoughtful and lengthy. I and the Executive very much appreciate the committee's work. I personally appreciate very much the way in which the committee convener has gone about his work. I accept what he says about the need for constructive criticism. The Executive recognises that it should be able to take on and absorb constructive criticism, and it is important to put that on record.

Gordon Jackson said that we are at the start of a process. I deliberately started my earlier speech with the words:

"In this second session of our new Parliament".

Six years into devolution, it is important that we put this in context. We are at the start of a process. Our constitutional arrangements are maturing; our standing in the world is improving; and our efforts to improve that standing in the world are increasing all the time. I hope and think that, when I spoke earlier, I demonstrated the range of activities that are now taking place, with the offices in Washington, the future office in Beijing and the other things to which I referred, which illustrate how the breadth of our activities is increasing all the time, as it will continue to do. Alasdair Morrison was right to say that we will always develop. That is the point that I am trying to make. This country is at the start of a very exciting journey. Our constitutional arrangements will transform our standing in the world and the opportunities that are available for our people. The Executive recognises the critical importance of sticking to the task and improving the situation.

Sometimes, we hear surprising and revealing things during debates. I heard Frances Curran talk about, and accept, that there is a market out there. The idea that she has been converted to the realities of a market-driven world is very special. We should mark that in the debate.

Richard Lochhead mentioned that independence might increase our representation abroad, but the debate is in no way about our constitutional arrangements. If anything has struck me as I have travelled on the Executive's behalf, it is the tremendous support that we receive from our embassies and consulates and the wide variety of United Kingdom offices around the world. There are 827 United Kingdom bodies worldwide and we have access to every one. We have access to a range of consulates and embassies that are among the highest regarded of any country. If we are serious about our ambitions to expand

Scotland's role in the world, it would be lunacy to disengage ourselves from that critically important network.

Mr Swinney: In the report, the committee says that the Executive should remind the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of its responsibility to promote Scotland as part of its general activities. How does the Executive monitor the effectiveness of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the many other agencies that it talks to in promoting Scotland overseas?

Mr McCabe: We engage constantly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That dialogue is important. It is important for us to understand that department's enthusiasm. I tell members in all sincerity that I have never met a representative in any of our consulates or embassies around the world who is not enthusiastic about the opportunities that devolution offers and who is not willing to help us to promote those opportunities. We will continue to progress the dialogue with those offices around the world. I know from experience that they are keen to do that.

Mr Swinney raised several issues about the recommendations that the Executive did not accept. It is important to mention them briefly. We did not accept the recommendation that the international strategy needs more ambition or should provide more detail, simply because of the inherent recognition that it is a living document. We accept that the aims in the document will always be subject to review. We will always be alive to the fact that when change is needed, it will take place.

There is no shortage of ambition. As I said, we have shown that from the range of activities in which we have engaged and from the resources that we have applied. I assure members that the multiyear delivery plans that support our detailed co-ordination of Scotland's activities will ensure that our ambition is driven forward for our engagement throughout the world.

We also rejected the recommendation to appoint one minister for European and external relations issues. I say sincerely that what matters is not a minister's title, but the actions that a minister takes. If we as a small country are to achieve maximum impact for our work, it is critical that every minister in the Executive plays a part in promoting the country abroad. That is the approach that we will take. The aim is not to create silos or empires, but to drive forward Scotland's position and standing in the world. The Executive believes that that will be best served by every minister knowing that they have a role to play in that activity.

The strategy that we have produced, the activities in which we are engaged and in which

we will engage in months and years to come, our co-operation agreements with Bavaria, North Rhine Westphalia, Catalonia and Tuscany and the work that we are prepared to do on the United States will advance the country's standing in the world. That will not only attract tourists, but promote the work of our universities and the opportunities that are available for our people, attract people to bring work here for our people and convince the world that we played a marvellous part in its development in the past and that we intend to play an equally marvellous part in future.

16:54

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):

The debate has been constructive and has drawn together just under two years of work by the committee. As committee members have said, a great deal of progress has been made during our deliberations. An international strategy has been produced and there has been a commitment to international development. As a number of members—Gordon Jackson, John Swinney, Alasdair Morrison and Margaret Ewing—have said, those moves have been welcomed by the committee and the Parliament.

I am one of the few original members of the committee and have to reflect on how far the Parliament has travelled on such matters. I cannot imagine such a debate happening six years ago—it is important to reflect on what the minister said about our being at the start of the process in the second session. I hope that the committee's inquiry has demonstrated in some small way the Parliament's ability to be forward looking and outward looking. I welcome the minister's commitment to aim higher. The committee report wanted that to happen.

We would all agree that we are dealing with work in progress—I think that Phil Gallie mentioned that. From the debate, I get the sense that today should not be a conclusion, but should mark the beginning of initiatives that can take the promotion of Scotland further.

The points that members have made can be put into three categories: Scotland the product, structures and looking to the future. I hope that I have enough time to deal with all those categories.

A number of committee members posed a question that we asked at the beginning of the inquiry: what kind of Scotland do we want? That was one of the key questions with which we grappled and members, including Margaret Ewing, have reflected on it this afternoon. In the evidence that the committee took, the Welsh and the Flemings said that we had clear advantages in image marketing through having a distinctive

product to promote. Scotland has distinctive icons, such as bagpipes, tartan, heather and castles. Some of us may ask whether such icons should be used to promote Scotland, but outsiders looking in clearly see Scotland as a nation that is rich in culture, steeped in history and heritage, renowned for poetic and literary genius and blessed with landscapes and countryside of remarkable natural beauty. It also has its own language—Gaelic. Therefore, we have much to promote.

Scotland is also a modern country. It is dynamic and welcoming, with first-class universities and a highly motivated workforce. As the minister said, we need to promote Scotland's past and present and we have demonstrated that we can do so. We have hosted the MTV awards and the annual T in the Park music festival is seen on television screens across the globe. We will host the G8 summit and the UK presidency of the European Union is approaching. There is much to welcome.

The devolution process and constitutional reform have acted as a catalyst for many developments. We need only consider the location and expansion of the consular corps in Edinburgh to recognise the contribution that the Scottish Parliament has made to progress.

I turn to structures and will reflect members' views and the views in the report in a spirit of constructive criticism. Improved co-ordination of initiatives and actors and the lack of joined-up thinking are themes that ran through the evidence, even that from the most enthusiastic participants. Phil Gallie highlighted the evidence of people such as those from the SCDI and the Robert Burns World Federation, who said that, as stakeholders, they were not sure where or how they fitted into the bigger picture. That prompted the committee to conclude that reform of the Scottish international forum is necessary and desirable. I welcome the fact that the Executive has agreed that the forum should be streamlined and that the minister will report back to the committee on his discussions with the forum.

A number of members—John Swinney, Phil Gallie, Richard Lochhead and Gordon Jackson—spoke about ministerial accountability. The Executive and the minister disagreed with the committee about ministerial accountability, but I ask the minister at least to keep an open mind on the matter in the months and years ahead, as we recognise the importance of mainstreaming European matters across all departments. Witnesses made it clear that lines of accountability are important; it is important that outside agencies know where responsibility lies and who should be contacted.

I will conclude with a few words about the future. The minister has given a commitment to be open

about what works and what, in the light of experience, is seen to be less effective. Inevitably, that means two things, the first of which is continued partnership with the committee. That is something to which we look forward, as the minister has been very constructive in engaging with the committee. The second thing is clear monitoring and analysis of the strategies, which several members have mentioned this afternoon. Paragraph 40 on page 10 of the committee's report notes the Executive's commitment to that. The committee wants concrete results from those regular reviews, so that we can all be clearer about what works.

I thank the committee clerks, past and present, for what was a mammoth task in processing the contributions that we received to our inquiry. We received so much evidence that we had to leave much of it online, as we could not produce a printed volume of it all. Committee members would also want me to extend our thanks to all those who gave of their time during committee visits abroad, when a huge amount of good will was exhibited towards us.

It was with sadness that I learned of the recent death of Professor George Blazycha, a specialist in eastern European affairs who gave evidence to our inquiry and who engaged with the committee on several occasions. I express the view of all committee members in saying that Professor Blazycha will be sadly missed.

I hope that the committee's report and the Executive's response will continue to act as a catalyst, within the Parliament, for discussion and debate on the promotion of Scotland as a must-visit place. Today is a day for talking Scotland up. I live in Scotland not because I was born here—in fact, my husband's family and most of my family live in the United States—but because I wanted my children to grow up here, as I think that Scotland is the best small country in the world.

Decision Time

17:02

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S2M-2796, in the name of Alex Neil, on behalf of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, on its third report in 2005, "Restructuring Scotland's Tourism Industry", be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Enterprise and Culture Committee's 3rd Report 2005 (Session 2): *Restructuring Scotland's Tourism Industry: Report on the Review of Area Tourist Boards* (SP Paper 305).

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S2M-2806, in the name of John Swinney, on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee, on its first report in 2005, "An Inquiry into the Promotion of Scotland Worldwide: the Strategy, Policy and Activities of the Scottish Executive", be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the European and External Relations Committee's 1st Report 2005 (Session 2): *An Inquiry into the Promotion of Scotland Worldwide: the Strategy, Policy and Activities of the Scottish Executive* (SP Paper 297).

Planning Process (M74)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-2788, in the name of Rosie Kane, on the planning process and the M74 northern extension. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament considers that any proposal by the Scottish Executive to restrict public input into the planning process should be rejected; recognises that the planning process requires change but notes that any change should be in the interests of democracy and inclusion; believes that local knowledge is imperative when planning decisions are being made; notes the recommendation of the public inquiry reporter that the M74 project should not proceed, and thanks residents along the route and beyond for their continued interest and input on this issue.

17:04

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): I know that this type of debate is normally consensual and that we normally thank one another for bringing the debate to the Parliament. I hope that even members who support the construction of the M74 northern extension will, as the motion states, note the recommendations of the inquiry reporter and thank the residents along the route for their continued interest and input. We can surely agree on that. We all believe that locals should be active citizens. That is taught in schools and colleges and it is encouraged by the Parliament. Therefore, when citizens do just that and take the time to find out what is happening in the community, I trust that we can applaud their active citizenship, even when we do not agree with their conclusions.

I thank and pay tribute to JAM74—joint action against the M74—residents against the M74, Friends of the Earth Scotland, the Scottish Association for Public Transport, the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish Socialist Party, which is my party, TRANSform Scotland, Govanhill community council, Cambuslang, Carmyle and Rutherglen residents against pollution, Tom Martin, Maria Mohan and countless other groups and individuals who have worked tirelessly over the years being active citizens. The task has not been easy for them; for residents in particular, it was often a struggle to get equal access to information, resources and expertise.

There was a great deal of input into the local public inquiry that took place over a period of months. Members should thank those who gave of their time and energy, no matter what they think of the resulting report. The issue has been rumbling around for decades and some in the chamber will say that, if we had simply got on with it, the world

would be a better place. The opposite is true. We should be grateful for the gift of hindsight and thank all those who have taken part in slowing the construction down so that we might use that hindsight.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I remind the member that much the same arguments were used about linking the M8 and the M77. Does she not agree that the M77 is an absolutely magnificent route that reduces pollution, particularly in Glasgow?

Rosie Kane: I do not agree. With the M77, we were promised a better economy for the people along the route and less pollution. None of that has come to fruition, so I do not agree with Mr Gallie.

The public inquiry would never have taken place if it were not for the active citizens who stayed involved, met regularly and sometimes dragged themselves out weekly—some of them have disabilities and some of them had weans in tow—to exchange information and to work their way through plans. We in the chamber must congratulate all those people.

Perhaps the First Minister would congratulate them if he were here, given that when Cathie Craigie asked him last week

“how the Scottish Executive will ensure that the rights of communities are properly represented during the planning process”,

he stated that his “twin objectives” were

“to create a more efficient and modern planning system that ensures that local authorities and Government deal with the needs of communities and applicants properly and efficiently”

and

“to ensure that individuals and communities have a better opportunity to influence the decisions of local authorities and Government at each stage of the planning process.”—
[Official Report, 12 May 2005; c 16826-27.]

In response to a question from Janis Hughes in November 2003 on the M74 northern extension, the First Minister prejudiced the outcome of the local public inquiry with his opinion when he said:

“I support the construction in question.”

However, he would not allow the locals to express their opinion. We might have thought that he would have allowed them to, because, to his credit, he went on to say in response to a question from Patrick Harvie:

“In the public inquiry that is taking place and in other decisions that will be required to be taken over the coming period, it is important to take into account the impact on individuals in the area.”

I for one could not agree more with the First Minister, which is weird. He continued:

"Doing so is important for those who would be affected by the construction of the new road."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2003; c 3739-40.]

He was talking about the M74 northern extension.

If that is the case and if those were the beliefs of the First Minister in November 2003 and last week in this chamber, surely we have consensus in the chamber tonight. However, the lack of denial about recent leaks tells a different story and I fear that we are about to see a power grab that will remove the expertise of the community from the planning process. My concern is that the definition of modernisation in this case will mean the removal of citizens, community councils and non-governmental organisations from the process. The dismissal of the local public inquiry report indicates that the Scottish Executive is concerned that it has been too successful in promoting awareness, participation and democracy and now wants its ball back.

Those active citizens have got in the way of a dinosaur of a plan. They have worked hard to find out what they need to know. They have had their day in court and they have had the plan swept aside, but they have been ignored. We are in a political Jurassic park, in which the Executive is trying to give birth to a dangerous, ugly white elephant, but the communities are the ones who will live with the consequences of this monster. The public inquiry has been dumped on the hard shoulder while the M74 juggernaut drives over democracy, leaving communities choking in the exhaust fumes.

The mace on the Parliament's floor has inscribed on it four words. It mentions justice, but where is the environmental justice in the decision? It mentions integrity, but does that mean that we ignore such reports? It mentions compassion, but where is the compassion for those along the route who live with the legacy of toxic waste? Finally, there is democracy, but that should mean keeping the people as part of the process.

Tonight, I want to ask the minister and the Parliament some questions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute.

Rosie Kane: I will not even need that.

Will communities and individuals have the right to challenge all developments now and in the future? Will they have the right to the same information, resources and access to experts as developers, local authorities and the Executive have? Will the modern planning system of the future offer equality of arms?

17:11

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I hope that we can achieve consensus on the issue, but I suggest that that is unlikely, given Rosie Kane's speech this evening.

Rosie Kane starts from two false premises. First, she claims to speak against the M74 on behalf of community interests across Glasgow. However, her assumption is that those who shout loud enough about an issue are necessarily right. Secondly, she assumes that, if those who have a particular position on an issue can get people to an inquiry, their view should necessarily be validated by a reporter.

Even if that were the case, tonight's debate is on the principle of whether the Executive should accept a reporter's findings. In the case of the M74, the minister chose to reject the reporter's recommendation despite howls of outrage. However, on other issues, ministers have rejected the recommendation of a reporter who found in favour of a proposal. For example, when the recommendation to approve the Harris superquarry proposal was rejected by the relevant minister at the time, environmentalists and many others welcomed the ministerial intervention that they now condemn in the case of the M74. The reality of the debate is that judgments eventually need to be made between competing interests.

Among those competing interests are the long-term benefits of the M74 to Glasgow's economic potential over the next 40 or 50 years. As a representative who has argued for the completion of Glasgow's motorway network, I make no apology in highlighting its importance in tackling the issues of poverty, exclusion and inequality, which Rosie Kane and many other colleagues will surely agree are critical. The M74 is one of the key tools for doing that.

Rosie Kane: Will the member give way?

Mr McAveety: If I may make this point first, I will then concede and sit down to listen to Rosie Kane's contribution.

Essentially, the issue is about how we make cities competitive. Given Scotland's and Glasgow's location within Europe, and given the problems of economic development that the city has historically faced, it strikes me that to make Glasgow less competitive than the many other equivalent cities in Europe that are developing their motorway networks would be a major abdication of responsibility. I would like to hear Rosie Kane's response on that issue.

Rosie Kane: I asked the member to give way for a couple of reasons. First, he was elected to Glasgow City Council on a manifesto that opposed the construction of the M74 northern extension.

Secondly, does he accept that Easterhouse, Pollok and Townhead have not benefited economically from the introduction of motorways? Does he think that those areas have done well as a result of the motorway?

Mr McAveety: If members pop along to junction 10 on the M8, they will see that Easterhouse now has a good health centre, a major new further education college facility and a major retail park, which has just been completed. Many people would have said that such facilities could never have been developed in that part of Glasgow, but those have all come about because of the connectivity that junction 10 of the M8 has provided.

In reality, those developments have been delivered because—I say this in a partisan fashion—folk have been elected who want to make connections between economic opportunity and infrastructure development. Since 1999, the Executive has made commitments on a whole range of issues to try to address the many concerns that Rosie Kane identified.

The analysis that Rosie Kane provided is wrong not only on grounds of economic competitiveness—on that issue, she clearly missed the point—but on the environmental issues. Why some of the reporter's factual findings did not end up in his conclusions is an issue that the reporter will need to square. In his report, he concedes that the M74 development would substantially reduce the impact of traffic and congestion on the immediately adjacent roads and streets that are being used at the moment—from Duke Street at the top end of the east of Glasgow right down to where Dalmarnock Road crosses into Rutherglen.

It strikes me that we are having a dishonest debate in which it is claimed that one side has the virtue of environmentalism, whereas the other side does not. In the light of all the points that I have made, it is legitimate for us to ask how we make the city more competitive, ensure that the impact of traffic on streets is diminished and, most important, create jobs and employment for Glaswegians, in particular. Once it has been fully developed, the M74 can deliver those benefits.

I will pass on the other issues that are being debated this evening. I wanted to come to the chamber as the elected member for an area that is affected by the M74 to put the case for its extension. Most of the public have accepted that it is worth while and they will certainly see the benefits of it.

17:16

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I am grateful to Rosie Kane for

allowing Parliament to debate this matter. It is a shame that the debate is not many times longer, because that would allow the paucity of the SSP's arguments to be exposed fully.

The Scottish National Party has debated the M74 issue twice. On each occasion, it concluded by a huge majority that the economic and social case for the project is overwhelming. First, the Kingston bridge is the most congested part of Scotland's traffic system. Secondly, the completion of the link will, in effect, provide a ring road round Glasgow. Thirdly, it will allow traffic to be taken from the city-centre roads. We do not often hear the argument that that in itself contributes to road safety. There has been a reduction in the number of fatal road accidents in Glasgow from 141 in 1976, before the motorways were built, to 13 in 2003. There is less traffic in the city centre today than there was in 1961, despite the fact that there has been a threefold growth in traffic in Glasgow as a whole. On Saturday, I met a Glasgow cop who said that he is looking forward to not having to take bits of bodies off the roads. I hope that when the Greens reply to my speech, they will recognise the safety argument.

Phil Gallie: Does Fergus Ewing agree that the M74 extension would lead to a massive environmental improvement, by reducing the noxious gases that are emitted by slow-moving traffic?

Fergus Ewing: It falls to Phil Gallie and me to put the environmental case. It is also rarely mentioned that the cost of rectifying the polluted land that is part of the project is estimated at £50 million. If the land is not to be part of the missing link in the motorway, who will pay that sum? I hear no answer, because there is none. No one will pay the £50 million and the land will remain polluted for all time, unused and unusable.

A leading businessman from my part of the world told me recently that he intended to set up a head office in the central belt of Scotland, in order to expand his Highland business south. It took him less than one minute to dismiss the west of Scotland from his plans, because of the time that his staff would have to spend on the M8 and the Kingston bridge sitting in their cars, doing nothing, getting paid and polluting the environment. I want businesses to come to Glasgow, not to be driven away from it.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) rose—

Rosie Kane: Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: No.

The SNP wants to turn its fire on the Scottish Executive, which promised that the project would begin long ago. In October 2001, it issued a press release that stated, "M74 extension to begin".

Another press release, from May 2002, stated:

"Work on M74 missing link to start next month".

Perhaps I missed the start of that work.

Of course, the planning inquiry was a sham, because the Executive had spent £41 million on buying up land and factories that could be used only as part of the motorway. What on earth was it to do with that land if it did not go ahead? The Executive press releases announcing the inquiry never said that its purpose was to determine whether the project should go ahead; the intention was only to allow views to be heard. Frankly, that was typical Labour spin.

The problem that we now face is that if the legal action that is threatened by the Trots and the Greens succeeds in delaying the project, the effect will be—

Patrick Harvie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ewing, Mr Harvie has a point of order.

Fergus Ewing: I hope that I will get extra time.

Patrick Harvie: I merely want it noted for the record that legal action is not being threatened and will not be pursued by the Scottish Socialist Party or the Scottish Green Party.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That sounded like an intervention; it was certainly not a point of order.

Fergus Ewing: The legal action that is threatened might prevent the M74 project from going ahead in accordance with the timetable. There is no plan B; if the project does not go ahead, the workers in the companies that would have got the work will have no work to fill the gap. Skilled Scottish workers might be handed their P45s as a result of the legal action that is threatened by the SSP and the incompetence of the Greens.

17:21

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I have no difficulty in agreeing with Rosie Kane that we should be grateful to the people who participated in the inquiry. I am sorry that people are disappointed but, inevitably, disappointment is sometimes a consequence of the democratic process.

Let us be clear: the arguments for proceeding with the M74 link are compelling on economic, environmental and safety grounds. For many years, Glasgow and the west of Scotland have been bedevilled by the fact that the motorway is incomplete. The situation has rendered businesses uncompetitive. We should acknowledge that a major institutional change in

the way in which businesses operate has taken place in the 30 or 40 years since the construction of the motorway system in Glasgow began. There is much more business with the south-east and with Europe, and the motorway link will be a vital component in speedy and cheap communications.

I accept that some people will be adversely affected by the project, but surely the question must be what is most beneficial to the largest number of people. It is regrettable that some people will lose out. However, would the disruption and minor economic consequences that certain people suffered be more regrettable than the rendering uncompetitive of businesses in west-central Scotland and the accompanying dramatic loss of jobs and future business opportunities, which would undoubtedly be the effect if the project were cancelled?

Patrick Harvie: The member mentioned the job losses that would undoubtedly flow from the cancellation of the project. Of the various figures for the number of jobs that depend on the project that have been floated by the Scottish Executive, Glasgow City Council, the Confederation of British Industry and others, which figure does the member accept? The lowest estimate is 1,200 and the highest is 66,000. Does the member think that any of the figures bears any relationship to reality?

Bill Aitken: It is obvious that there are dramatic disparities in the figures that have been quoted and Patrick Harvie is perfectly correct to point that out. I will not quantify the figure, but I operated in the real world for many years and businesses told me time and again that the lack of a proper motorway project was one of the biggest handicaps that they faced when they wanted to expand, develop and indeed survive. The economic arguments are so obvious that I am surprised that Patrick Harvie cannot see them.

However, I part company with advocates of the project on one matter. I am concerned that the absence of direct links to and from the Kingston bridge will cause serious problems of congestion and road safety in Glasgow as well as serious difficulties for residents of Plantation and Tradeston. We must examine that issue, because it would be very unfortunate if a project that could do so much good caused all sorts of difficulties for businesses and private residents south of the River Clyde. Given the size of the project, it would not cost that much extra to allow for direct access on and off the Kingston bridge—indeed, I have heard estimates of £12 million. I wrote to the Minister for Transport on the matter some time ago, but he is unable to accept those arguments. He should now re-examine the issue and make much more stringent inquiries than he has made to date. However, as I have said, the argument for

proceeding with the project is simply unanswerable. It must go ahead.

17:25

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I certainly congratulate Rosie Kane on securing the debate, but I am a little disappointed by the way in which it has gone so far. I wanted to talk about the M74 in the context of the planning process, partly because that is what the motion talks about and partly because the Minister for Communities is waiting to respond to the debate and he probably has more to say about the planning process than he has about the M74.

Given that the M74 has been raised so prominently, I will turn my speech round and start by addressing those issues. I should point out that, in doing so, I do not want to open up any wider debate. After all, I have had this argument before and will have it again, and I do not expect to convince many members on the Labour and SNP benches that they should move away from road building.

I want first to respond to two points, the first of which was raised by Frank McAveety. He is now notable by his absence, and I do hope that he reads the *Official Report* of the debate. I do not argue—and never have argued—that Scottish Executive ministers do not have the power to make a decision on a planning issue after a public local inquiry. However, I strongly argue that the PLI report shows clearly and comprehensively why this decision is wrong.

Secondly, I am sure that Fergus Ewing sincerely believes the many emotive arguments that he made. However, whatever the amount of road infrastructure in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, congestion, air pollution, CO₂ emissions, climate change and road safety levels are the results of road traffic growth alone. Year after year, there is more road traffic in Glasgow. According to the Executive's projections, there will be a 40 per cent increase in road traffic in Glasgow. That is the driver behind the very serious problems that Mr Ewing identified.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: I will happily extend to Fergus Ewing the courtesy that he did not extend to me.

Fergus Ewing: I am grateful to the member for giving way. Will the Greens tell us how many roads there should be? Should there be any new roads or motorways anywhere? Are they against the internal combustion engine and, if so, does their opposition also apply to public transport such as buses?

Patrick Harvie: I will gladly celebrate on the day that the internal combustion engine is no longer a

necessary part of our lives. However, we are not designing a society or a city from scratch. We have what we have, and the question is whether it is better to spend £500 million on an urban motorway project, with all the associated problems that the PLI report has highlighted, or on crossrail schemes and traffic reduction. Those are the issues that we want to focus on.

I will move on to talk about how this matter was dealt with by the planning process. I was an objector to the M74 before I was elected as an MSP—indeed, I objected to the project before I was even a candidate for election. After the 2003 election, I gave evidence to the public local inquiry. If people are interested, they can read my precognition on my website. The reporter endorsed some, but not all, of my arguments and certainly endorsed the range of arguments that witnesses raised against the road.

Then there was nothing. Despite the Executive's target to publish 80 per cent of PLI reports within two months and the rest within three months, there was no response for months and months. Finally, I happened to be in my office in Holyrood—by now I was an MSP—when a colleague told me that Nicol Stephen was standing in front of a camera, telling the BBC his decision. He did not tell me as a representative, as a witness to the inquiry or as an objector to the orders; he told the BBC first.

It is clear that people who engage with the planning system are not given the respect that they are due as active citizens. Reforms to the planning system have to rectify that—and I hope that the minister hears. Yes, we need the system to be effective, to be faster and to endorse and facilitate sustainable development, but it must also be fair. If it is going to involve people, they have to be trusted. That trust has been denied them in the past. In effect, they have repeatedly been told at the end of the day that they are not valid participants and that they cannot appeal against bad planning decisions, even though developers can. Unless people know that they can get involved on an equal footing, they will never engage and—even though we can talk about it all we want—consultation will not materialise. My challenge to the minister and his colleagues is to rectify that in their reform of the planning system.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I should point out to Mr Harvie that I was aware that Frank McAveety was leaving and that he had apologised for that.

17:30

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): It is good that we are debating this issue and that a lot of people took part in the public inquiry, agitating and making their views known. However, people

have to accept that they will not always win. Many people support football teams that do their best but do not win every Saturday.

I want to deal with two aspects: first, the merits of the argument and, secondly, the planning issues. This was a difficult decision for a minister. The issue is not black and white. Both sides of the argument are carefully balanced and, in the end, the minister came down on one side. There are economic and social arguments in favour of promoting economic activity and prosperity in and around Glasgow; but there are also perfectly valid environmental arguments in favour of the minister's decision.

The motorway will reduce congestion on existing streets. It will reduce delays—

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Gorrie: No. I would prefer to get on if I may.

The motorway will make life better for motorists, pedestrians, cyclists and local residents. It is much better for traffic to go on what is in effect a bypass than for it to trundle through ordinary residential and shopping streets. The motorway will also improve public transport, which will not be held up so much by cars in ordinary streets. It will greatly reduce the pressure on the M8 and the Kingston bridge. There are therefore many ways in which, on environmental grounds, the decision is perfectly respectable. The idea that it is all very wicked does not stand up to scrutiny.

As I understand it, the Executive has two main aims. One is to put a lot of investment into public transport and the other is to complete Scotland's main road network, of which the M74 extension is clearly a major part. By definition, a network is joined up. There is no point in having a lot of wee bits of string that do not join up, which is what we have at the moment. Only a very few additions have to be made to give us a complete road network. That is a high priority, along with public transport.

I turn now to planning. If we go back a long time, we can see that this issue was not well handled. There never seemed to be a clear strategic decision. A two-stage process is required. First, the Executive must make a strategic decision, answering the question, "Do we want this road or not?" Once it has argued its case and decided that it wants the road, people must have the chance to argue and object and so on.

After that strategic stage must come the second stage, when it is decided exactly where the road will go. At that point, there can be local inquiries into the details. Again, people must be able to object and make their views known.

We need a system that has greater community involvement in the planning process—both in the development of plans and in the early stages of planning applications. There must be much more front-loading of community involvement. There must also be a limited appeals system—limited both for developers and the local community.

One thing that we must do—and it is very difficult—is to find out the genuine views of the local community and not just the views of the people who shout the loudest and most frequently. Like most clichés, the cliché about the silent majority is true. We have to find ways of discovering what the silent majority of people actually want. Even they may not be able to get what they want, because there may be very good reasons why what they want cannot happen, but we must involve the whole community in the planning process.

I hope that we can learn from this issue and do things better in the forthcoming bill on planning.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am minded to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate, as there are still a number of members who wish to take part.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 6.06 pm.—[*Carolyn Leckie.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:35

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): Along with many, if not all, other members of the Parliament, I welcome the Executive's commitment to modernising the planning system, which is long overdue, and I look forward to the publication of the planning bill.

Like Patrick Harvie, I would have liked to be discussing planning with the minister in tonight's debate, but I think that, with all due respect, Mr Harvie was being a trifle naive in thinking that that is what we would actually be talking about. Although the motion purports to be about planning, it is clear that it is just another attempt by the Scottish Socialist Party to grandstand on the issue of the M74 northern extension. As Fergus Ewing said, the motion demonstrates the paucity of the SSP's arguments. It amazes me that the SSP will not accept that the road is necessary for so many reasons, some of which we have already heard about.

Rosie Kane: Will the member give way?

Janis Hughes: We have heard what Rosie Kane had to say. She had a perfect opportunity to express her point of view. It is my turn now.

The benefits of the M74 northern extension will be far-reaching and include those of encouraging regeneration, providing employment, capping contaminated land and improving road safety. Those benefits are especially important to me this week, in light of Hoover's bitterly disappointing announcement that it will enter into consultation on the future of the 88 remaining manufacturing workers in Cambuslang. If those jobs are not retained in Cambuslang, it is vital that we do everything that we can to encourage regeneration and bring jobs to the area.

That point is reinforced by the long list of organisations that support the M74, which include the four largest political parties in the Parliament, the councils of South Lanarkshire, Glasgow and Renfrewshire, the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and Scottish Airports Ltd. In my opinion, the Executive was completely correct in its judgment that the reporter did not give enough weight to the many positive aspects of the M74 extension.

Much has been made of the number of objections to the scheme that were raised during the public local inquiry, but it is perhaps the case that such inquiries tend to draw objectors to a proposal to a greater extent than they draw supporters. The Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland states:

"it is doubtful if the promoters of the scheme made use of the strategic planning witnesses who might have been called had the principle of the scheme not been taken for granted somewhat".

Opponents of the M74 would do well not to overemphasise the scale of opposition to the road, especially when it has such widespread support and will bring major benefits to the whole of Scotland. Although those benefits will be felt particularly in west central Scotland, they will not be confined to the Glasgow area, which most of tonight's speakers have mentioned. I have highlighted many of those benefits on previous occasions in the Parliament but, unlike the SSP, I do not intend to go over old ground.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the construction of the road will provide significant economic benefits. As Scotland's economy grows, extra demand will inevitably be placed on our roads. The west of Scotland is responsible for more than half of Scotland's gross output, so we must act to improve our transport links if we are to remain competitive and drive forward our economy.

The scheme will bring huge environmental benefits for my constituents and those of many other members, as Frank McAveety pointed out. The sheer volume of traffic on Rutherglen Main Street, which, along with streets in residential areas, heavy goods vehicles use to make their way to the south side of Glasgow and the city

centre once they have exited the M74, is causing significant environmental problems locally. The construction of the extension to the M74 will result in the capping of many toxic waste sites throughout the area, which is also good news.

I firmly believe that a review of Scotland's planning laws is long overdue, but so is the completion of the M74. The sooner we build the M74 northern extension, the better. I wish the SSP would wake up and realise that.

17:39

Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to Rosie Kane for allowing us the opportunity for the debate this evening. Unlike other members, I do not propose to spend any time on the M74—on which the decision has been made—when we have the opportunity to discuss much more important matters, such as local decision making in the planning process and how we can enhance local democracy and inclusion.

Let me start by making a point about local planning that is often overlooked, which is that it is local and it is democratic. Unlike many public services—for example, nearly all decisions that are taken in respect of delivery of health services—most key decisions in planning are taken by locally elected and locally accountable people. For almost a decade, I was a member of a local authority planning committee. In that time, I took part in the public meetings and processes that were part of the formulation of local plans. Local plans are prepared and decisions are made by locally elected and locally accountable people who are elected by their communities for those purposes. Councils publicise and consult extensively on their local plans and structure plans and members of the wider public have substantial opportunities to take a direct part in those processes. In development control, which is where some 90 per cent of local authority planning work is focused, virtually all decision making is done locally by local people—the exceptions occur in areas where the Executive steps in. Decisions are based on the contents of local plans and structure plans, which are themselves the outcome of local consultation and decision making.

The local authority on which I served—as I said, for almost a decade—was used at that stage to consulting on key local planning applications, to allowing objectors and supporters to speak to councillors in meetings and to holding local meetings in the affected communities, which was, I think, representative of all local authorities at the time. From time to time, we would sit in town and village halls, facing hostile members of the public who did not approve of the planning application in question. We would listen patiently to all the arguments and we would give detailed, courteous

and sustainable answers to all the objections that were made and explain the conditions that were attached to consents, why rejected applications were rejected or why the plans that were passed were passed.

When people say that the planning process needs to be levelled out and that a level playing field needs to be created, they should recognise that the role of the local authority is to protect the public interest. Local authorities exist to make decisions in the light of the opinions of the people who elect them and to whom they are accountable.

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that the planning authority on which Mr Tosh served performed its functions with great courtesy and respect to the community that it served. However, does he recognise that the new code of conduct raises serious problems for councillors today who feel that they are unable to represent the views of their constituents? Citizens in a ward where a planning application is being considered are unable to approach their local councillor or to have them represent their views at the planning committee.

Murray Tosh: That was never the proper role of councillors: they were there to make decisions based on objective evidence. There is no reason why local councillors cannot hear objections or representations from their communities. However, local councillors are expected not to make definitive decisions on planning applications until they have heard all the evidence. That is common sense; it does not get in the way of the local democratic process.

There are ways in which the democracy of our planning process can, and must, be improved. Surely improvement is all about more effectively building people into the planning process and about speeding up that process. It is important that we focus the Executive's mind on the imperative requirement that it deliver its proposed planning bill, and that we ensure that, whatever role it creates for enhanced local decision making and public participation, the bill is put at the beginning of the process, at the consultation and participation stage.

It has been suggested that the Executive is minded to create a third-party right of appeal, for example. If it does so, it must be careful to build in a right of appeal that is qualified and manageable and that can be coped with at local authority and Executive levels. Let us forget about the M74, which is done and dusted. The planning decision has been made and we have many more important issues and processes to consider in the months and years ahead.

17:44

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I fear that Murray Tosh may live to regret that statement. The M74 is definitely not done and dusted. I am sure that local communities will make that clear.

Like Patrick Harvie, I will concentrate on planning. It is worth noting that the M74 is not mentioned in the motion until 56 words in. It would have been helpful if some members had addressed the majority of their speeches to those 56 words instead of just ignoring them.

I fear that far from improving inclusion in the planning process, we are about to repeat the serious mistakes that have been made in health board consultations. In such consultations, input at the beginning is assured, but there is no means of ensuring that all the information—such as transcripts and submissions—is shared, and there is no opportunity to question interpretation of evidence, judgments or outcomes. I would like the minister to reassure me that that will not be the case with all developments that communities face; if it is, communities will have a right to speak and to submit their views but they will have absolutely no right to be listened to.

I want to address Frank McAveety's points. It is a shame that he is not here. He said that the debate is based on a false premise and that people think that if they shout loud enough they will get their own way. That seems to be Frank's argument for dismissing any form of consultation. He seems to be saying, "Don't listen to the people who submit their views to the consultation. Just ignore them." Perhaps that is an honest position, but if he truly believes that every person in an affected community should be consulted, I am sure that he will support a call for a referendum on the M74. Then we would have the view of the whole community, and we would have followed his argument. However, I suspect that he would not support that. He also talked about economic benefit, but failed to mention that when the Glasgow Development Agency carried out a survey, all the companies along the route stated that they would set up anyway. His argument was, therefore, wrong.

It is well known that building a motorway does not reduce the number of cars on the road or the amount of pollution, but increases them. Why do we not talk about spending the £500 million to £1 billion on better public transport links, such as buses and rail? People in the area around the motorway would then be able to get to their work and they would not need a motorway. Indeed, the people who work in Easterhouse and all the working-class areas along the route are unlikely to be able to afford cars in the first place. They need buses and trains.

It is interesting that Fergus Ewing was the SNP's speaker in this debate, and that no Glasgow SNP MSP spoke, but maybe that should not be a surprise, since he promotes the right-wing roadmongering philosophy. Perhaps the Glasgow SNP MSPs did not feel able to promote that view. He spoke about road deaths, but of course he ignored the increase in the incidence of asthma and other pollution-related health problems that will result if the M74 extension goes ahead—and all for £100 million to £200 million per mile. He talked about the toxic waste that would not be removed if the motorway was not built, but he obviously does not know the facts, because there is no plan to remove the waste. However, there is a plan to put concrete over it and to leave it there indefinitely, until it seeps up through the concrete. Fergus Ewing is wrong again. He also resorted to name calling, as usual, when he referred to "Trots". I am not sure whether Fergus Ewing knows what he means by that. If he means people who opposed the bureaucratic and undemocratic regime of the Soviet Union, I am guilty as charged, unlike half the people on the Labour benches in the past and, no doubt, some of Fergus Ewing's own SNP members.

The truth is that SNP members cannot see a bandwagon rolling away from them without their jumping on it with no credibility whatever. Apparently, the Lib Dems think that they have environmental credentials; unfortunately, Donald Gorrie was left to put that position, spinning on a pinhead—so much for the Lib Dems' environmental credentials.

I reiterate the questions that Rosie Kane posed to the minister. Will he address the issues of democracy, accountability and the imbalance of power in the planning process? Will communities have equal arms in the planning process? Does the minister believe that citizens—the majority—should have a greater say than have developers, who are an elite minority? Has he already ruled out a third-party right of appeal and, if so, what is the rationale for doing so?

17:50

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): It is fair to say that, while I sometimes go on a little too long, I am not known as a stickler for procedures; indeed, I cannot remember the last time that I raised a point of order. However, the powers that be in the parliamentary authorities should reflect on the motion, as it deals with two distinct topics: reform of the planning system; and the merits or demerits of the M74 extension. Further, it would be impossible to conclude that the motion meets the criterion of providing an opportunity for a cross-party debate. As my colleague Janis Hughes said, all four main political

parties are on one side of the debate and others are on the other side. It would be helpful if we reflected on whether today's motion meets that criterion.

Carolyn Leckie: It would have been better if the member had made a point of order, because we could have responded to it. Wendy Alexander's comments show the dismissive attitude of the big parties to the small parties. There is cross-party support for the motion from the Scottish Socialist Party, the Green party and the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party, but it is obvious that Wendy Alexander does not see that as cross-party support.

Ms Alexander: As I said, the issue is for the parliamentary authorities. I will leave it at that, because I am not a stickler for procedures.

I turn to the two matters at hand: the M74 extension and the planning issue. In my remaining minute or so, I will try to dispose of both of them.

It is proper and unarguable that we should pause and think before we build more roads, but the M74 extension is not any old road; it is a road that will relieve the worst and most significant congestion black spot in the entire country, not the fourth or fifth-worst black spot. The work that was done on the road's economic benefits showed that, in terms of road safety and reduced travel time, the road would bring between five and nine times more benefit. That is the reason why the road is much needed.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member at least recognise and note that the inquiry reporter found that, although there would be some relief of congestion, it would be ephemeral?

Ms Alexander: I have read the inquiry report.

I turn to the suggested alternatives for dealing with the congestion. Carolyn Leckie suggested that people could get on buses and on to rail, but I am not sure how we can put the output of Chivas Brothers, Rolls-Royce or Hewlett-Packard on to a bus, although I concede that it is possible to put it on to a train. If we wanted to do that, Mossend would be the multimodal terminal at which to do so. However, we need the M74 extension to get the entirety of the industrial output of Cunninghame North, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire to Mossend to allow us to pursue the multimodal solution that is rightly talked about.

Rosie Kane: Does the member accept that we have busy junctions because we have too many motorways and, as a result, increased traffic? Does she accept that, although the motorway runs beside a railway line for much of its journey, there has never been a multimodal study into the alternatives?

Ms Alexander: It is sometimes appropriate to use trains, but it is absolutely clear from talking to Chivas, Rolls-Royce and Hewlett-Packard that they do not want private rail lines to their factories; they want a fast route to market and to be able to choose whether to go by road or rail. The critical issue is that, given their desire to get to the south of England, we should not demand that they go through the entirety of the north side of Glasgow, which is what makes the Kingston bridge the sort of blockage that it is at present.

As I am in my final minute, I will come to the second issue, which is the planning system. We all know that there is huge frustration about planning. However, there is a risk that we in this chamber might assume that the source of that frustration with the system is anger with the decisions taken rather than frustration at the delays that exist in the system, which we need to sort out.

One of the reasons why some of us have less sympathy than others with the idea of a third-party right of appeal is that, rather than reforming the system to deal with the delay, it would introduce more procedures into a system that is already beyond breaking point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Alexander, you must finish now.

Ms Alexander: Let me just make something clear to Patrick Harvie. He suggested that we have a developer-friendly system. However, it is hard to suggest that the system is overly friendly to developers when, on the one measure of that that we have, only two out of the 33 planning authorities meet the target that they have been given to process large applications within four months. The frustration with the planning system arises as the result of delay and we should not clutter up the system further.

17:56

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): I congratulate Rosie Kane on securing this debate on the reform of our land-use planning system. I share her desire to ensure that there is greater inclusion of local people in planning decisions. That is why the Scottish Executive will actively address inclusion in its reform proposals. I am happy to acknowledge the active citizenship of Rosie Kane and others in relation to the M74. However, I am not here to debate the merits or otherwise of that proposal. For one thing, I am not the Minister for Transport, and for another, the matter is currently the subject of a challenge in the courts.

In our partnership agreement, the Executive said that we would improve the planning system and that is exactly what we will do. There are two main themes to the improvements that we will make.

We will create a more efficient planning system that will deliver the right development where and when it is needed. Sustainable growth will be at the heart of that. It is equally important that we will ensure that local people and communities have better opportunities to participate in the planning of their areas and in the decisions that affect them. I can therefore reassure Rosie Kane that one of the major thrusts of our reform package will be to ensure that local people are properly engaged, are clear about the future direction of development in their areas and are able to contribute, confident that their voices will be heard.

It is no secret that we intend to ensure that the role of the national planning framework is continued and enhanced. The "National Planning Framework for Scotland" document has already received considerable acclaim and support from all interests in the planning system. There have been calls from many sides to give the framework greater status, not least from those representing environmental interests. We agree that there are decisions, essential to Scotland's future, that need to be taken at the strategic, national level—as Donald Gorrie suggested—and believe that the national planning framework is a key vehicle for setting out those decisions. In particular, the national planning framework will need to be clear on the spatial implications of other key strategic policies, such as transport, water and sewerage, waste and regeneration policies. We will need to map out how we will meet our obligations under European environmental law—in relation to waste disposal or wastewater treatment, for example—and ensure that those obligations are properly accounted for in the planning system.

Murray Tosh: I understand what the minister is saying, but can he clarify whether he sees this as being in any way contrary to the objective of speeding up the planning process at a local level? Is it unacceptable that the M74s of the future will emerge through a plan-led process or are they going to be fed in at a national level, bypassing the local planning process?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will speak about the local planning process later, but the key message to get across is that decisions should be made at the most appropriate level. There is absolutely no doubt that planning authorities are and will remain at the core of our planning system and are best placed to make decisions on local matters.

The national planning framework will undergo strategic environmental assessment, which involves an environmental report that must be subject to full public consultation and the issuing of a statement about how environmental considerations have been taken into account. As a result, the key national strategic planning document will be subject to a thorough public

examination of the potential environmental impacts. There can, therefore, be no question of removing the public right to influence Scotland's future development. It is quite the opposite, in fact. I repeat the point I made at question time last week that our planning reforms contain no proposals to change the procedures on nuclear power stations.

It is no secret that our reforms will seek to put development planning at the heart of decision making. That is a crucial area of work in which we need to ensure that local people are properly engaged, which they are not at present. In future, plans will involve local people more effectively, continue to protect the environment—which they will do more effectively—and determine how applications are decided.

To be able to participate fully, local people should have the right to be informed at an early stage that preparation of a new plan is beginning. They should have the right to be able to influence that plan, which will set out proposals for how their local area will develop. I noted what Carolyn Leckie said about influence; local people do not have a great deal of influence now, but we certainly intend that they should have more. They should have the right to expect that decisions on individual applications will be taken in accordance with the plan unless there are overriding reasons to decide otherwise and they should expect a greater degree of scrutiny of decisions in which that does not happen. There are many other ways of involving people in individual planning applications that will be described in the white paper. Crucially, that involvement will be at an early stage, which is precisely what Donald Gorrie wished.

Murray Tosh: Does the minister mean by that statement that, in the proposed planning bill, the Executive will propose that there should be no third-party right of appeal in circumstances in which the proposed consent accords with the approved local plan?

Malcolm Chisholm: Carolyn Leckie raised the third-party right of appeal. I was going to refer to it later, but as it has been raised now, we might as well discuss it. Some people think that introducing a third-party right of appeal would be the most effective way to ensure local participation, but others disagree, favouring earlier and effective involvement with influence to increase the ways in which local people can have a proper say in the system. There is a hard choice to be made, as I said at question time last week. We all want more effective involvement in the system, but the question is what the most effective way of doing that is, being mindful of other consequences of a third-party right of appeal, which Wendy Alexander mentioned. One thing that is common to most

arguments is the idea that we need to restore confidence in the planning system and ensure that decisions are taken in the public interest.

Fergus Ewing: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will finish what I was saying about development plans and then I will take an intervention if I am allowed to, although I am probably overrunning my time.

It is crucial to a new, more effective and inclusive planning system that we ensure that the process of making development plans is efficient, predictable and transparent, which is not the case at present. The local plans that the majority of councils have adopted are more than five years old and around a quarter of them are more than 15 years old. That is why a main aim of our reforms will be to reinforce the centrality of up-to-date and relevant development plans. That will be an essential part of ensuring that there are better opportunities for local people to influence the decision-making process. As I said to Murray Tosh, the renewed emphasis on local plans will reinforce the role of planning authorities at the core of the planning system. Development plans will also be subject to strategic environmental assessment, so there will be better opportunities not only for local people in general to have an influence at that crucial stage, but for environmental interests to have such an influence.

Fergus Ewing: On a point of planning procedure, will the minister state whether it is legitimate for a public local inquiry to proceed after the Scottish Executive has purchased land voluntarily? If so, was the inquiry on the M74 extension made aware in the course of its work that plots were being acquired voluntarily? That question is not affected by any litigation, which relates to the merits of the argument. It is an important point, because *The Herald* and other newspapers argued that there is an element of sham if land is purchased in advance of, and pre-empting the outcome of, such an inquiry.

Ms Alexander: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I really do not think that members' business debates are the appropriate occasion for fishing opportunities regarding future policy announcements by the Executive. I would ask you to reflect on that, and I would be grateful for your views.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is entirely up to the minister how he responds, but I take the member's point.

Malcolm Chisholm: I think that I have dealt with the fishing for future policy announcements—I think that that was fishing for something else. The member can try fishing with Nicol Stephen if he likes, but I suspect that the matter is as sub judice for him as it is for me.

The planning white paper will be published in the near future. Until then, I can only urge people to be patient and to keep an open mind. When the time comes, it will be necessary to examine the full range of improvements that we will make for the long-term benefit of all Scotland's people. The programme will aim to improve the opportunities for local people to participate in the process and to make the system fairer, more efficient and more suited to a dynamic, growing Scotland, while at the same time placing more value on Scotland's heritage and environment.

Meeting closed at 18:06.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 25 May 2005

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by Astron and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop
53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh

Blackwell's Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5412
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by Astron