

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 21 September 2005

Session 2

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## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 21 September 2005*

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

### 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 Msgr John Tormey, parish priest of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Greenock.

**Msgr John Tormey (Parish Priest of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Greenock):**

Today is the feast of St Matthew, so we will begin our reflection with a reading from chapter 5 of the Gospel of St Matthew:

"Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them.

How happy are the poor in spirit:  
Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Happy the gentle:  
They shall have the earth for their heritage.  
Happy those who mourn:  
They shall be comforted.  
Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right:  
They shall be satisfied.  
Happy are the merciful:  
They shall have mercy shown them.  
Happy the pure in heart:  
They shall see God.  
Happy the peacemakers:  
They shall be called children of God.  
Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:  
Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

I would like you to picture this scene. A small boy walked along the beach and collected starfish stranded at low tide. There were hundreds of them, but he lifted a few at a time and carried them to the sea shore. As he threw them into the sea, one at a time, a man who was watching him said, "What's the point? It will make no difference." The small boy looked at him, threw another starfish into the water and said, "It made a difference to that one."

We hunger and thirst for what is right: an end to war and to put a stop to suffering and debt around the world. The task seems enormous and the work to be done incessant. As politicians, you believe that you can make a difference. The gospel passage encourages you to be like that small boy

who was determined to save as many starfish as he could.

Children often inspire us not to give up. When I baptise a small child, I reflect with parents and family how this child has so much potential to become someone great—maybe a footballer or a singer, or even a First Minister of the Scottish Parliament. They smile and wonder. Perhaps we, too, need to remember the hopes and dreams of our youth. Most people, however, do not become too famous. Nevertheless, everyone can make a difference in today's world. Your love and my love make a difference. Every small act of mercy that we carry out, every word of kindness, every time we say that we are sorry or call to see how someone is, we sow seeds of love, which change our world for the better.

To fight for justice and to eradicate poverty could gradually wear down the enthusiasm of any politician worth their salt, unless he or she sees signs of success. I pray for all of you who work here that you will see your work make a difference to all Scots and to people beyond these shores: to improve the quality of our life, our health and education; to help alleviate the suffering of millions who live below the poverty level; for fair trade and for the respect of every person's dignity from conception to natural death. I pray that your selfless work for others may begin each day afresh, with every letter you open, with every phone call you return, with every person who you speak to. For when you do these little things well, you are—like that small boy on the seashore—throwing another starfish back into the sea.

## Climate Change

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-3293, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on behalf of the Environment and Rural Development Committee, on the committee's fifth report in 2005, which is on climate change.

14:36

### **Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):**

First, it will not be possible to do justice to a wide-ranging report and an incredibly complex topic in seven minutes. However, I thank the committee clerks and the staff of the Scottish Parliament information centre for their invaluable help in assembling a powerful range of witnesses and experts, who gave our inquiry an excellent start. The Environment and Rural Development Committee also thanks the organisations and members of the public who contributed generously to our discussions.

The committee started the inquiry with the result of our sustainable development research, which we commissioned some time ago. We questioned whether the Executive was taking an integrated approach to sustainable development across its range of functions. We also looked at the Parliament in that context. We considered climate change to be such an important and urgent topic that we wanted to test the Executive's commitment to sustainable development and assess how its climate change review process stood up across the range of Executive departments.

In my seven minutes, I want to talk about the context of our report and our key conclusions, and about where we think we should go next. The context is that climate change is happening now. We have time to tackle its impacts before they become irreversible, but we must shift away from our current levels of carbon consumption and emissions, which cause climate change. As the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution put it:

"If we go for business as usual ... we are destined for something unimaginable."—[*Official Report, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee*, 26 January 2005; c 1545.]

Earlier this year, the G8 summit focused on aid, trade and debt in developing countries, but climate change is hovering in the background for all those countries and it has the capacity to make life even worse for millions of their citizens, particularly those who live in low-lying coastal areas, who will be extremely affected by rising sea levels. Climate change has an impact on flooding, even in our own communities. There is also the potential for climate change to link disastrously with the food

chain as the climate heats up over the next few decades.

We call on other countries to do more, but we must be prepared to do more ourselves and to raise our game. The committee believes that that is a huge task, which will require radical change. The United Kingdom signed up to the Kyoto agreement and Tony Blair has now signed up the UK Government to a 60 per cent carbon reduction by 2050. As the RCEP said, business as usual is not enough because it will not get us to our targets.

After taking evidence, the committee was unanimous in the view that climate change is happening. The evidence is there for all to see across the world, including Scotland. The last time that we discussed climate change in the chamber, the Western Isles tragedy had just occurred and the dreadful impact of the storms there was at the forefront of our minds. Since then, other catastrophes have happened around the world. We believe unanimously that we must act now. We know that extreme storm conditions will be more frequent and we know of the regional weather differences in Scotland, to which we must adapt.

The committee was unanimous in its view that we must think about how we act to slow down climate change and try to stop it. We were similarly unanimous about the need to prepare now for the impacts of global climate change, because they are happening now.

The committee considered the Scottish Executive's climate change programme. We felt that it did not go far enough or fast enough and we were concerned that the minister's review later in the year must provide a route map—not only to set out the Scottish Executive's leadership, which we regard as crucial, but to provide information for Government agencies, for local government, for the national health service, for every business in Scotland, and for all of us as individuals.

We all need to know how to respond to climate change. That is why, if I can advertise the prop that I have with me, the committee has produced a report of its key recommendations. I will not be able to go through them all in my seven minutes, but I hope that my colleagues will pick up on the key issues. The report will go to every member of the Parliament and copies will be available for people who want to provoke a debate in their communities.

We examined the key sectors that are still adding to climate change emissions. We considered energy; agriculture, land use and forestry; transport; and business. Those are the key sectors that we have to turn away from business as usual. We are concerned that not

enough is being done on energy efficiency—and that is the easiest place to start. We want to see more of the Scottish energy efficiency strategy; we want the Executive to give it higher prominence and we want members throughout the chamber to take it on board. We welcome the renewables targets that the Executive has set and the huge expansion that is in train. However, we want the Executive to develop a range of other renewables technologies as well, beyond wind and wave.

We want biomass and biofuels to be considered, and we want mass-scale micro-renewables to be considered. I am delighted that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has today announced an expansion of the funding for the Scottish community and householder renewables initiative. In my constituency, there is a scheme that would not have been possible before that initiative, and there had to be lobbying to get the Solar Twin technology included.

There is huge untapped potential. I have spent the summer talking to people about how we can go beyond the pilots and get projects into the mainstream. One of the key recommendations of our report is that renewables are not to be seen as just something innovative. We want there to be projects throughout the country. I know that there is an appetite in our committee for more radical proposals and I look forward to future debates, particularly on such issues.

We want the Scottish Executive to work with the UK Government on an energy strategy for Scotland that tackles climate change. That is a crucial conclusion in our report and we feel that it has to be acted on.

When we considered agriculture, forestry and land use, the committee was surprised by how high up the list that sector was when it came to increasing emissions. None of us expected that; we all expected transport to be number 2. However, there has been a huge expansion of emissions and there are distinctive Scottish issues that we have to tackle. The committee was therefore disappointed that the new land management contracts have been given such a low profile and such low consideration. Climate change issues have not been reflected, but we think that they have to be integrated into all our policies on land use.

The committee accepts that there has been a huge expansion in public transport. However, even today a newspaper headline shows that aviation emissions are the fastest growing source of emissions. Also, we are still not dealing with the increase in road transport. We need interim targets. We know that, up to 2021, road traffic vehicle miles are set to soar by 27 per cent, but what are we going to do about it? The committee does not think that a strategy is in place to reduce

those emissions. We were told by the then Minister for Transport that road user charging had, in effect, been ruled out for a decade. We do not think that that is good enough and we want more urgent action.

We want the Scottish Executive to set targets across every sector so that we can begin to look at where we are going. We noted the First Minister's summer announcement that the Scottish Executive would set sectoral targets for each area of Scottish life. We want that announcement to be built on because, in future, it will concentrate minds. It will let us explore what Scotland's equitable contribution to UK commitments should be. That is meant to be at the heart of the climate change strategy. We need information and we need to generate both energy and the resources to tackle the climate change challenge.

The committee chose its words very carefully. Membership of the Environment and Rural Development Committee covers the range of political parties in the chamber, and getting agreement among those members is no easy task. I hope that the fact that we achieved unanimity on such a lengthy and complex report sends a message to the Executive.

The Executive has the support of the committee—and, I hope, the support of the Parliament—to be more radical when it comes to the review of the climate change programme. We hope that the Executive will consider our recommendations. We accept that an awful lot is happening in the Executive and we welcome a huge amount of it. However, we do not believe that it is all being done because of climate change. Some of the things that the Executive is doing are sensible and are good environmental policies, but we must ensure that there is action across every Scottish Executive department. We want the Executive to take the lead by moving away from business as usual and considering what Scottish companies can do to tackle climate change. That is crucial. If we can only target green energy and think about how to green our economy, we will be in a win-win situation. Our economy must use significantly less carbon and we must consider how our businesses can respond to that.

On climate change, there is no single fix or simple solution. We know that the Executive has many difficult decisions to take. In preparing its report, the committee wanted to say to the Executive that it needs to be more radical and to act more urgently, because climate change is already upon us. Some members have already had experience of the devastating and tragic impact of stormier weather. All of us can expect more of that throughout Scotland. On the east, winters will be drier and, in the west, there will be a lot of rain, which unfortunately will not be spread

throughout the year. That is what our country faces. In other parts of the world, the challenge will be immense.

Let us do our bit—let us agree as a Parliament that there is much more that we can do. It is crucial that we do not forget about climate change after today's debate, but come back to it. Our committee has already decided that it wants to explore more of such issues in future. When we scrutinise Executive legislation and conduct our inquiries, we will ensure that consideration of climate change is key. I hope that the Executive will do the same and that the minister will be able to respond positively and to flag up more radical action for the future.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Environment and Rural Development Committee's 5th Report, 2005 (Session 2): *Report on Inquiry into Climate Change* (SP Paper 342).

14:46

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** I am pleased to participate in an important debate. I acknowledge how much I and all members of the Parliament welcome the excellent report on climate change that the Environment and Rural Development Committee has produced. Just as the convener found it difficult to cover all her points in seven minutes, I will have difficulty in fitting in my response.

I am grateful for all the information that the report contains. The production of the report is timely because, as Sarah Boyack made clear, we are in the midst of a serious and radical review of our climate change strategy. The publication of this well-informed and well-constructed report could not be more welcome. The small summary booklet, too, is excellent and the committee is to be commended for producing a splendid publication that is readable and stops the reader from getting too bogged down. Parliamentary committees and the Executive could learn from that.

The report points out that it is vital that we respond to the situation that we face. We will not argue, as some people in other countries would seek to do, that there is any doubt about climate change. There is no doubt about it. We must respond by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and taking steps to prepare for the inevitable impacts of climate change.

The Executive is undertaking a review of its programme. We believe that we have some starting blocks. We have had targets on renewable energy and this morning we issued news on the SCHRI. In the past 10 days, we have announced

differences in the way in which we will apply renewables obligation certificates in relation to wind and wave power.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** My intervention is about the review of the Executive's strategy. I welcome the announcements that the minister made this morning about the Scottish community and householder renewables initiative, but is he satisfied that the Government has a truly joined-up strategy on biomass, especially in relation to public procurement projects? The part that biomass schemes can play in the public-private partnership projects that the Government has undertaken has troubled a number of members. Is the Executive's strategy joined up? To those of us who are observing from the sidelines, that does not appear to be the case.

**Ross Finnie:** I am conscious of the point that John Swinney raises. We have developed a programme that focuses on driving forward our commitment to renewables across the Executive. My friend the Minister for Energy will make further announcements on biomass. He is addressing the lack of connectivity between certain of the incentives and assessing whether that can be tackled through public contracts.

We are conscious of the fact that we have to keep pushing on with the green jobs strategy. We must ensure not only that we acknowledge the need for work in that area, but that it develops environmental technologies, so that we have at our command more tools to enable us to address the serious problems. The convener of the Environment and Rural Development Committee also referred to the need for us to pay attention to the national transport strategy and that, too, is being reviewed.

I very much take the point that one of the apparently obvious and simple measures to be taken—and one that we are developing—is the creation of a greater focus on energy efficiency. I assure Sarah Boyack that the Executive is working on that. We are also working with the United Kingdom Government to develop a UK adaptation policy framework, and we are funding the development of a Scottish climate change impacts partnership to address the impacts of climate change. We accept that the on-going review, which is embracing all aspects of Government, must drive the agenda forward. We have to come up with a different and much more focused programme—with a much more radical format—than programme number 1. We understand also that we cannot underestimate the contribution that Scotland can make. As a developed country, we have a responsibility to act and we are working in collaboration with the UK Government and our European and international partners. I believe that



Scotland can help to make a difference, as was pointed out in today's time for reflection.

I am pleased to announce the publication today of the latest Scottish greenhouse gas inventory. It shows that, in 2003, Scottish greenhouse gas emissions were around 10 per cent lower than in the Kyoto baseline years and that UK emissions were 13 per cent lower in the same period. However, those statistics do not tell the whole story, and it is important not to draw a false conclusion because of the issues around energy and gas. The figures that we have produced today will be enormously helpful in taking forward the commitment that I have already given to have targets in the new climate change programme. Not only is it important that we have a more radical review; it is crucial that we have it expressed in terms that are measurable.

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** We welcome the data that were released this morning. Can the minister confirm that the Executive will now work towards establishing a national emissions target, especially as it is developing a much more robust data set in the area?

**Ross Finnie:** I acknowledge—as the committee's report acknowledges—that, although we are in possession of new data that will help us hugely in developing targets, creating a single target figure is very complex. As the committee report concludes, we are probably more likely to get more meaningful data to provide substance to sectoral targets. At the moment, that is our position. I still think that that will make the new review a much more robust document.

The review of our climate change programme is continuing, and the committee's inquiry report, together with the improved data to which I have referred, will make a key contribution to that. Together, through the actions of the committee, our interaction with it and our consultation on the process, we will end up with a much more radical and much-improved climate change programme, which I hope will respond to the requirements not just of the committee but of Parliament as a whole.

14:53

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** We all agree that, from the sad loss of an entire family in South Uist last winter to the massive destruction and loss of life that we have seen in New Orleans in recent weeks, we are reminded constantly of the potential impact of climate on our daily lives.

The Environment and Rural Development Committee's report addresses an important and wide-ranging issue. It is a great pity that the time that has been made available to debate the report is so short; the actions of people are a major

variable in the equations that determine climate change and we all have to take responsibility for our actions. Of course, we need to think globally and, if anything worth while is to come out of recent events in the southern states of the United States, it will be that the biggest polluter on the planet has been made to think about its role in causing climate change and the part that it can play in tackling the problem.

We also need to act locally and, as the committee's report says, urgently. Unfortunately, I did not sense any urgency in what the minister said this afternoon. For example, we need to set ambitious targets for carbon emission reduction and we need to take policy decisions that will meet those targets.

Paragraph 177 of the report states:

"The transport sector was regarded by most witnesses as absolutely central to addressing climate change."

I could not agree more: a comparison of different forms of transport points the way towards progress in this regard. The Carbon Trust shows that on a per passenger kilometre basis, buses are more polluting than trains and that cars are the most polluting of all. I think that we might have already guessed that.

It is apposite that we are having a debate on climate change this afternoon and a debate on the A9 at 5 o'clock this evening; some of the same issues are likely to arise. I listened to the minister's colleague, Tavish Scott, on the radio this morning saying that one of the things that we need to do about the A9 is to improve the rail network into Perth so that folk are more likely to get out of their cars and into the trains—if only.

The Executive must promote, develop, improve and invest in our rail network much faster than it is doing at present. Apart from the very real problems that I face in trying to travel efficiently by rail from my home to the Parliament because of the shortcomings of the Perth to Edinburgh link, I have the experience in my constituency of several small campaigns for the opening or reopening of railways to serve communities that are almost wholly dependent on cars. Members with similar experiences will know just how incredibly slow the process is. We need, literally, to get moving much faster.

Another hot topic in my constituency is the contribution to climate change by various forms of electricity generation. I am entirely convinced of the benefits of wind power technology; at the same time, I am increasingly frustrated by the lack of any sort of national strategy to deal with the sense of many communities that there will be turbines on every hilltop. I do not support every proposed wind farm in my constituency, but I would far rather have a wind farm at the bottom of

my garden than a nuclear power plant or, indeed, a nuclear waste dump. One of the most worrying aspects of the climate change debate has been the nuclear lobby's attempts to portray nuclear power as the clean, green answer to the problem. It is anything but.

Nuclear power is expensive and unsafe and, because of the waste that it produces, it is probably the least-clean energy around. There is little sign of any change in our lifetime, the lifetime of this building or even of this country.

The committee's report deserves to be taken more seriously and more urgently than seems to be the case at the moment. I hope that this will not be the only opportunity to discuss climate change.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab)** *rose—*

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Rather more than one and a half hours would seem appropriate. That would allow the likes of John Home Robertson to contribute. I look forward to coming back to this issue soon.

14:58

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** It was a pleasure to take part in the evidence taking on the inquiry. As a member of the Environment and Rural Development Committee at the time, I found it valuable to have some of the evidence presented in a format that allowed us to make comparisons. However, as the convener of the committee said, we came to rather different conclusions, perhaps for reasons of politics and background. Nonetheless, the report in its broadest terms is extremely valuable and has provoked worthwhile discussion today.

I thank the clerks for the way in which the report is presented. However, I have one criticism in retrospect. Having allowed time to pass and then looked at the report again, I think that perhaps its scale and the priorities that were attached to various issues in it could have been handled differently. However, I say that with the advantage of time having passed.

We all agree that climate change and global warming are happening. However, we also know that global warming has been happening for at least 10,000 years. If we go further back into history, it is obvious that the functioning of the planet and of life on it has been designed to stabilise the temperature of the earth. As a result, CO<sub>2</sub> has been tied into the soil in order to prevent the planet from heating up. Although we can do a great deal to prevent circumstances from becoming even worse, our priority must be to learn to cope with the situation that we face. It is perhaps the case that, whatever we do, we cannot

reverse the process. Indeed, we might have to learn to live with a continuing process.

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):** I have a brief intervention on cause and effect. The Parliament can have a limited effect on the causes of global warming. We have already heard about tsunamis, the New Orleans disaster and so on. The most recent records show that, in two years, 5,300 senior citizens died in this country of winter-related deaths.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Quickly.

**John Swinburne:** We can do something about that, so I am sad to hear that nothing is being said about something that we can do, instead of talking about global warming, the effect of global warming—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** This is becoming a speech, Mr Swinburne. I think that you have made your point.

**Alex Johnstone:** I agree with part of what Mr Swinburne was saying at the beginning of his intervention, but I am not sure that I understood the references later on.

I understand the importance of the Parliament and the Government in dealing with the problems that we face. It is entirely appropriate that we take action to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through saving energy wherever possible and through promoting energy efficiency and the better use of the energy that we have.

As Roseanna Cunningham said, we must remember that the problem is worldwide. If we are to lead by example, we must deliver worldwide advantage. We could do more to promote the use of biomass, for example—that is one thing that the Executive could have done more with in recent years. I am increasingly contacted on the subject, particularly by farmers, who are keen to get involved in biofuels but feel that the Executive's actions in promoting the production of liquid fuel on Scotland's farms are not as positive as they might be.

Looking at the issue in worldwide terms, I believe that Scotland needs urgently to address the fact that, whatever we do, we cannot expect the rest of the world to follow unless we set a genuine and good example. The great problem with CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is that the fastest-developing economies in the world are also the largest ones. Countries such as China and India, with their huge coal reserves, find themselves wondering why we are telling them that they cannot use those reserves. The fact that we have already had the opportunity to develop our economies makes it difficult for us to argue the case.

Roseanna Cunningham spoke about nuclear power. Scotland has a great deal to teach the

world about the use of safe nuclear energy. I also believe that Scotland could have a great deal to teach the world about the safe and economic use of our coal reserves, without releasing CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. We need to invest in that technology. If we are not to have a proliferation of unsafe nuclear technology across the world, we must take the opportunity to promote safe nuclear energy here. That would not only prevent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but give us a technology that we can export, ensuring that the disadvantages of nuclear energy do not blow around the world and come back to haunt us.

15:03

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The inquiry that led to the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report was, I believe, one of the most important pieces of work that have ever been carried out by any committee of the Parliament. I thank the clerks in particular for the work that they put into it. I hope that the Executive's response to the challenges that are outlined in the report will not be mere warm words.

Anyone who attended the Environment and Rural Development Committee's opening evidence session on climate change or who subsequently read the *Official Report* of it could not fail to be impressed with the seriousness with which climatologists and other scientists have addressed the issue. Professor Hoskins of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution said that the earth is

"as warm as it has been in the past million years—and we are turning up the radiator."—[*Official Report, Environment and Rural Development Committee*, 26 January 2005; c 1522.]

That is a serious warning.

I welcome the emissions figures that the Executive has published today, but although some of our initiatives are good, they can still seem piecemeal. I welcome the grants for small community or individual household renewables, but, as John Swinney said, there is frustration among local authorities that cannot get wood-fired central heating installed in their PPP schools.

Is anyone in Scotland manufacturing wood pellets? No. Is anyone in Scotland manufacturing the stoves that will burn pellet or chip? No. Can we grow enough wood to make biomass a significant energy provider? We do not seem to know. Will land management contracts encourage the planting of more woodland? Foresters doubt it. How much engineering work in renewables will come to Scotland? Will Scottish banks support the development in Scotland of home-grown renewable businesses? It seems to me that we have an opportunity gap in renewables that needs

to be bridged without delay. Is our present green jobs strategy up to the task?

How do we bring about a culture change without being environmental fascists? We know from health debates that we cannot just tell people to do what is good for them; we have to make people want it, too—there has to be a carrot as well as a stick.

Builders of houses offer us triple bathrooms rather than triple glazing, because they say that that is what the public demand, yet improved energy efficiency would deliver half our carbon reduction target. We need to make the public value energy efficiency.

On transport, we want to continue to enjoy cheap petrol and aeroplane flights as if fossil fuels were limitless and harmless. Even the oil and gas companies recognise the importance of sustainability and the role that they have to play in easing the inevitable transition to renewable alternatives. Where are the cheap rail fares, as Roseanna Cunningham asked?

There is important research to support in carbon sequestration and hydrogen technology and we commend the Executive's investment in such research, particularly in marine renewables. However, where is the route map? We know where we are and we know where we want to be, but how do we get there? Where are our targets in building standards and transport emissions? How do we persuade businesses and individuals to sign up for the journey when the past couple of years have seen such huge controversy surrounding the impact of wind farms and the upgrading of the grid? How do we persuade people to make significant lifestyle changes? How do we make such changes affordable for them and attractive to them?

The Executive has the major role to play and it cannot shirk it. It must not only regulate now for the future, but persuade the public of the seriousness of the need for change. I look forward to hearing radical proposals from the Executive in due course and to its setting practical examples that others can follow. The public sector will have to lead and set the example.

I appreciate the First Minister's announcement that targets will be set in the various sectors. We are all impatient to see the Executive's climate change strategy and we would like the minister's assurance that it is truly on course for delivery later this year.

I thank all those who were involved in the committee's inquiry and in producing the report. As I said, this has been one of the most important pieces of work that have been done in the Parliament. I am sorry that the chamber is so empty; it should have been packed, because

climate change will impact on every person in Scotland and every person will have to take cognisance of it. We cannot ignore climate change, because it will have a great impact on our lives in all sorts of ways. I ask the minister to underline in his response the Executive's strong commitment to dealing with this serious matter.

15:08

**Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green):** I broadly welcome the findings of the Environment and Rural Development Committee's inquiry into climate change and congratulate the committee on producing a valuable report. In particular, I congratulate the convener and members of the committee on achieving cross-party unity—having heard Alex Johnstone's speech, I realise that extraordinary ability was needed for that.

The committee has been able to gather evidence on climate change and to take the longer view, which we rarely have a chance to do in the chamber. Because of that approach, it has been able to make strong recommendations to the Executive on behalf of the Parliament.

In contrast, I am gravely concerned by the Executive's hugely non-committal response to the committee. Its written response was very much a business-as-usual palm-off. I hope that the committee continues to engage with the Executive on the matter and brings the minister before it again to answer further questions, as the Enterprise and Culture Committee did when we had an inadequate response from the Executive to our inquiry into renewable energy.

**Ross Finnie:** I appreciate that the committee's work was timed to be coincidental with the review, but I think that it is a little unfair to say that, just because we are unable to disclose certain information because we have not finished that work, we are not able to tell the committee exactly what is in the review. That seems harsh in the extreme.

**Chris Ballance:** We need action from the Executive on things such as transport targets, which it is currently examining without acting on. We need action to be taken on climate change targets much more quickly than it looks as though it will be taken. The world is criticising George W Bush for not signing up to a global target. We need to meet our targets as quickly as possible.

The Executive's response to the committee states:

"Our objective is to deliver emissions reductions in Scotland without damaging economic development."

It is my perception that the Executive has not taken on board the fact that climate change will be responsible for a great deal of damage to

economic development, as has been the case in every one of the climatic events in the world in the past two years. Making a quick and thorough response to climate change would be the best thing that we could do for economic development in this country. However, the Executive is not prepared to adjust significantly its short-term, business-as-usual mindset.

Today, the Tyndall centre for climate change research published an independent report showing that, if Government expectations for air transport expansion are realised, all other emissions will have to reduce to zero if we are to honour our commitments. Where is the Executive's action on that? If anything, the Executive's action is going in the other direction and encouraging more air transport emissions.

I strongly urge the Executive to reconsider its response to the committee's recommendations and particularly the committee's call for a national target. I note that, while the Environment and Rural Development Committee calls for national targets on transport, the Labour and Scottish National Party members on the Local Government and Transport Committee have closed their minds to the idea. That is deeply unfortunate. Scotland needs an overall climate change target that will focus minds and provide the impetus for a change from the Executive's business-as-usual attitude. I ask the minister to respond to that challenge in his summing-up speech.

15:13

**Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP):** I thank the members of the Environment and Rural Development Committee for their hard work in the preparation of the report.

We all know the facts about climate change. The scientists and experts have been telling us for long enough that our present lifestyles are unsustainable. If we keep on going the way we are, we will need two extra planets. The last time I looked, however, there was only one earth.

We all know the figures about climate change, such as that 90,000 Scottish homes are under threat of flooding. We know that the changes in the growing seasons will threaten the farming industry and that the changes in the sea will threaten our fishing industry—or, rather, what is left of it. However, what is the Executive going to do about the issue?

Since the Parliament opened, we have had countless debates on climate change, renewable energy and sustainable development. However, we have no national targets for recycling or emissions and we have seen the contract for a wave-energy generation system lost to Portugal.

I will examine four areas that contribute to climate change: energy production, transport, forestry and farming. In Scotland, we are lucky, in that we have vast amounts of renewable energy available to us. We also have an Executive that is responsible for the promotion of renewable energy. What progress has been made? Despite the Executive's pledge to increase participation in renewable energy projects by communities and local authorities, we see a lack of support for such projects. That should come as no surprise because, in Scotland, we have no strategic approach to renewable energy development. Climate change is happening now, but we have no strategic approach—I repeat that point because it is extremely important.

Transport is predicted to become the sector with the greatest emissions by 2015, so the Executive must act now. We need to devote energy to and invest in the development of a proper public transport system and a proper freight rail system. We need that now. So far, we have seen little progress, but we have seen a £1 billion trunk road building programme, including the M74 extension. What exactly is that doing to address climate change?

Last week, in the chamber, I asked the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications about the transportation of timber in light of the fact that the timber crop in Dumfries and Galloway is set to rise in the next 10 to 15 years. He stated that the national transport strategy will be brought to the Parliament next year. It will be next year before we have the strategy and who knows how long before anything is implemented. I hope that it is worth the wait.

In Scotland, we have a timber industry that could be the envy of the world. We have timber that we can use as wood fuel as well as in the building industry, but where is the support and development? The committee's report highlights the fact that the forestry strategy does not include any emissions-related objectives and has no vision for the maximum contribution of forestry towards tackling climate change. I hope that the Executive will take on board the report's recommendation that the forestry strategy should be reviewed to include climate change issues.

Lastly, the farming industry produces vast amounts of greenhouse gases. What has the Executive done to address that? We know that organic farming is increasing, yet we still have to import much of the organic food that is sold in Scotland, which adds to the problems of climate change. Why is our organic aid scheme so overbureaucratic that farmers are leaving organic farming? The scheme is a waste of public money and a cause of stress to farmers and it does nothing to address climate change. We also have

land management contracts that do not address climate change considerations. Climate change must be fully integrated into a review of the agricultural strategy. It is telling that the committee voiced concerns about the lack of leadership on the issue in the farming sector.

As I said, the committee's report is excellent and no one doubts the real need to address climate change. I therefore challenge the Executive to act on the findings of the report and to do something about climate change.

15:17

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** One of the wake-up calls that I heard on the environment was when I learned many years ago that acid rain effects on the Scandinavian forests can be traced back to the very beginning of Britain's industrial revolution. That is quite a thought, because now, two centuries later, we are having to face the effects of human activity on our climate. We are looking at the Kyoto protocol and the targets on greenhouse gas emissions that we have all agreed to meet, but we should also reflect on how long the process has been going on and how quickly it is accelerating.

People ask why we should bother about climate change when Scotland can make only an infinitesimal contribution to the action that is needed globally, but I think that the parable of the starfish, which was mentioned at this afternoon's time for reflection, is apt. To look at the matter in a selfish way, if we do not act, we will face some of the adverse consequences. As Alex Johnstone said, we need to lead by example. Why should we ask developing economies to be more responsible in their use of energy if we are not prepared to be more responsible? There are practical things to be gained, in that the technologies and strategies that we develop can be shared with other countries. As Alex Johnstone also said, if we develop clean coal technology and share it with China, where there are vast developments, that will be for the global good.

The Environment and Rural Development Committee's report asks several questions. What are we doing about climate change? Are our actions delivering on the obligations that, collectively, we have accepted? In some cases, the answer is, perhaps, not so far. Is climate change a consideration in all policy areas? What actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should be seen as priorities? We recognise that an effect exists, but we have no idea how great it might become, because a time lag occurs between cause and effect. We need to consider how we adapt to the known changes, but we will also need to adapt to the inevitable consequences

of past behaviour that may have 20 years of effect still to happen.

The first step in dealing with a problem is to recognise that it exists. Its existence is now without question and scientific consensus has been reached on the matter. The committee report takes the next step of asking what we do about the problem. The problem is long term, wide ranging and complex. It has taken us a long time to get into this mess and it will take us a long time to get out of it—if that is even possible—or to get over it.

Action is needed in a wide range of areas and actions must be planned far into the future. It is vital to have an integrated strategy and a clear idea of the desired outcome. That must be broken down into manageable and incremental steps.

Greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced in the key sectors of energy, transport and land use. Because of our type of soil, land use is particularly relevant to efforts in Scotland. In transport, graphs are all going the wrong way. Much effort and not a little political courage will be needed to cut demand in addition to taking the more popular actions to improve public transport, especially rail.

In energy, there are no big simple solutions—at least, there is only one, which is to use less. That means that we require the cumulative effect of myriad smaller solutions. It is perfectly possible to meet many of the target emission reductions in the energy sector by dealing with demand rather than supply. The place where the most difference can be made is—surprisingly—not in the industrial sector, but in our lives as individuals.

The scope is enormous for energy savings in the choices that people make about travel, about the houses in which they live and about the appliances that they buy and how they use them. We will not make progress until that potential is harnessed. People power works. We can make people aware—we can give them good information about the choices that they can make and the tools to make them—and stand well back. We will have triple glazing, not triple bathrooms.

The Scottish Executive can do much to facilitate choice. Overall, it must develop an integrated strategy complete with action plans for all sectors and a route map with milestones and timeframes that are underpinned by information that lets us know when we reach them.

15:22

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I was greatly impressed by the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report and by the speech that Sarah Boyack, the committee's convener, gave. The report goes into detail on many aspects of climate change and pulls

together all the information for those of us who do not deal with it day to day. I read the report with interest and some disquiet.

Sarah Boyack quoted the stark warning from the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, which is on page 1 of the report. It is worth restating:

"If we go for business as usual ... we are destined for something unimaginable."—[*Official Report, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee*, 26 January 2005; c 1545.]

Roseanna Cunningham showed how some people have already faced the unimaginable horror of what climate change can do.

However, it is not all horror. The next paragraph of the committee's report says:

"A massive possibility for change exists at government, business and individual levels, given the right policy levers and leadership."

I urge the Scottish Executive to promote that possibility for change. It should start from the top—the Government—and work down to business and individuals. It should use the right policy levers and show leadership.

The committee and many knowledgeable commentators have pushed for a national target that will allow for sectoral objectives and a strategy to achieve them. As WWF Scotland says in its commentary on the report:

"The Scottish Executive's response"

is

"that they are still very much against the key measure—an overall climate change target for Scotland."

I do not understand why that is the case. WWF Scotland says:

"Without this demonstration of political will Scotland is bound to fail to make an equal contribution to the UK's Kyoto Protocol target of a 12.5% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2008-2012."

As Sarah Boyack said, the issue is not only about Scotland; it is not only about our sitting here wondering how climate change affects us. Everything that the developed world does has knock-on effects on people in poorer countries. We have already seen the awful effects that there can be, but things will get worse.

I was interested in what Maureen Macmillan said about the many things that can be done. Many small initiatives could do with support from the Government at the top. In asking for a route map, she reflected what the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report states. On page 63, the report says:

"At all levels individual citizens and business people need a route map for how we can move towards a carbon-free world. High level government action is clearly required in many policy areas."

It states:

"there are many ways in which significant contributions ... can be achieved by individuals (with little cost to the public purse) if they are effectively engaged in the process."

Being "effectively engaged" is the key. As the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing note states, in our country,

"none of this is new—most people understand the messages that increased energy use and consumption are bad ... but the key is making it easier for them to make more sustainable choices."

That is where radical leadership is required. In paragraph after paragraph, the committee's report urges radical action from the top to encourage everyone else. Some solutions may be difficult for people to implement, but the Government's job is to make decisions about what is necessary for the greater good.

The report is important and could be the key to the way forward. However, there is not enough time to discuss the implications and potential solutions that are noted in it. Members have called for much greater debate and discussion, which I, too, would welcome. The Executive's response has been somewhat disappointing in the light of the report's radical nature, but the response does not have to be disappointing. We could move forward.

15:27

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** I have in my hand the summary document on the climate change inquiry that the committee produced—it has been referred to a great deal. Its first words say it all:

"The world's climate is changing."

The challenge for every right-thinking individual and Government is how to put in place measures that will deal with the climatic juggernaut that is heading in our direction.

I do not have to travel far from my old home in North Uist to see the extent and impact of the changes that have taken place in a few short years. The changing and ever-shifting sands of the machair, for example, are a constant reminder of them. Members have mentioned the dreadful storms in January this year that brought home to all of us the tragic and devastating effect of higher seas and more frequent storms—the convener of the committee highlighted that matter in her opening remarks.

The community that I represent is all too well aware of the awesome power of the ocean and the elements, but the January storms truly gave all of us real cause to take stock and to plan in a different way for the decades ahead. We must take stock and revisit the age-old certainties that

we took for granted. In years past, people built houses close to the shore in low-lying areas, but that is no longer an option for people who are building new homes.

Three weeks ago, the good men of Ness in Lewis returned from their annual hunt to Sulasgeir—which is 40 miles north of Lewis—with the solemn news that the orders for all of us who had pre-ordered guga would have to be reduced by half. The usually robust gannet colony on Sulasgeir is no longer what it used to be. Changes in the climate have greatly affected the bird population and a 1,000-year-old tradition has been threatened. The bird colony's viability is certainly under threat in my lifetime.

That is why the approach that the so-called Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has taken with respect to renewable energy projects not only in my constituency but throughout the country is bewildering. The society is a virulent opponent of wind farms and takes an inherently dishonest and illogical position.

On Monday, I visited the Arnish yard in Stornoway, which is at the forefront of the renewable energy revolution. Seventy men were working on a Portuguese wave generator. It is encouraging to see the progress that is being made across Europe.

For years, Western Isles Council has been trying to create an energy zone—a philosophy that is eminently exportable. Rightly, the council wants to embrace a range of energy generation solutions that can be taken across the world. I know that the Executive is serious about supporting that.

Chris Ballance of the Greens raised the issue of transport policy. Just before I came into the chamber, I was encouraged to hear what Ross Finnie's UK counterpart, Elliot Morley, has said in relation to aviation emissions: he wants them to be included in international agreements, which is a sensible and proper approach. He is also seeking advances in technology that will limit emissions. That is very necessary, given the prediction that UK air passenger numbers will rise from 180 million to 475 million by the year 2030.

**Mr Ruskell:** I acknowledge what the member says about the importance of including the air industry in the emissions trading scheme. However, does he acknowledge the evidence that the committee received suggesting that that will not be enough to tackle the problem?

**Mr Morrison:** I hope that the member welcomes the inclusion of the air industry in the scheme. The position that has been taken by the UK Government, supported by the Executive, is the responsible one. I hope that the Green party will join us in supporting it.

Sarah Boyack, my eminent colleague and convener, who marshals her troops marvellously, spoke from a committee perspective and was right to highlight what we learned as a committee. A business-as-usual approach is simply not acceptable and a reduction in emissions is key.

Members from all parties are correct in stating that this institution on its own will not save the world, but we can and will make our contribution. Roseanna Cunningham mentioned the biggest polluter on the planet and how it has been so savagely reminded of the consequences of doing business as usual.

I do not think that my colleague John Home Robertson is in the chamber, but he wanted to mention Alex Johnstone's contribution. He said that it was statesmanlike and wise.

This has been a short, useful and well-informed debate. I urge all members to support the motion in Sarah Boyack's name.

15:32

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests, which declares that I own land, part of which is under development as part of a wind farm. I express the hope that that statement finds more approval with members of the committee than it possibly finds with some of my colleagues.

Earlier this year, I was half listening to a programme on the radio when I heard a phrase that gave me quite a jolt and grabbed my attention. The person who was being interviewed had started to talk about global dimming. Like everyone else, I had heard a great deal about global warming, but global dimming was a new one to me. Apparently, in the three days following the tragic events of 11 September 2001, during which the world's aircraft were universally grounded, scientists could detect a significant improvement in air quality, due to the lack of aircraft fuel vapour in our skies. I found it quite frightening that such a measurement could be detected in just three days. It certainly put to the back of my mind any notion that climate change could be either a figment of some scientist's imagination or part of the natural cycle of our planet's evolution. We undoubtedly have a problem that is man-made; therefore, it is the duty of man to address it.

Conservative members welcome and accept the broad thrust of the committee's report. As a former convener of the Rural Development Committee, I commend the Environment and Rural Development Committee for the impressive work that it has put in to produce it. However, like all reports, it is to a degree designed to be thought

provoking. In the short time that is available to me, I would like to provoke a little thought on one or two issues.

The report states that by 2015 transport is predicted to take over from energy as the biggest emissions sector. The report recommends that the Executive's transport strategy should firmly integrate emissions reduction targets into transport planning. That is a fine statement, but I am not sure that it stacks up if it is intended as a one-size-fits-all approach. If one compares the use of the car in my very rural constituency, coupled with the comparative lack of alternative means of transport, with the use of cars and availability of alternatives in the central belt, one sees that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution.

Although I take this opportunity to welcome the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications's announcement yesterday that three identified improvement projects on the A75 are to be put out to tender, that should be part of an on-going process of improvements to the route, certainly for economic reasons and because there are genuinely beneficial environmental reasons for some targeted road improvements.

I understand that it now takes something like 12 Minis to produce the same amount of pollution as one of the original models used to produce. The technology must continue to improve, but we must guard against punishing use of the car unnecessarily in our most rural areas as we seek to address the important global issues.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Fergusson:** I really do not have time, but if I find that I do, I will let the member come back in.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** You have time if you wish.

**Sarah Boyack:** The member is a substitute on our committee at the moment. One of the recommendations in the report was that we should take a social justice perspective on transport. We accept that it is not a case of one size fits all, but we are trying to focus on where we can make savings. We did not want to penalise people who live in rural parts of the country—we were keen to emphasise that—but we wanted a much harder look to be taken at emissions throughout the country.

**Alex Fergusson:** I am grateful that I had time to take that intervention and I thank the member for her reassurances on the matter.

We must not allow theoretically sound projects to falter through not being properly thought through. I give members a brief example. Dumfries and Galloway Council's waste PPP proposals could have resulted in the waste-derived fuel at



the end of the process being used to create energy, fuel a greenhouse-based enterprise and create a significant number of new jobs. Indeed, when I questioned several aspects of the proposal, just such a venture was paraded before me by the preferred bidders as a sop to my concerns. However, once the PPP was awarded, the proposer of the energy-from-waste plant was unceremoniously dumped so, for at least seven years, the waste-derived fuel will simply be consigned to landfill. What sort of environmental improvement is that? The Executive must ensure that such potentially beneficial schemes are properly thought through; currently, they are not.

The Presiding Officer's patience will probably run out shortly but, according to the report, 40 per cent of energy could be saved. That is simply another way of saying that 40 per cent of energy is gratuitously wasted. The Executive could do a great deal to highlight some of the small items that are referred to, such as the use of energy-saving light bulbs, which could make a real difference.

If the report is to lead anywhere, we need not more targets from the Executive, but a little more action.

15:37

**Nora Radcliffe:** The debate has been on a wide topic and is difficult to summarise. Sarah Boyack effectively set the context at the start when she spoke about the consequences and why action is needed, outlined where it is needed and emphasised the need for a route map.

In answer, Ross Finnie made it clear that the strategy that we have called for is being developed throughout the Scottish Executive and promised that it would be both more focused and more radical.

I totally agreed with Roseanna Cunningham's point that it is the actions of people that will have the most effect. I also agreed with what she said about the nuclear industry.

Alex Johnstone made the point that our priority might have to be learning to cope with where we are rather than trying to halt or reverse the effects of global warming. I say to him that although I am quite sure that we could have safe nuclear energy, my problem with it is a pragmatic one—it will cost an awful lot of money that would be better applied in other ways.

Maureen Macmillan spoke about the piecemeal efforts that are being made and about what more could and should be done. She asked the Executive, "How?"

Chris Ballance welcomed the opportunity to take the longer view, although he was worried by what he saw as a non-committal response from the

Executive. I will return to that later. He pointed out that if we are talking about economic development, the best thing that we could do would be to look at economic damage. He also called for more action on transport.

I agree with Rosemary Byrne that the revised forestry strategy must include consideration of the effects of climate change and what can be done to mitigate those and I am sure that it will.

Linda Fabiani was right to say that everything that the developed world does has a knock-on effect on the third world. Her other point was that the key was engaging people effectively in the work to meet the challenges of climate change.

Alasdair Morrison said that, with the effects of climate change, we all need to think differently. Alex Fergusson provided another wake-up call by pointing out that grounding aircraft for three days has a measurable effect on air quality. He also made a very good point about energy wastage.

A thread of disappointment at the Scottish Executive's response to the report has run through the debate. All I can say is that I hope that the Executive's Scottish climate change programme will be radical and focused and that it will allow us to begin to tackle the challenges that climate change presents.

15:40

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** As members from all parties have pointed out, the incidence of freak floods in this country, droughts in Africa and hurricanes that can overwhelm major American cities leaves us in little doubt that the climate is changing. However, what can we do about it?

As Sarah Boyack mentioned, a report from the Tyndall centre for climate change research published this very day states that, if air travel continues to grow at its present pace, the UK will have no hope of reducing emissions to the target figure of 60 per cent by the mid-century. Of course, the rate at which China builds coal-fired power stations makes it difficult to see how a little country such as Scotland can influence global climate change. Perhaps Oliver Letwin's suggestion that an independent body—the Royal Bank of Scotland, perhaps—should preside over the UK's transition to a low-carbon economy has some merit. Certainly Friends of the Earth believes that such an approach could be more effective than Government supervision.

**Mr Ruskell:** Does the member also agree with Mr Letwin that we need to make year-on-year reductions in our greenhouse gas emissions and that having a national target is perhaps the best way of doing that?

**Mr Brocklebank:** Broadly speaking, I think that I agree with Mr Ruskell. I am about to come on to that point.

Despite the minister's certainty, not all scientists accept that global warming exists. Although some, such as Professor Bjørn Lomborg of the University of Aarhus in Denmark, accept that such a phenomenon is possible, they believe that we can do little about it; that it might be a good thing for some of us; and that, in any case, more pressing issues must be dealt with.

I hasten to assure the chamber that that does not represent my own view. As an optimistic agnostic, I believe that, given our current state of ignorance, we should act in a way that ensures that we are not disadvantaged, whatever the outcome. We cannot continue to pump carbon dioxide into the atmosphere without seriously considering the consequences.

So what should we do? The immediate and obvious answer—not just on environmental grounds—is that we should drastically reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. We can do far better things with oil and coal than run cars and fuel power stations.

As Alex Johnstone and other members have stated, we should also launch a major programme of energy efficiency. Renewable energy technology has a role to play in that respect—I will say more about that later—but we could introduce certain basic policies now. As Alex Fergusson said, a staggering 40 per cent of the energy that we use could be saved by introducing house insulation improvement schemes that cover windows, heating methods, smart meters and low-energy light bulbs. We desperately need a UK—and indeed Scottish—energy strategy. Over the years, UK Governments of various hues have failed to introduce such a strategy, and I must say that this Executive's response to the committee's report reflects a degree of urgency that is perhaps best summed up in the word “mañana”.

Although I accept Alasdair Morrison's claim that these days the gugas are in short supply in Ness, presumably because of a shortage of feedstuffs, there are other reports of pilchards, sea bass and other Mediterranean species becoming more plentiful in Scottish waters. I remember hearing the dire tales of cod being fished out off the Newfoundland Grand banks; however, they simply seem to have moved into the cooler mid-waters of the Atlantic. Moreover, when the cod moved away from the Grand banks, that fishing was replaced by a healthy shellfish industry, which is now worth more than the cod fishery ever was. I am by no means complacent about any effect on North sea cod and haddock stocks; we want those fish in Scottish waters. However, there is much that we

still do not know about climate change's long-term effects.

Finally, renewables will play an important part in any future energy mix that is based on reduced use of fossil fuels. As Sarah Boyack and others stated, Scotland is well placed in that respect, what with the possibilities of wave power, tidal power, hydro power, wind power, biomass and the imaginative use of photovoltaic technology, which works effectively in Scandinavia and the north-east United States.

The Executive's current energy policy has been obsessed with onshore wind power, which I believe, despite my colleague Alex Fergusson's interest, has resulted in mounting opposition to large-scale wind farms throughout the country, such as at Clatto in north-east Fife, where 18 turbines have been proposed—each of them one and a half times larger than the Scott monument—in an area of outstanding natural beauty. A recent cost-benefit analysis of onshore wind farms carried out by the University of Stirling has concluded that they will cause losses, not gains, to Scotland's environment and economy. According to the Stirling researchers, every megawatt of electricity generated by onshore wind farms comes at an annual environmental cost to the average Scot of £7. The result showed conclusively that, although offshore wind farms were environmentally acceptable, most onshore ones were not. At the very least, I believe that the Executive now has a responsibility to introduce new planning guidelines, so that local authorities, communities and developers get adequate guidance on where onshore wind farms might be sited.

I commend the motion and the committee's report.

15:46

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** My first public appointment of the day was in the car park of the Motorgrill at Ballinluig at some ludicrously early hour of the morning, to do an interview about the improvements to the A9 that will be the subject of business later this afternoon. As I drove down to the Parliament later on, a caller to a radio programme said that politicians who argue on the one hand for dramatic reductions in carbon emissions as part of a climate change effort and on the other for road building are hypocrites of the first order—and here I am closing this debate on climate change. At least I do not feel quite so alone since Alex Fergusson made his declaration of interests, which perhaps puts into context some of the challenges that we face in this world that we live in.

I am pleased to be closing the debate and to be able to reflect on an important report from the Environment and Rural Development Committee. This is not the first debate that the Parliament has had on climate change; we had an effective debate on some of the issues in the previous parliamentary year. One of the key themes that came out of that debate, which has come out of today's debate again and which was outlined powerfully by Sarah Boyack in her introductory comments on the report, is the importance of having an effective national strategy and national framework in place to guide all activities in this policy area. In this country, we are in the fortunate position of having a debate that is based on the fact that we all agree that there is a problem. We have moved on from the debate about whether there is an issue to be addressed; we now agree that there is a problem that must be addressed. The question is about how effectively we can undertake the work to do that.

I have been struck by the common theme that emerged in the speeches by Sarah Boyack and, in particular, Maureen Macmillan, which is that there is a particular role for the public sector in driving a number of the initiatives. When we consider the scale of the public sector and the influence and significance that are attached to everything that the public sector does, it is undeniable that public sector leadership would do an enormous amount to advance some of the issues that we are concerned about. In an intervention, I raised a point with the minister—and got a more promising response than I had begun to expect from the Executive—about the use of public sector procurement in that respect. Members will know, as the minister does, that my concern is that major PPP investments in the schools estate in my constituency may be constrained by the fact that the desired use of wood-fuel heating systems is unaffordable because wood-fuel systems are more expensive than conventional, oil-fired heating systems.

That is a classic example of the need within the public sector to find a way of bridging the gap between having a conventional heating system that will undoubtedly contribute to damage to the environment and having a wood-fuel heating system that, although more expensive to install, will be neutral in terms of carbon dioxide emissions. I have already had a number of approaches from people with interests in the forestry sector in my constituency who are desperate for projects to go ahead because they would provide a market for their wood-fuel products. Crucially, such schemes would have no damaging impact on the environment.

The Government could seize the opportunity to link up different aspects of policy. I have to say that I found Mr Finnie's response to me earlier a

great deal more encouraging than Mr Brown's response to me on the subject last Thursday, and I hope that significant action materialises.

The other key point that has come out of the debate is the importance of having established targets to guide our activity. The Environment and Rural Development Committee's report states:

"The Committee believes that the evidence shows climate change to be an urgent and extremely serious challenge for government."

It continues:

"It requires political commitment at the heart of the Scottish Executive, and urgent application by policy-makers in every department and sector of Scottish government."

I appreciate that the Government is reviewing its response to climate change, but the use of that kind of language does not sound to me like anything other than a parliamentary committee giving a big wake-up call to the Scottish Executive, which should intensify the pace at which the issues are being tackled.

I will raise a couple of other points about the practical issues that have been raised with me in my constituency. The renewables sector, which Mr Brocklebank and Alasdair Morrison commented on, is obviously controversial. It is important that as soon as possible the Government advances improvements to the planning framework to allow us to resolve and rationalise the issues.

Last week, I attended a meeting in the town of Birnam in my constituency. There are applications for four colossal wind farms within a 10-mile radius of the village of Amulree, about 8 miles away, and I have no idea how one rationalises one application against another. If every application is deemed to be satisfactory because it passes all the tests, does that mean that they all go ahead? There is a need for the Government to acknowledge the scale of the problem and to tackle the planning framework for onshore wind farms. I thought that the minister had said in previous debates that fresh guidelines would emerge before the summer, and I expected those to be forthcoming, but I have not seen anything emerge, so I hope that there is clarity on the issue as soon as possible.

Not far from Birnam, a proposal is emerging for a small-scale hydro scheme on the River Braan. I am advised that the scheme would generate enough power to fuel a town the size of Pitlochry, which is also in my constituency. Such small-scale, unobtrusive schemes represent an effective use of geography and should be utilised to their maximum potential. Such schemes will be controversial—people are objecting to the hydro scheme because it would cause difficulties for canoeists—but there is plenty opportunity to

undertake them in a sensitive fashion. I hope that the Government will address the matter.

The other constituency issue that I will raise concerns the consequences of flooding. Alasdair Morrison mentioned the tragic events in his constituency in January, which commanded the sympathy of Parliament. In all our constituencies, people's lives have been turned upside down. The events have been on nothing like the scale that we have seen in international situations, but they have happened closer to home and have had an immediate impact on individual householders. I hope that the Government will reconsider having an effective national strategy on flooding, which it has not been willing to pursue. A lot of buck passing to local authorities is going on when there is a problem with local schemes.

The committee's report is excellent. I hope that it will intensify the Government's efforts to tackle the issue and will lead to a refreshing debate about how we can contribute to tackling here in Scotland an issue that is a global problem.

15:54

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** This has been an interesting and varied debate on what I think is an important and challenging committee report.

Against the background of what has been said during the debate and the report's range of proposals, it is important to emphasise that, as Ross Finnie said, our climate change response is still formally under review. As a result, we are unable to respond definitively to some of the committee's recommendations. However, where we have been unable to provide a full response, we aim to respond in greater detail in our revised Scottish climate change programme. We look forward very much to working on that with the committee.

I will respond to points that have been raised in the debate. Maureen Macmillan and John Swinney raised the issue of biomass's important contribution. Indeed, the forum for renewable energy in Scotland found a potential for 450MW of capacity from biomass, which would create 2,000 jobs. Biomass has huge potential and, as Ross Finnie said, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning will make an announcement on that in the near future.

Rosemary Byrne and Nora Radcliffe referred to the need for forestry strategy to recognise the importance of forestry land in reducing emissions. I agree with that view, which will be reflected in the review of forestry strategy.

Sarah Boyack said that climate change must be factored into public sector decision making. She is right, of course, and that is why the Executive is taking the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Bill through Parliament. I believe that the Executive is showing leadership in this hugely important area.

Two members stated that nuclear energy has an important role to play in addressing climate change. However, I repeat that the Executive will not support further development of nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved.

John Swinney referred to planning. I understand that national planning policy guideline 6, on renewable energy, is under review. I am happy to give him more information about that and the timescales that are involved.

In addition to our domestic action, it is important not to understate the contribution that Scotland is making, as part of the UK, to wider international efforts to respond to climate change.

**Mr Swinney:** I am grateful to the minister for her comments on NPPG 6. Can she give us any information today on the timescale for the review of that guideline and the announcement of its results? Alternatively, she may wish to write to me about that later.

**Rhona Brankin:** I do not have such information to hand, but I am more than happy to give it in writing to Mr Swinney.

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

**Rhona Brankin:** I would like to carry on, if that is okay.

We input to UK negotiations in United Nations and European Union fora. We do so because implementing much of the Kyoto protocol and transposing all EU environmental directives are devolved to the Executive. For example, we are implementing the EU emissions trading scheme and its linking directive, which will introduce two other Kyoto mechanisms: the clean development mechanism and joint implementation. We will also be involved in implementing the proposed European Commission regulation on fluorinated gases.

Around 120 installations in Scotland are part of the EU emissions trading scheme and they are expected to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to around 6.5 million tonnes below projected emissions over the next three years. Large emitters, such as Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern Energy, as well as some universities and the largest hospitals, which account for almost 50 per cent of Scottish emissions, are captured by the scheme.

We are working with the UK Government to develop the UK's national allocation plan for the second phase of the trading scheme, which starts in 2008. In time, the scheme will encourage major companies such as Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern Energy to invest in sustainable projects in developing countries, while allowing such countries to engage more substantially in the UN climate change process—that is something that we all want.

Reference has been made to the problem of aviation emissions. Given the increasing impact that aviation emissions are having on total emissions, it is important that the Executive supports the UK Government's efforts to include intra-EU aviation in the EU emissions trading scheme, which has huge potential and is very important.

We are committed to ensuring that our revised climate change programme clearly supports our objectives in this area. The revised programme will send signals about the level of the Executive's commitment. That is why we have committed ourselves to developing climate change targets in areas of devolved responsibility. Such targets will have an important role in demonstrating our commitment across a wide range of devolved policy areas and in providing clear benchmarks against which to judge our progress.

Our climate change response will continue to develop over time. That is why our response is subject to continued monitoring and review—and why we agree with the committee's recommendation that an independent audit regime would be desirable for the revised Scottish programme. We intend to report in the revised programme on our plans to introduce such a regime.

The greenhouse gas emissions data that were published today go a considerable way towards demonstrating the Scottish Executive's commitment to playing its full part in tackling the very real threat that is posed by climate change—and I think that many of us were touched by Alasdair Morrison's experience in his constituency.

I will finish by saying that the Executive will continue to use its powers to encourage further action in support of a stable climate for its people and, indeed, for the people of the world.

16:01

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** We have had a good and wide-ranging debate, which has presented quite a challenge to me in closing. I thank everybody who has participated, all who took part in our inquiry—we had some passionate contributions—and the

clerks and research staff who helped us very ably throughout.

At the outset, I say that the committee's report stands as a signpost. In one direction, it points to the failure of the past; in the other, it points to the way out and how Scotland can trail-blaze the path to future safety. The report shows that the war against climate change is not simple and cannot be won on a single front. It demands that we stop climate change by slashing emissions at the same time as we are dealing with symptoms such as flooding that are already happening. It demands that small, short-term, local action—such as developing micro-renewables in our homes, schools and offices—should take place alongside the big, international, long-term agreements such as the Kyoto treaty. It demands that priorities be changed and that there be only joined-up thinking in government and not contradictory policy. It demands all that from the state, from corporations and from individuals.

Tackling climate change is quite simply the hardest and most important challenge that society faces. It is disappointing—and a lot of disappointment has been expressed in the chamber this afternoon—that the Executive's response to the committee's report is depressingly weak in meeting that challenge. The response grasps the enormity of the problem, but it lacks the leadership to deliver. That point was made ably by Linda Fabiani.

Let us consider just one small action—the implementation of the EU's buildings directive. Apparently, the Executive cannot do anything soon because we do not have enough buildings inspectors in Scotland. We are engaged in a war against climate change—would Churchill have pulled back in the second world war because of a lack of inspectors? No—he would have gone on and tackled the problem.

Many members have quoted the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's good words in evidence to the committee—that we are “destined for something unimaginable” if we just go on with business as usual. The tragic images that we saw on television of people floating dead in the water after hurricane Katrina left little to my imagination but, by God, we can expect much worse around the globe unless we get this right.

The committee heard evidence on what the impacts might be in Scotland. It is clear that we will see more extreme weather and we learned of the risk of flooding. That will really worry people in John Swinney's constituency in my region of Perthshire, who are already vulnerable to flooding. We heard that the flooding risk could increase by up to 20 times by the mid-point of the century.

Our response so far in Scotland has been inadequate, and the committee has said so. We have failed to make the kind of cuts in pollution that are desperately needed. Figures that were released this morning show that climate change emissions in Scotland fell by around 10 per cent between 1990 and 2003—an apparent surge in reduction from last year's figure, which was only 5.7 per cent. I think that that requires some further investigation. Even in light of today's revised figures, the Executive must still achieve a 12 per cent reduction in seven years' time if its performance is to be in line with UK targets. That will be extremely hard for the Executive to do on the back of its response to our report, which is lacking in substance.

I will go further and say that I believe that the Executive has been somewhat disingenuous in its response by suggesting that the committee rejected the idea of having a national target for emissions reductions on the basis that we do not have enough levers of power in Scotland. That is simply not the case. The committee agreed that the Executive should work towards having a national target. I invite the minister to take the response back to his civil servants and to get them to reword it. When Gordon Brown sets targets for the UK economy, he is not in control of all the levers, just as Andy Kerr is not in control of all the levers when he sets targets for teenage pregnancies. We set those targets because we aim for important goals. What could be more important than tackling climate change?

It is important that we consider what role each sector can play in meeting a national target. It is welcome that the Executive has agreed to consider sectoral targets for energy and transport, which are two of the biggest problem areas for getting our emissions down. However, there is still no clarity on how ambitious those targets will be. Post-G8, the climate change programme is still dangerously delayed. We expected it to be completed before G8, but we are still waiting for much of the detail.

I turn to particular sectors that were mentioned during our climate change inquiry and which members have brought up during the debate. Energy is a problem sector. The electricity industry is the biggest producer of climate change emissions in Scotland and its production of such emissions is going up rather than down. Electricity is part of the problem, not the solution. Many members, including Ted Brocklebank, have highlighted a crucial recommendation in our report, on the need for us to take energy efficiency seriously. In our report, we suggest that making efficiency savings of 40 per cent is doable.

We must understand the route map and realise what the mix of energy sources will be in the

future. Alex Johnstone is right—we will have one hell of a debate when we come to discuss what that mix should be. It is clear that micro-renewables and biomass, which many members have mentioned, have a role and that they should be in the mix. I thank John Swinney for bringing up our perpetual frustration about the situation at Breadalbane Academy, about which we have asked numerous questions. The school just wants to make the small step of installing a biomass heating system in its new premises, but it cannot because it is constrained by the SCHRI fund. We must sort out such small issues as well as big issues such as the need for national climate change targets.

**Mr Swinney:** Does Mr Ruskell agree that Mr Finnie's response earlier in the debate was slightly more encouraging than the response that we got from Mr Brown last Thursday? If the logic of the argument that has been advanced during the debate is followed, there should be no impediment to Breadalbane Academy's project getting the go-ahead.

**Mr Ruskell:** That is true, but we have been round the houses on the issue numerous times. Mr Swinney and I have spoken to about four different ministers. We are talking about an issue of joined-up government. There is no alternative to joined-up government. The case of Breadalbane Academy is a classic example of the small issues that need to be tackled throughout Scotland.

Alex Fergusson reminded us that transport is set to be the biggest emitter by 2015. Our committee report identifies that no progress has been made in reducing or even maintaining the level of emissions from transport. Transport emissions will be a huge problem. I say to John Swinney and other members that hard political choices will have to be made. Those who want to spend £600 million on making the A9 a dual carriageway must realise that that money will have to come out of investment in other projects, such as rail infrastructure development. That will have an impact on climate change. When we make such decisions, we must be conscious of what the impact will be.

We must adopt interim traffic reduction targets. I was bitterly disappointed that, as Chris Ballance reminded us, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 did not include such targets. We look to the minister to ensure that we take action in that area. I am also disappointed that Sarah Boyack has been the only member who has mentioned congestion charging. Congestion charging is a key area that the report recommends should be addressed. We desperately need political leadership from all parties on the issue if we are to reduce our emissions from transport. Why is it just

left to Sarah Boyack? Why do ministers not argue for action on congestion charging?

Two surprises came out of the committee's report. First, business is reducing its emissions. That is important, as it shows that business efficiency equals environmental efficiency. Secondly, it is clear that land use is a problem, as we are getting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from our soil. Many members have talked about the role of land management contracts. They are a lever for the minister and he should go away and act on that. Rosemary Byrne also talked about the role of forestry, which is vital.

In conclusion, I say to every member, from the First Minister to my colleagues in the Green party, that if we cannot find a way to stop climate change—if the issue is continually kicked into the long grass—and if we fail to prioritise this crisis above all others, then, when the unimaginable impacts of climate change become our grandchildren's reality, the very democratic system on which the Parliament is built will begin to crumble. It will crumble because democracy will have manifestly failed the people and the planet. Do not let that be our legacy to them—act on this report now.

## Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-3287, in the name of Brian Adam, on behalf of the Standards and Public Appointments Committee, on its sixth report in 2005, the "Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland".

16:12

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of the Standards and Public Appointments Committee. The remit of the committee was extended in March to include consideration of statutory consultation documents and reports of non-compliance that are received by Parliament from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland.

Under the act that established her office, the commissioner is required to consult Parliament on a code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies. The Parliament as a whole is to be consulted on the draft code. In considering how such draft documents were to be handled, the Parliament agreed that there should be prior scrutiny of them by a committee, to be followed by a debate in the chamber, which ought to enable Parliament as a whole to respond without taking up an inordinate amount of chamber time. I note that we have 45 minutes for the debate. Some members may be concerned that we may not take quite that long, but I will endeavour to ensure that the subject is given an appropriate airing.

Before this year, we did not have a mechanism to enable a person or a body to consult the Parliament as a whole. This is the first time that the new rule in the standing orders on such consultations has been put into practice. The report by the Standards and Public Appointments Committee sets out the steps that it took in considering the draft code of practice. We started with a highly successful informal meeting with the commissioner, Karen Carlton. The committee was impressed by her undoubted enthusiasm and passion for the role that she has taken on. Following that briefing, the committee wrote to the commissioner with some fairly wide-ranging questions, to try to capture a bit more of the ethos of her office and perhaps gain an indication of her objectives and a greater understanding of the rationale behind the draft code. Those questions and the answers to them are set out in annex B to our report.

It is also worth noting that we looked at a report that was published in January 2005 by the

Committee on Standards in Public Life. One aspect of that report was consideration of different public appointment systems throughout the United Kingdom. Karen Carlton gave evidence during the course of that inquiry and, generally, the Committee on Standards in Public Life looked favourably on the arrangements that are in place in Scotland now and the ones that we hope to have in place in the near future.

The report by the Standards and Public Appointments Committee is self-explanatory, but I wish to touch on a couple of the committee's responses to specific questions in the consultation questionnaire. Those are set out in annex A to our report.

The interim code of practice under which the commissioner is obliged to work classifies public bodies in upper and lower tiers, and there are differing approaches to appointments depending on the classification of the body. The commissioner has to work under that code, because it contains the current rules.

We were pleased to note that the draft code proposes that every appointment round will be subject to the same criteria, regardless of the size and spend of the body. That is a consistent approach that we feel will reflect positively on the system. We were concerned that bureaucracy might take over and that perhaps, for some appointment rounds, a sledgehammer was being used to crack a nut. However, we were reassured by the commissioner's intended approach, by the thought that has gone into applying the principle of proportionality, and by the further guidelines that will be published once the code has been adopted.

Other members may want to comment on the topic of the political activity and allegiances of candidates for posts in public bodies, so perhaps I should be brief on that matter. The draft code states that political activity declaration forms will not be sent to applicants; such forms will be completed only by successful candidates, for monitoring purposes. That is not standard practice elsewhere in the UK, and witnesses who gave evidence to the committee noted that in a small country it may be relatively easy to guess a candidate's political affiliation.

However, the rationale for appointments in Scotland is merit. Political activity is not a criterion for appointment and it is to be hoped that the commissioner will be successful in her strategy of attracting new faces to posts in public bodies. There has been considerable concern that there is a Buggins's-turn attitude to public appointments in Scotland, with the usual suspects moving from one body to the next. I share the view that we should be encouraging new faces to offer themselves for public service. The criteria that are

used should help in broadening the field and make it less possible to identify candidates.

The committee feels that the commissioner is advocating the right approach in keeping political activity separate from the selection and interview process, especially when it is operated in conjunction with anonymised applications in the early stages of an appointment round.

The code of practice can be evaluated only in the light of its operation and the experiences drawn from that operation. The Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Act 2003 requires the commissioner to keep the code under review, and we note that the commissioner has stated that she intends to ensure that she receives feedback from those who are involved in public appointments and that that will be taken into account in determining any future revisions.

That flexibility, added to the sound base that is set out in the draft code, means that the Standards and Public Appointments Committee is content to endorse the "Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments in Scotland".

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Standards and Public Appointments Committee's 6th Report, 2005 (Session 2): *Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland* (SP Paper 410), together with the *Official Report* of the Parliament's debate on the report, should form the Parliament's response to the consultation by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland.

16:19

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

I welcome the opportunity to take part in this brief debate. With the committee report and this debate, the commissioner has fulfilled her duty under the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Act 2003 to consult the Parliament on the code of practice.

The committee's remit has been extended and there is now a mechanism for reporting to the Parliament any serious breach of the code. The committee states that it favours the anonymisation of applications. That is a welcome change from the interim code of practice whereby applicants' details are known throughout the appointments process and it will go some way to ensuring that appointments are made on merit. As Brian Adam has pointed out, it is in the interests of all of us to make it clear that appointments to public bodies in Scotland will be made on merit and not according to any other criteria.

I turn to the vexed question of cronyism and public patronage in the public appointments system. The committee recognises that



"there is a public perception that 'cronyism' and political patronage is prevalent in the public appointments system".

If there is such a public perception, it is hardly surprising, when we consider the evidence of the number of members of the Labour Party in particular who have been appointed to public bodies. That perception in turn prevents others from even applying for appointments, as many believe that it is pointless and that they will not get appointed anyway. That is what I believe the code of practice and the appointment of the commissioner are about.

Like the committee, I believe that the commissioner, Karen Carlton, is genuine in her endeavours to ensure that the perception and the reality of the situation are overcome. I look forward to her further work on the equalities strategy. The public appointments system needs to be opened up. It must be open, transparent and fair. That is the only way in which public bodies will genuinely reflect the diversity and reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland. In her response to the committee, Karen Carlton acknowledged that

"More work must be done to encourage a wider variety of people to apply for positions and this will be addressed by the Equal Opportunities Strategy",

which she is now working on. The evidence continued:

"The Commissioner is charged with preparing and publishing a strategy for ensuring that appointments, and recommendations for appointment, are made by the Scottish Ministers in a manner which encourages equal opportunities."

It is important that the commissioner monitors how effective the public appointments process is at the moment, and whether or not the code of practice is leading to the changes that I think all of us believe are needed. The commissioner said that she has

"written to the Permanent Secretary to request access to information provided by applicants in their application and monitoring forms during the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2005, to determine applicants' gender, ethnic origin, ability, declared political activity, age, educational background and where they live."

That is important, but there is a flaw here. I do not think that the permanent secretary should keep that information once an appointment has been made. It is not right that the Executive, having made the appointment, hangs on to all the data. I would like the commissioner and the Executive to work together so that, when an appointment is made, such information is passed into the safe keeping of the commissioner for public appointments. I hope that she and the Executive will consider that.

I would like the commissioner to return to the Parliament at the earliest opportunity once she has carried out the assessment and monitoring of

political appointments from the start of the Parliament until 31 March 2005. We need that information. If we do not have that information, which precedes the code of practice, it will be impossible to work out whether the code of practice, once it has been adopted, has made a difference. I hope that the information on past public appointments will be placed in the public domain, and certainly in the Parliament's domain, so that MSPs may see whether the changes that have been made have indeed led to a wider field of people being appointed to public bodies in Scotland.

I congratulate the Standards and Public Appointments Committee on its examination of the draft code and I congratulate the commissioner, who has done a very fine job.

16:24

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** If I employed a speech writer, which I do not, I would have suspected Tricia Marwick of passing her a used fiver, because the beginning of her speech and the beginning of mine bear remarkable similarities. I make no apology for repeating the points, because they are important in the context of the debate.

On behalf of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party members, I welcome the report and the motion. Although it is self-evident that the topic does not bring people flocking to the chamber, it is nonetheless important in that it addresses one of the issues that has so bedevilled modern politics: cronyism.

I recall a very senior—and, I am grateful to say, now retired—politician advising a group of us some years ago that one should never give up the power of patronage and that it was too important a weapon to be surrendered lightly. If a line exists between patronage and cronyism, I suggest that it is very fine indeed. I suggest strongly that whatever we call it, cronyism must be rooted out of our public appointments system once and for all.

The committee recognises in its report that there exists a public perception of cronyism. I suggest respectfully that that is a massive understatement. It has got to the stage where cronyism is almost taken for granted by the general public. On occasion, I feel sympathy for individuals who are appointed perfectly acceptably to high-profile public appointments for which they are probably eminently suited, because the very fact of their appointment can lead a sceptical public to wonder what their political connections are and what favours they might have carried out in order to deserve such a seemingly lucrative reward.

We very much welcome what I consider to be the key point in the code and the commissioner's

resolve to tackle it head on. We simply must eliminate all suggestions of cronyism if respect for public appointments and public agencies is to be fully restored.

What else needs to be done to restore faith in this politically sensitive area? I believe that it is vital that such appointments are genuinely open to all, and we look forward to the production, as soon as is practicable, of an equal opportunities strategy to promote vacancies to the widest possible audience. Although we accept that it is not the function of the code of practice to raise awareness of vacancies, we are encouraged by the commissioner's candid admission that more work needs to be done to encourage a wider variety of people to apply for positions. On that issue, we are clearly heading in the right direction.

The third aspect of the code that we welcome is the stress that it places on the importance of the commissioner not only being at arm's length from and 100 per cent independent of Scottish Executive ministers, but being seen to be so. The committee rightly questioned the commissioner in some detail on that aspect.

Although we accept that the minister must specify the desired criteria for the appointment at the outset of the process and should be given a summary of candidates at the end of it, the success of the code is totally dependent on there being no ministerial involvement at all in between those two extremes. The process will require careful monitoring if that aim is to be achieved, but its importance cannot be overstated.

Ultimately, both the code of practice and the equal opportunities strategy will further the stated desire of eliminating the perception of cronyism in public appointments only if ministers themselves respect and encourage the commissioner in her goal of ensuring that all appointments are made accessible to the widest possible pool of talent and are awarded on a visibly non-political basis. As long as that remains its aim, the code will continue to have our support, as does the motion before us this afternoon.

16:28

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Cronyism takes a lot of different forms. Some of it might be described more as networking—one tends to favour the applications of people one knows. There might be a network at the local golf club, or whatever the venue for networking in a particular area may be.

Appointments can also be seen as a reward for public service. One of the better episodes of "Yes Minister" features a high-powered scientist who is persuaded to write his report on the alleged dangers of a chemical firm in a sensitive

constituency in a certain way; he then gets the chairmanship of a public body. That is, obviously, wrong, but I have no doubt that it happens—perhaps it happens only south of the border, but I would not bet on that.

If someone is given a choice between voting for either A or B to get a job in some quango or other and they know A quite well and think that he is competent and do not know B at all, they are likely to vote for A. That is human nature, so we will not be able to get away from that. However, we have to make rules that are as clear as possible so that the selection process is competitive, open and above board. At the end of the day, however, someone will have to decide whether A is better than B and they will make that decision based on all sorts of reasons, some of which might not stand up to too much scrutiny. However, we live in an imperfect world to which we all contribute many imperfections.

It is important to take a proportionate approach to this matter. We do not want to get wildly excited about jobs that have no or little pay and which do not involve the disposal of large amounts of public money. Such jobs should be treated differently from those that are well paid.

The question of anonymity has been explored at length. The point is that everyone in Scotland who really matters—obviously, that excludes me—knows everyone else who really matters and, therefore, even if the process is anonymous, people will say, "Oh, that must be X," and will support him or not on that basis. There is an issue about the attempt to try to keep things as anonymous as possible. The intention is excellent, however.

It is a good idea that the same rules should apply to people who are nominated by organisations. Certain bodies, such as the Faculty of Advocates, have a right to nominate people to serve on the boards of quite a lot of other bodies. We have been dealing with some of those bodies recently in relation to charity law reform; I am thinking of the boards that run the national galleries, libraries and so on. However, I think that that process should be similar to that which applies to official nominees, which would mean that there would be no chance of cronyism arising in that regard.

The question of political activity not being a plus or a minus in the process is important. Certainly, people should not be appointed to a body merely because they have been an active member of a particular party. However, the reverse tendency is almost as bad. Some people regard anyone who has done any dabbling in politics as inherently evil and think that they should not get public posts.

Others have talked about the need to get a wider range of people applying for public posts. As has been said, often people do not think that they will get the job and so do not apply. However, they are also not aware of the opportunities that exist. Between us, we have to advertise and promote the whole process much better. We have all had discussions about trying to get people who we happen to know through our party-political activities who might not be active politically but who are knowledgeable about a particular sphere to apply for the sort of jobs that we are discussing. On the whole, however, they do not. We have to convince good people to apply for public posts.

On the issue of the length of time that people should be allowed to stay in their posts, I think that they should be allowed to stay on for longer than is proposed, but I understand the arguments in the report. If we are trying to attract new people, there have to be vacancies for the new people to take up. Perhaps, therefore, 10 years is long enough. However, in some organisations, a lot of the skill and knowledge is in one person's brain and it is a pity to have to lose that. The issue could be examined again.

I have been on the board of one organisation—unpaid, I may say—for a long time and I have been trying to get off it, but people keep saying, “No, no. You remember what happened 30 years ago, so we need you.” That is flattering, but I think that it is probably a mistake. I can accept the 10-year point, but I still think that we have to consider the matter.

In general, the proposals are a good step forward. I do not know how we can persuade a sceptical public that we are trying to make things open and above board. We should perhaps consider how we can apply some of the principles in the report to the press and the media—that would be an extremely salutary lesson for them.

16:35

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to take part in this brief debate on the draft code. This afternoon's debate is a necessary stage in the process that will allow the commissioner for public appointments in Scotland, Karen Carlton, to prepare a finalised code for ministerial appointments. The code, when it has gone through the required consultative process, will allow the commissioner properly to regulate, monitor, report on and advise on the process through which citizens are appointed to the boards of Scottish public bodies by Executive ministers.

In my view, the Standards and Public Appointments Committee's sixth report in 2005,

which is before the chamber today, is correct to point out, in paragraph 12, that

“the draft Code of Practice ... will provide a solid platform”

from which to create a “robust mechanism” to ensure that “any negative image” of “political patronage” is properly countered. I emphasise that we are talking about perception and not reality—pace Tricia Marwick, Alex Fergusson and Donald Gorrie. When the draft code came before the committee, there was a unanimous view on that point and I believe that the committee was correct so to conclude. I support the words of the convener of the committee on that point.

I will comment briefly on a number of points that the committee made in its response to the consultation and which led to the all-party consensus. Annex A of the report is the committee's response to the seven key questions that the commissioner posed. In response to question 2, the committee was keen to express its support for the principle that every application for a public appointment should be subject to the same process. I believe that the key to attracting as wide a field of applicants as possible is for the process to be, as the committee's response states,

“as straightforward and understandable as possible.”

A consistent approach throughout the appointments procedure should enable a cross-section of Scottish society to feel able to come forward to be considered and to serve. That is what we all want. Such a coherent approach is both sensible and necessary if the perception—not the reality—of political patronage is to be challenged. I suggest that, if we keep on talking about the reality of cronyism, for which there is little evidence, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I state again that cronyism is the perception and not the reality.

The committee concluded—correctly, in my view—that the proposal to anonymise applications in the early stages of an appointment round is essential to the construction of a process that ensures that all applications are judged purely on their merits. I believe that we can all agree on that. Committee members thought that that proposal could lead to a rise in public confidence in the system and achieve the aim of

“eroding the perception of cronyism.”

Committee members welcomed the commissioner's acceptance that the educational establishments that candidates attended should also be anonymised. Again, that will help to remove any suspicion or perception of bias.

The final aspect that I will touch on is political activity. I regard as sensible the committee's conclusion that

"Political activity is not relevant to the appointments process".

Committee members were strongly of the view that

"in order to achieve a 'depoliticised' framework for appointments to public bodies in Scotland, information of this nature should be taken out of the equation at an early stage."

I believe that that is so wholly sensible that it is worthy of everyone's support. Committee members also believed that, because we all agreed with the idea.

Appointments to public bodies by Scottish ministers must be seen to be like the actions of Caesar's wife—above suspicion. It is up to the Parliament to play its part in assisting the commissioner to produce a code that will prove resilient enough to achieve such a laudable and necessary objective. On that basis, I commend to the chamber the sixth report in 2005 of the Standards and Public Appointments Committee.

16:40

**The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon):** It gives me great pleasure to offer the Executive's support for the introduction of the proposed code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies in Scotland. I believe, and external scrutiny confirms, that we have a good system. The proposals will help to strengthen it further and will knock on the head the perception of cronyism.

I congratulate the commissioner for public appointments in Scotland, Karen Carlton, on the progress that has been made. Overall, the Executive's view is that the draft code represents a significant advance. In our formal response, we will warmly welcome the broad thrust of her proposals. It is in everyone's interest to take the opportunity to establish a new Scottish code that is tailor-made to meet Scotland's requirements and the expectations of all our stakeholders and the wider community.

I also congratulate the Standards and Public Appointments Committee on the compilation of its thorough and comprehensive response to the consultation. I am sure that the commissioner will welcome its constructive contribution, as outlined by Brian Adam and others.

Public confidence in the public appointments process throughout the United Kingdom and perhaps more widely has sometimes been low, as many members have said. The Executive has taken various steps to address that. As a priority after devolution, we introduced legislation to establish a separate commissioner for public appointments in Scotland with a remit to establish

a new Scottish code for ministerial appointments. I am pleased to be involved in the current stage of the continuing process of improving the integrity of our public appointments system.

The full terms of the Executive's response to the consultation will become public in due course, but I will say a little about the proposals and follow up several points that members made. The Executive welcomes the redefined principles that underpin the code. In particular, extending the definition of independent scrutiny to make it clear that an independent assessor is involved at each stage of an appointments round should serve to reassure the public and dispel the perception of cronyism.

Given the level of unwarranted criticism and allegations of cronyism in recent years, I am pleased to support the commissioner's proposals to remove the political activity declaration from the early stages of the appointments process. That has been widely welcomed throughout the chamber. That information plays no part in the selection process, but the suspicion remains that that is not always the case. We are of course content for that information to continue to be collected and published in the case of successful applicants.

We are also content with the decision to preserve anonymity until candidates are shortlisted, but anonymity beyond that point would be impracticable. We agree with the commissioner's proposal to abolish the 10-year rule. The 10-year rule may reduce the talent pool or make contributing to the public sector less attractive. We support her views on that.

We have some concerns about the principle of proportionality. Brian Adam suggested that we must be careful not to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut. We have concerns about abolition of the two-tier system, which works well. We would like the commissioner to produce further guidelines on how the principle of proportionality should be interpreted to ensure that, throughout Scotland, the approach is consistent and the process is practical and understood fully.

The Executive also has concerns about statutory nominations, although we have few in Scotland. The nominees are in competition only with one another and not with other candidates. We do not consider it practical in all instances to subject them to the same process, but we need to satisfy ourselves that the procedure that is followed by the nominating body is suitably robust and that it leads to an acceptable outcome.

We welcome much else in the draft code and I am happy to reiterate and confirm the Executive's broad support for the introduction of the new Scottish code of practice. We believe that the new code will assist in driving standards up even

higher, contribute to the delivery of quality appointments and help to manage and reform important elements of public life in Scotland, and we hope that it will enjoy improved public confidence for years to come.

To respond to the point that Tricia Marwick made, I confirm that information on public appointments going back to 1999 will be handed over to the commissioner, which will inevitably lead to our being able to judge the impact of the new code of practice in the coming years.

**Tricia Marwick** rose—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I was going to let Tricia Marwick intervene, but I notice that the minister is finished. That fooled me.

16:46

**Brian Adam:** I have enjoyed listening to the debate and thank members for participating in it. It is not surprising that those members who have participated have been engaged with the committee; the honourable exception is my colleague Tricia Marwick, who is a former member of it. Speeches have been informative and constructive.

The motion states that the official report of the debate will form part of the Parliament's response to the consultation by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland. The commissioner will therefore consider members' comments and ministerial comments.

It is natural that most members should have focused on cronyism. We need a baseline and I am glad to hear that the minister has given an assurance that details of appointments since 1999 will be made available so that we have a proper baseline for measuring whether we are achieving what we want to achieve. We want evidence that we are encouraging more well-qualified people to contribute to public life in Scotland, that there is a diverse group of appointees and that we are disposing of any real or perceived bias in the system. However, we will have to wait to see the outcomes.

Donald Gorrie told us a little about the "Yes Minister" approach to appointments. Although much in that series appeared to be founded in reality, I hope that this type of approach will be able to address that. A series of independent commissioners has been appointed to deal with a number of issues to do with public confidence in public life. I hope that the reservations that the minister expressed on behalf of the Executive will be tempered by the discussion about moving towards the commissioner's position if there is doubt about a position. That will help to reinforce

public confidence. Even if we occasionally have to consider the proportionality of things, we ought, when there is doubt, to err on the side of the commissioners rather than on the side of those who have done it before and know that it works, so to speak. If we are to instil public confidence in our procedures, we must support the independence of the various commissioners' offices.

I hope that when we fill any post we will get the best person for that job. That means that, among other things, age, gender, where a person went to school and any religious inclinations that they may have must be disregarded. Bill Butler rightly pointed out that that is a key area in which there is a perception of cronyism. It will be very easy to identify someone's background if we do not ensure that applications are anonymised. Donald Gorrie was correct to say that, in a small country such as ours, even if we anonymise everything it will be possible to identify at least some individuals. However, if we meet one of the other big objectives that the commissioner has set in her draft code of conduct, we will attract new people, who may be less easily identified.

We need to avoid discrimination. We already have a raft of laws that aim to stamp out discrimination and inequality in the workplace. The approach that is taken in the commissioner's draft code of practice reflects the need to get the best person for the job. The code speaks of merit. It states:

"All public appointments are governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit, by the well informed choice of individuals who match the needs of the public bodies in question."

Many posts are important in delivering not just the Executive's wishes, but the wishes of the Parliament. I understand the desire of those with public policy issues to have someone sympathetic to those issues in place, and that question needs to be addressed. However, we have a wealth of people who are willing to give of their time in order to improve the well-being of our country. Some posts carry significant salaries, whereas others carry only modest salaries. In order to get good-quality people and to have appointments based on merit, we must ensure that the process is independent and that merit can be seen to be the principle governing selection. We are aware that there is a perception that that may not always be how things work and that many worthy applicants may be put off considering offering their talents and services because they believe that their face does not fit or that they do not have the right connections. Donald Gorrie dwelled a little on that point in his speech.

Hard work and time will probably be required to remove the perception to which I referred. As there is a turnover in public appointments, we

should start to see that happen. It is important that the monitoring process is keenly scrutinised, not just by the commissioner, but by Parliament. Perhaps even parliamentary committees that have a particular interest in an issue should take a good look at the process. It will take time for the situation to change, because not all ministerial appointments will end with the production of the code of conduct. There should be a natural turnover, but gradually we will get to that point, which should help to build public confidence. The committee believes that the commissioner is taking the right approach to tackling the problem. She has shown a definite commitment to putting in place a system that can command public confidence.

The draft code alone will not solve every problem, although we hope that it will go a long way towards achieving that aim. The Standards and Public Appointments Committee looks forward to receiving the commissioner's draft equality strategy, to which some speakers referred. We should receive it later in the year. The strategy is an important buttress to the draft code, as we understand that it will lay the groundwork for encouraging and supporting a wider variety of people to apply for posts in public bodies. It will address the issue of opening up the appointments process to people who have not previously applied and of supporting applications, especially from those who, for whatever reason, have not submitted them in the past.

The strategy will be subject to the same scrutiny procedure that we are currently undertaking for the draft code of practice. When it is laid before Parliament, I encourage members with an interest in the area of public appointments to take a look at it. I know that there are members who have an interest in the area. Perhaps because of all the other things that are happening at the moment in the world of politics in Scotland, they have not taken the opportunity to take part in today's debate. There will be another, and I encourage those with an interest in public appointments to participate in it.

The Standards and Public Appointments Committee would be pleased to receive input to its considerations on its report to Parliament. It is open to any member to come to our committee meetings.

I encourage members to support the motion in my name on behalf of the committee and to endorse the contents of the report on the draft code of practice. The commissioner for public appointments in Scotland is trying to build confidence in the system of ministerial appointments through the draft code. In that endeavour she is to be commended and supported.

Our committee believes that the draft code provides a sound platform from which to launch our campaign for a process that is seen to be more accessible and attractive than at present and that encourages a diversity of applicants, which is what people inside and outwith the Parliament would like.

## Business Motions

16:55

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-3316, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 28 September 2005

2.30 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Preliminary Stage Debate: Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Financial Resolution in respect of the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Executive Debate: Membership of the Committee of the Regions  
*followed by* Business Motion  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 29 September 2005

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Justice 2 Committee Debate: 9th Report, 2005, Inquiry into Youth Justice  
 11.40 am General Question Time  
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time  
 12.30 pm Themed Question Time—  
 Justice and Law Officers;  
 Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 1.10 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 5 October 2005

2.30 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Executive Business  
*followed by* Business Motion  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 6 October 2005

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Scottish National Party Business

11.40 am

General Question Time

12 noon

First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm

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

2.55 pm

Executive Business

*followed by*

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

*followed by*  
*Curran.]*

Members' Business.—[*Ms Margaret*

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-3309, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Family Law (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 30 November 2005.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:56

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of eight Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motions S2M-3301 to S2M-3308, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Definition of Specified Person: Correspondence) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Absconding by mentally disordered offenders) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Use of Telephones) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 (Modification of Enactments) Order 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Safety and Security) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Cross-border transfer: patients subject to detention requirement or otherwise in hospital) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Scotland) Order 2005 be approved.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The question on the motions will be put at decision time. We are a little ahead of ourselves so I suspend this meeting for three minutes until 5 pm.

16:57

*Meeting suspended.*

17:00

*On resuming—*

## Decision Time

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S2M-3293, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on the Environment and Rural Development Committee's fifth report of 2005, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Environment and Rural Development Committee's 5th Report, 2005 (Session 2): *Report on Inquiry into Climate Change* (SP Paper 342).

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S2M-3286, in the name of Brian Adam, on the Standards and Public Appointments Committee's sixth report in 2005, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Standards and Public Appointments Committee's 6th Report, 2005 (Session 2): *Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland* (SP Paper 410), together with the *Official Report* of the Parliament's debate on the report, should form the Parliament's response to the consultation by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to put a single question on motions S2M-3301 to S2M-3308, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments. The third question is, that motions S2M-3301 to S2M-3308, in the name of Margaret Curran, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Definition of Specified Person: Correspondence) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Absconding by mentally disordered offenders) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Use of Telephones) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 (Modification of Enactments) Order 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Safety and Security) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (Cross-border transfer: patients subject to detention requirement or otherwise in hospital) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.



That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Scotland) Order 2005 be approved.

## Road Accidents (A9)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-3155, in the name of John Swinney, on the accident record on the A9. Mr Swinney, you have seven minutes.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern the statistics recently published by the Scottish Executive that show that 82 fatalities occurred on the A9 in the last five years; recognises that this is the highest number of fatalities for any trunk road in Scotland; notes the local concern at the delays that have occurred in undertaking promised junction improvements at Ballinluig and Bankfoot in Perthshire, and recognises that, even when these improvements are made, the road will remain fundamentally unsafe until it is reconstructed as a dual carriageway from Perth to Inverness.

17:02

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** Presiding Officer, thank you for calling me to speak. After my failure to stick to my time in the debate on climate change—for which I apologise profusely—I hear your siren words about seven minutes. I will keep my speech to that time.

I thank all the members who have signed my motion and the Parliamentary Bureau for scheduling this debate. I want to cover three main points: the accident record on the A9; the delays to the Ballinluig and Bankfoot junction improvements in my constituency; and the case for transforming the A9 into a dual carriageway.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Will the member give way on the Ballinluig junction?

**Mr Swinney:** On the Ballinluig junction? Well, okay.

**Maureen Macmillan:** Will the member join me in asking the minister to ensure that the access roads at the new Ballinluig junction do not interfere with the ground that is required to reinstate the rail loop at Ballinluig? After all, we need to reinstate the Ballinluig and Newtonmore loops if we are to get an hourly rail service between Inverness and Perth.

**Mr Swinney:** What I want the Government to do is to get on with delivering its commitments to the people in my constituency, which is something that it has lamentably failed to do so far. I will say more about that in a moment.

Scottish Executive statistics show that the A9 is the trunk road with the highest number of fatalities in Scotland. Between 2000 and 2004, 82 people died on the road and there were 1,111 accidents

in which someone was injured. Only last week, a minibus carrying 20 backpackers was involved in an accident with a lorry on one of the road's confusing single to dual carriageway stages. It is a minor miracle that more serious injuries did not arise from that incident.

As the MSP for North Tayside, part of my regular role is to listen to the concerns of people who have lost loved ones in road accidents on the A9. In preparing for the debate, I received correspondence from people in such circumstances. As policy makers, when we receive evidence that shows that a road has an accident record as appalling as that of the A9, I believe that it is our duty to act to improve the situation.

The second point that I want to cover is the delay to the Ballinluig and Bankfoot junctions. In April 2002, the then Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, Lewis Macdonald, came to Ballinluig and announced that the Scottish Executive would upgrade the junction. He said that the cost would be £4.2 million, that the money would be found in the budget years 2003-04 and 2004-05, and that the junction would be ready in spring 2005. I was there this morning and I did not notice that the junction had been improved. The announcement was broadly welcomed, as the junction had claimed four more fatalities a year previously, when an Israeli family was killed in a tragic accident. The design advanced by the Scottish Executive was also welcomed. What progress has there been since then? The only answer is precious little.

In July 2004, when there had already been a two-year delay to the commencement of works, the Scottish Executive said that preparation for the scheme was under way and that the programme plan was to publish the draft orders late that year or early the following year. In a parliamentary answer to me on 21 January 2005, the then Minister for Transport, Nicol Stephen, said:

"The department is working to a timetable that will see draft orders for the scheme published in May."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 21 January 2004; S2W-12135.]

It is now September, and not a single order has been published for the junction improvement. A junction that should have been completed by now has not even got off the Scottish Executive's drawing board and answers given by ministers only nine months ago have been rendered meaningless by further delay.

The sense of urgency about the matter that obviously grips the Executive is further reinforced by two additional points. On 13 June, the first occasion on which he answered transport questions in Parliament, the current Minister for Transport and Telecommunications told me:

"I can certainly give a commitment to look closely at the issues that Mr Swinney has raised about why the projects for those two sections of the A9 have not proceeded as quickly as might be desired by the member, his constituents and all who use the road. I am happy to look into that and I will respond to him as quickly as I can."—[*Official Report*, 30 June 2005; c 18643.]

I have heard nothing since that answer. Then, on 28 July 2005, I wrote to the minister raising further concerns about the timetable for improvement expressed to me by the chairman of the Mid Atholl, Grandtully and Strathday community council. I have heard nothing since I wrote that letter.

On the Bankfoot junction, the then Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning told me on 18 September 2002 that £600,000 had been allocated to introduce a grade-separated junction. All that needs to be constructed is a slip road, and to date there has been no progress.

I hope that the minister understands the depth of frustration and anger that exists in the communities that I represent about the delays to those developments. I simply cannot understand why it has taken so long. The charitable explanation that I have heard is that the reason for the delays is that the Government is preparing to announce the dualling of the A9 from Perth to Pitlochry and wants to ensure that all developments are compatible with the proposal. If that is the case, it may be a reasonable and palatable explanation. If it is not, I hope that the minister will tell Parliament why there has been such an abject failure to deliver on the promises made to my constituents by several Scottish Executive ministers.

The third point that I want to cover is the case for dualling the A9. I know that the minister will tell me that such a move will cost £600 million and that he will demand to know what projects I would jettison to make way for such a proposal. He knows me well enough to know that I live in the real world when it comes to such issues. The A9 cannot be transformed into a dual carriageway overnight. What I am looking for is a commitment from the Government that it will start the journey to make the A9 a dual carriageway between Perth and Inverness. It is work that will have to be spread over 10 or perhaps even 15 years, but we must start that work, because the road is structurally flawed.

In my constituency alone, the road switches from single to dual carriageway on five occasions between Perth and Drumochter. That is confusing for some well-versed local drivers, but totally bewildering for tourists and foreign visitors. I do not believe that elaborate signage and the dreadful three-lane carriageways that have been constructed north of my constituency are the

answer. The road needs structural improvement to become a dual carriageway, and I hope that the minister will look afresh at a sustained effort to make that possible.

I would be grateful if the minister would answer the three key questions that I pose in this debate on behalf of my constituents. Why has there been such a delay to the promised Ballinluig junction improvement? Why has there been such a delay to the promised Bankfoot junction improvement? Will the minister give fresh consideration to the case for making the A9 a dual carriageway in light of the news that the A9 is the most dangerous trunk road in Scotland?

This is the second time that I have raised the issue in a members' business debate. On the previous occasion, in November 2002, the then Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, Lewis Macdonald, came out with the immortal words:

"Complacency is as unacceptable as alarmism".—  
[*Official Report*, 27 November 2002; c 15789.]

I can only assume that he was accusing me and others of alarmism. Today, the charge of complacency sits full square at the door of the Scottish Executive. I hope that the minister provides some answers that explain to my constituents why they have been so badly let down by their own Government.

17:10

**Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I thank John Swinney for securing the debate on the motion. I was not a member of Parliament when the first debate that he secured on the matter took place, but I am sorry that the issue still requires to be debated.

Mr Swinney rightly pointed out the bad accident record on the A9. *The Courier* has campaigned for a long time for upgrading of the road and regularly carries photographs of cars, lorries, buses and debris littering the road after yet another crash. I confirm that it is a big issue locally; it provides me with a regular stream of letters and e-mails from people who live by and travel on the A9.

Mr Swinney is also correct to say that the switch from two-way traffic to dual carriageway confuses many drivers and often confuses visitors to Scotland.

Any map of Scotland shows that there is a distinct lack of roads and other transport links on the north-south axis in comparison with east to west. That is another reason why we should examine how best we can utilise and improve existing links.

Earlier today I pointed out the economic advantages of making the A9 a dual carriageway

all the way from Inverness to Perth. The argument for that is based not only on reducing transport costs for people at either end of the A9, but on the pluses from getting more visitors into our remote northern areas. As I strongly believe in the economic case for upgrading the entire road to dual carriageway, I will urge that that become party policy. As all members know, once something is Liberal Democrat policy, it happens.

In the meantime, we should examine how we can reduce the number of accidents on the A9, despite its intermittent patches of two-way traffic. I am encouraged that recent accident statistics show no increase, but the number of accidents is still unacceptably high. I advise all MSPs that the issue is still a matter of major concern for people who live by or use the A9.

I am glad that other measures have been taken to improve the traffic flow between north and south. We are concentrating on the A9 in this debate, but we should not forget that a railway line travels parallel to the A9. If we can increase the volume of traffic on that line we may, in the short term, reduce the volume of traffic on the A9—particularly the number of heavy goods vehicles that tramp up and down the road. I emphasise that we should do what we can. The Scottish Executive is, through the freight facilities grant, improving the volume of traffic on the rail link, which will help the situation in the short term.

I support John Swinney's motion.

17:13

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** I congratulate my colleague on securing the debate and I concur with all that he said and commend his eloquence on behalf of his constituents.

The part of the A9 in my constituency is a dualled section south of Perth. Notwithstanding that, I have a constituency interest because my constituents—like the constituents of many other members—use the A9 north as well as south of Perth, so they have to deal with the reality of the situation.

The accident record south of Perth also needs to be addressed. I caution my colleague against assuming that dualling will solve the problems—there will still be problems if the junctions are not dealt with. That is, of course, why he also talked about the junctions. There are very dangerous junctions south of Perth. I particularly recommend that the minister examine the problem between the two junctions at the Cairnie braes, because there has been a very bad accident record over a number of years in that area, which must be addressed. It is a cause of major concern south of Perth and it adds to pressure from some

communities to reopen railway stations, which is pertinent to what I want to say.

Clearly, given the context of John Swinney's comments, problems at junctions must be addressed as well as the amount and nature of traffic on the A9. Andrew Arbuckle touched on that when he referred to freight and the number of lorries on the road. If more freight could be put on the railway, that might reduce the number of lorries on the road. There is also the issue of the number of cars that use the A9. However, the problem is the lack of viable alternatives. I have a specific question for the minister about freight. What is the Executive doing to shift the freight burden off the road and on to the railway? Such a shift would have a significant impact. I heard the minister on "Good Morning Scotland" today; he said that we must try to get people on to the trains and we must look at the train links into Perth. That issue is dear to my heart.

I want to encroach a little on John Swinney's patch to concentrate on viable alternatives. Aberfeldy in John Swinney's constituency is 31.7 miles north-west of Perth. Travel to work on public transport from Aberfeldy to Perth takes 1 hour and 24 minutes, using two modes of public transport. People must leave Aberfeldy at 7.24 am to get to Perth for 8.48 am. If they are running a bit late, their next possible time of arrival in Perth is 10.26 am. Travel by car from Aberfeldy to Perth takes 30 minutes less than by public transport and people can leave and arrive when they like. Given the circumstances that I have described, I challenge the minister to say what he would choose to do. I ask him to be honest in his response, because the truth is that he would take his car, which would have to travel on the A9.

With reference to the minister's comments this morning, I questioned a previous transport minister in the chamber about the fact that there is no train between Perth and Edinburgh between 7.10 am and 8.50 am. Is the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications aware that people who live north of Perth cannot get into Perth by train until 9.09 am at the earliest, unless they leave the previous night?

Nicol Stephen, the former Minister for Transport, is now the Deputy First Minister. It is long past time for soothing comments about improving rail links into Perth. It is time for real action. We want fewer glib references to public transport options and more delivery of such options. Until those options are delivered and there is a real likelihood of traffic reduction, road improvements must be undertaken. Not to do so is to risk more people dying.

17:17

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I congratulate John Swinney on securing a debate on such an important subject. I do not always agree with him, which I am sure will come as a relief to him, but I agreed with virtually every word he said.

I approached this debate with a sense of déjà vu, because we have been here before. We debated the dualling of the A9 in 2002. I am sorry to say that we got little satisfaction at that time from the then transport minister. Why are things different today? Why should the Executive and the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications listen to pleas for the dualling of the A9, when the previous Executive and transport minister did not listen to similar pleas in 2002?

I believe that two significant issues make the situation different from what it was in 2002. First, there has been a continual increase in traffic levels on the A9 over that time; indeed, that has been the pattern throughout Scotland. Public policy has been to try to reduce traffic levels, but evidence shows that levels are going in the other direction. That problem is particularly acute on the A9 because the road links Inverness—which we know is Europe's fastest-growing city—with the central belt. As Inverness and its economy and population grow, it generates more and more traffic. Any road that might have been suitable as a single carriageway 10 years ago may well now require upgrading, but that must be doubly the case for the A9, given its particular circumstances and the growth of Inverness.

Secondly, and perhaps more pressingly, we now know what many people in Perthshire and the Highlands have suspected for a long time, which is that the A9 is officially the most dangerous road in Scotland. The relevant figures were in a parliamentary written answer to my Conservative colleague Brian Monteith. As we have heard, there were 82 fatalities on the A9 between 2000 and 2004, which is an average of 16 deaths a year. In addition, the A9 has always been in the top five of our most dangerous roads for injuries from road accidents during that period. Those figures are important. When we last debated the issue, the then Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, Lewis Macdonald, said that the A9 had a

"lower accident rate than the average for ... Scotland".—  
[Official Report, 27 November 2002; c 15789.]

The new figures give the lie to that statement. I hope that our new Minister for Transport and Telecommunications acknowledges the true position.

Sadly, the statistics will not come as a surprise to locals who use the road every day. The

particular problem with the A9—people who use it regularly will know this, and we have already heard about it this evening—is the continual switching from single to dual carriageway and back again. Even regular users of the road find it very easy to forget whether they are on a dual or single carriageway stretch. Imagine the confusion for foreign visitors flocking to Perthshire and the Highlands, particularly in the summer months, if they are not familiar with the road or comfortable with driving on the left. It is little wonder that the accident statistics are high.

An energetic campaign has been running for many years to have the road dualled. It has been supported by local newspapers such as *The Courier*, as Andrew Arbuckle, who is a former employee of that paper, said. Despite the fact that the campaign has been running for years, the problems of the A9 get no better. In fact, as the latest figures show, they seem to be getting worse.

I say to the minister that I understand that the costs of dualling the A9 will be substantial. At the previous debate in 2002, the then minister suggested that the cost would be in the region of £500 million. The minister today is suggesting a figure of £600 million. In anyone's book, that is a very substantial sum. However, expenditure at that level is not unprecedented by this Executive. I believe that the cost of the proposed Aberdeen western relief road will be similar. Although I have no doubt that that road is essential for the economy of Aberdeen and the north-east, the A9 must have at least an equally pressing case because of the statistics for road accidents.

I acknowledge that any Government has to balance its priorities and that there can never be blank cheques. However, surely it is time for us to say that the A9 is such a danger that it must be a priority for future expenditure.

Over the past five years, there has been an average of 16 fatalities on the A9 every year. With growing traffic levels, we can expect only that the level will at least continue unchanged, if not increase. That means 16 deaths this year, 16 next year, and 16 the year after that. So it will go on, unless something is done. For the sake of 16 lives every year, I urge the Executive to take this issue very seriously.

17:22

**John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** I congratulate John Swinney on bringing the debate to Parliament. There is no doubt about the concern about this section of the road. However, in supporting the campaign for the A9, I have to say that other routes north also concern me—I am thinking of the A82 in particular.

The A9 is a difficult and dangerous road to travel on. As we have heard, it has resulted in many fatalities, and the road has been identified as being the most dangerous trunk road in Scotland. That is not a situation or a statistic that we can ignore. At the earliest opportunity, we must initiate a concerted effort to address the problem.

As we have heard, the A9 is the main arterial route to the far north of Scotland. There is no doubt that it requires urgent attention and improvement over its entire length—members should not forget that the A9 travels beyond Inverness to the far north of Scotland. Some traffic calming and junction improvements have been undertaken, which have helped, but much more is required.

The A9 has many problems, but it is especially notorious for the frequency with which it alternates from dual to single carriageway. Some system of signage or even road markings should be introduced, especially on the single-lane sections, to remind motorists about the road system on which they are travelling. I travel that road twice a week and I usually find myself lost when I am on the single carriageway, wondering whether I am on dual carriageway and whether I can overtake—a dangerous situation.

Over the years, many proposals have been made to reduce the amount of commercial traffic. Other members have mentioned the problems that such traffic creates on the road. Efforts have been made to transfer road traffic to rail, but very little has happened over the years in spite of the massive support that is being given through the freight facilities grant. We need to clarify what the situation is now; I understand that some of the major supermarkets have reverted to road transport, which is causing even more problems and congestion on the A9. I wonder what happened to the grant moneys that were paid to those supermarkets.

If the north of Scotland is to continue to prosper and expand, it requires a much better transport network. That can be brought about only by construction of dual carriageway over the entire length of the notorious A9. When the existing A9 was being constructed, the Highland Council had the good sense to acquire the adjacent land so that land acquisition would not be an impediment to future improvements. We do not have that problem, so what are we waiting for?

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** When the member says that he wants the whole length of the A9 to be dual carriageway, does he mean that he wants the road to be dual carriageway all the way to Thurso?

**John Farquhar Munro:** I do not see why not. People who live in the far north are as entitled to

an improved road system as are people anywhere else.

Let us move forward to secure support and funding to bring the A9 up to the standard that is expected of a trunk road in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am pleased to support John Swinney's motion.

17:26

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank John Swinney for securing his second members' business debate on this important topic. It is clear that the issue will not go away as long as we continue to have unacceptably high numbers of fatalities on the A9. We must have solutions to the problems at the Ballinluig and Bankfoot junctions.

I am a Green member, but I am not implacably opposed to road building, road upgrades or road safety improvements. For example, I support the proposed additional short link between Blackford and Strathearn, which would take cars off the southern section of the A9 and provide better integration with the proposed new railway station in Blackford. Such a road would make a lot of sense and I would like to see it happen; it would be a good, green road. However, I am not convinced that dualling the A9 at a cost of £600 million is a priority. The Executive's priority must be to improve the dangerous junctions, to enforce speed limits and to invest in passenger and freight rail infrastructure.

We cannot ignore the all-embracing environmental issue, either. We have just had a debate on climate change and we have a huge mountain to climb if we are to make any inroads to our transport emissions. It is clear that dualling the A9 would have an environmental impact and that it would take money away from public transport improvements.

**Mr Swinney:** I appreciate Mr Ruskell's comments on the need to improve public transport infrastructure, but does he empathise with Roseanna Cunningham, who made a point that I have raised repeatedly on behalf of constituents? While we have argued about improving public transport, there has been a retrenchment in people's ability to use public transport to get into places such as Perth. For example, the fact that ScotRail has discontinued the early morning train stopping at Blair Atholl means that people cannot commute from there to Perth by train.

**Mr Ruskell:** I acknowledge that point. There has been a retrenchment and, for many people the car is the only viable option. However, we must chip away at our dependence on car usage.

There is already continuous dual carriageway on the section of the A9 between Perth and

Dunblane. I drive on that road regularly and I can tell members that it is dangerous, even though it has been dualled. It is dangerous because of the speed at which people travel along it. People travel at 90mph rather than 60mph. That, combined with the existence of a number of dangerous junctions, makes the dual carriageway very dangerous indeed. Perhaps the issue is that that dualled section of road is not, and cannot ever be, a motorway because local people need access to it from farm tracks and settlements all along the route. There will always be dozens of junctions that are dangerous because of the speed at which people travel along the dual carriageway. As Roseanna Cunningham mentioned, there are major junctions on that section of the A9 that need to be upgraded to grade-separated junctions.

Speed is a crucial issue. The Government's Transport Research Laboratory has produced numerous pieces of research that show that speed is a major factor. For every 1mph by which we reduce the average speed on our roads, we cut the accident rate by 5 per cent. Speed limits need to be reduced and enforced.

What is really shocking is that we have such a substandard rail service. As Roseanna Cunningham said, the train service from Edinburgh to Perth is dire. It takes longer to get from Edinburgh to Perth now than it did 100 years ago, and much of the Highland rail network is still single track. So, although I support John Swinney's call for immediate action to improve junctions on the A9, I also think that we need to dual the rail tracks. We should spend money on that before we think about spending money on dualling the A9.

17:30

**Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I, too, commend my friend John Swinney for securing the debate and for his persistent pressure on the issue. The road in question is a material and major artery to the Highlands and the north. Although Inverness has grown thanks to bridges, some road improvements and the benefit of the airport, it has grown in spite of the lack of dualling of the A9. Just as roads make markets, conversely, roads can stifle markets. To deny the Highlands the chance to see the A9 dualled is to limit their potential to converge economically with the rest of Scotland and the United Kingdom.

I am firmly of the opinion that we need major improvements to the A9 to reduce the incidence of accidents. At the top of that list of improvements, I include the removal of the dangerous junctions and the commitment that John Swinney eloquently asked for to start the process of dualling the road and, as John Farquhar Munro said, to continue the upgrading to the north of Inverness.

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** And to the east.

**Jim Mather:** Indeed. We need to get that artery functioning for the long-term good of the economy.

The A9 is a major disincentive to many drivers: it is dangerous, slow and frustrating. There is considerable A9 fatigue syndrome in Inverness and people would rather come down the A82. Although that journey is, in some ways, more limited and difficult, at least it is a consistent road to tackle.

**Mr Ruskell:** We have a limited amount of money. Does Jim Mather support the dualling of the A9, the A96 and the A92? Does he believe that we can address all those priorities at the same time?

**Jim Mather:** We are asking the Executive to get the process started. Let us get that process fuelled by a more efficient economy.

We are dealing with massive economic inefficiency. The travel time is appalling and is getting worse. There is an increasing presence of Tesco lorries, many of which do not reflect that company's sleek financial performance, although a few of their drivers occasionally pull over to let people past. We are facing massive hidden costs—the incalculable emotional and financial costs of loss of life, injury and trauma to domestic and business budgets that have costs exported on to them, as well as the costs to the ambulance service, the police, hospitals, and medical and physiotherapy resources. There are also costs in terms of road maintenance, insurance premiums and accident-induced road closures, which bring everything to a halt. All those factors create an investment disincentive to businesses and individuals and cause huge damage to local economic growth. Over time, that damage is severe enough to justify major investment in the infrastructure.

There are other Highland roads that fall into a similar category—the A82, the A85 and the A90—and whose current condition is limiting the economic potential of the Highlands and Islands. I leave the minister to consider the fact that we will not have economic recovery north of the Highland line until the A9 is dualled.

17:34

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Mention has been made, quite rightly, of the tragic deaths that there have been on the A9. An old friend of mine was killed on the A9 earlier this year. She was a girl whom I knew before I was married, and we worked together in Nigg. It is a funny thing but, until then, whenever I walked into my constituency office in Tain I would

see that lady and wish her good morning. Now she is gone. That is the instantness and awfulness of a sudden death. God knows what grief her family feel compared with my sadness.

I congratulate John Swinney on bringing the motion before us. He has been nothing if not extremely consistent in his endeavours, and I wish him well. John Farquhar Munro has, rightly, broadened out the brief to dualling the entire A9 as far as Thurso. I have written to the minister about an area of the A9 just short of Golspie, which is called the Cambusavie bends; the minister's officials know about it. It is a very twisty bit as one drops down towards Loch Fleet as one travels north. The minister knows it, and I am sure that others will know it. There was a very sad fatality there recently. The road is notorious for people coming off its sharp bends, particularly in winter. I hope that the minister's officials will look at that problem.

I thank the minister and his officials for the welcome work that is being done at the Ord of Caithness. The spending is now, I should think, well over £10 million. I have at all times found the minister's officials to be very civil and willing to take a can-do, positive approach.

What Mark Ruskell said was particularly interesting and thought provoking and in the best traditions of debate in the chamber. He said that the A9 is a working road that people go on and come off to get to their farms, and that is true. That is not in any way to disagree with John Swinney's laudable endeavour to get the road done up as much as possible. However, it is a point worth bearing in mind.

I drive a great deal on the A9, to-ing and fro-ing from my constituency. I used to get a lift with John Farquhar Munro from time to time, but once one discovers that one will be kippered by the black twist that he lights up one would probably take up driving oneself. I digress. Sometimes I take the train with Roseanna Cunningham, Rob Gibson and Eleanor Scott. I use the A9 a lot.

One of the things that I have seen, that we have all seen and at which Mark Ruskell hinted, is some incredibly dangerous driving. People overtake when they simply should not. In the States, there are defensive driving courses. However, since the relevant power is not devolved, that is not a matter for the minister. However, as part of an holistic solution we should, as well as pushing for investment, look at how some people conduct themselves behind the wheel. It is only the odd one out of the many drivers who use the road, but the odd one can take out a life or a family. We have all seen it happen.

Another point, of course, is about trying to get freight and people on to rail. Roseanna

Cunningham and Rob Gibson will know what I am talking about. It is all very well when one finds, as we have in the past, that the computer on the train thinks that the tanks beneath the toilets are full and locks the doors automatically. Not clever. It is not clever when one gets out of a train and sees some stations that are anything but welcoming to the communities that they service. I can think of two: Brora, which is pretty disgraceful, and my home town of Tain. Tourists are not encouraged to get out of the train if they have to ask, "What is this derelict building?" It used to be a station, once upon a time.

This is about an holistic approach; it is about doing much more to get freight and people on to rail. There is no reason, as Jim Mather and John Farquhar said, that these trucks should be on the road: the goods should be moved by rail.

Would it not be helpful if rail could offer some small amount of refrigerated transport? Given the interest that I always declare in the chamber, I would say that, would I not? That would be a great help in moving perishable goods to our cities and towns.

17:38

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

Many members have cited the figures for fatalities. I have dealt with many people who have had severe injuries as a result of accidents on the A9. I do not want to go into detail, but in several instances people have been left completely paralysed. We should remember them too and not just consider the fatalities.

I was delighted to hear John Farquhar stating the Liberal policy of dualling the A9 from Perth to Thurso. As Andrew Arbuckle says, "If it is Liberal policy, it happens." Well done, John; the campaign was very successful.

**Mr Stone:** That particular policy has not been signed off by the executive of my constituency party—yet.

**Mary Scanlon:** I am sure that it has no doubt about getting the member's support.

I commend John Swinney, and my colleague Murdo Fraser, for his commitment and persistence in tackling the accident record on the A9 and at the Ballinluig and Bankfoot junctions. Speaking as a statistic after experiencing a car crash on the A9, I have more than a passing interest in the debate.

Without wishing to take anything from the prioritising of the A9, I would like, as others have done, to highlight the A889, linking the A9 and the A86 from Dalwhinnie to Laggan, which has been designated the most dangerous road in Britain. That road has an accident rate that is almost four times higher than the next most dangerous road in

Scotland, which is the A99 that links the A9 at Latheron to Wick in Caithness. Other links from the A9 include the A95 into Morayshire, which is Margaret Ewing's constituency, and the A835 to Ullapool, both of which were designated by the AA as high-risk roads. We are talking about not just the A9, but the seriously high-risk roads that connect to it.

I support Murdo Fraser's call for the eventual dualling of the A9 to Inverness, but I remind members that the A9 does not stop at Inverness. The road north of Dornoch narrows and that part needs to be given greater priority status than we are giving it today. Jamie Stone did not mention the Berriedale braes, but I understand that the forecast is for a very severe winter and I put it on the record that I find the Berriedale braes quite frightening in good weather; I would not like to risk coming down them in snow and ice.

When I spoke in our previous debate about the A9, I highlighted the fact that apart from the three quarters of a mile of dual carriageway at Crubenmore, there was no safe place to overtake for a distance of 44 miles. That has now changed through the construction of the two-by-one lanes that John Swinney mentioned. Those lanes provide for safe overtaking, but because of traffic build-up and frustration, too many drivers try to overtake and that leads to a bunching of vehicles as the road goes back to a single lane. However, I support the increase in the number of two-by-one lanes between Drumochter and Moy because I believe that they can easily be converted to dual carriageway in due course. That change is a step in the right direction, not an end in itself. Given that the two-by-one lanes are a mile longer than the dual carriageway at Crubenmore, I look forward to hearing the timing for the extension of the dual carriageway at Crubenmore.

The Executive should be concerned about the fatalities, the horrendous injuries that many people experience on the A9 and the delay in the promised junction improvement at Ballinluig and Bankfoot. Although piecemeal changes and improvements are welcome, the bold step to dual the A9 is needed.

17:42

**The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott):** I thank John Swinney and other members for what has been a thoughtful continuation—the point that Mr Swinney was making—of a debate that I too wish had been concluded. I assure Mr Swinney and other colleagues that I have no plans to trot out a series of excuses about why the Ballinluig junction has yet to be started, but I can explain why, in technical terms, because that is what Mr Swinney asked for.



First, I should say that the Executive takes road safety very seriously and that we need to use the right language and be appropriate in how we describe risk on roads. As some members have said, we must also acknowledge the role of the driver. A road engineer can design the perfect road but that will not stop accidents happening. I know that members accept that.

In 2000, we set a target of reducing by 40 per cent, by 2010, the number of people killed and seriously injured on Scottish roads. By 2004, there had already been a 37 per cent reduction. We take such matters extremely seriously and the investments made across Scotland's road network are made for safety reasons, as has been reflected in tonight's debate.

Mr Swinney and others have recognised that the number of people who have been killed on the A9 is high—75 have been killed on the trunk road section between Scrabster and Dunblane and a further seven have been killed between Dunblane and Stirling during the five-year period from 2000 to 2004. Although the A9 is Scotland's longest trunk road, the number of people who have been killed on it is unacceptably high. I also take the point that has been made recently about other injuries and incidents.

Mr Swinney and others have argued this evening and previously for the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness, but Mr Swinney knows that I have to deal in the world of priorities. Transport spending in Scotland is at record levels: this year, for the first time, it is more than £1 billion and it is set to rise to £1.4 billion by 2007-08. We are committed to spending more than £3 billion on transport capital infrastructure over the next 10 years. I do not apologise for the balance of that expenditure moving from roads to public transport. I believe that that is the right long-term investment for Scotland.

I am serious about what I said this morning about rail and bus connections. I absolutely take the points that Roseanna Cunningham, John Swinney and Murdo Fraser made about commuters into Perth or north to Inverness. I undertake to look into the issues about local commuter services and the requirement for better city-to-city connections. One of the challenges that we face in the system, particularly in rail, is to meet the desire for both better long-term, city-to-city connections and better commuter services. Roseanna Cunningham raised that issue in relation to Perth.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The minister has talked about the difference between city-to-city services and local commuter services. There are no such things as local commuter services in and out of Perth; there are only city-to-city services, which are extremely poor. To talk about local

commuter train services is completely and totally to miss the point, because there is none.

**Tavish Scott:** I obviously did not explain that well. I said that I accept the challenge of considering those issues, which I will do. I cannot solve every problem overnight. I was trying to explain that there are constraints in the rail network that cannot be solved instantly, much as Roseanna Cunningham and I might like them to be. I have undertaken to consider the issues.

Upgrading all the A9 between Perth and Inverness to dual carriageway would cost in excess of £600 million. By any standard, that is a high level of expenditure and it means that other priorities would have to slip and change. There are a number of other transport projects—Margaret Ewing is looking at me in that knowing way that she has—and roads throughout Scotland that many members write to me about, as they did to my predecessors. Jim Mather mentioned a number and John Farquhar Munro never misses an opportunity to mention a number. All I am saying is that any transport minister has to make choices about such projects. We will make the best judgments that we can about the statistical evidence on the argument for change.

As colleagues have mentioned, one of the main problems with the A9 is the lack of guaranteed overtaking opportunities, which is why north of Dunkeld we have instigated a programme of targeted improvements to provide enhanced overtaking, and why south of Dunkeld we are considering the options for improving the standard of provision on that most heavily trafficked section of the route. The outcome of that study will be available before the end of the year.

I will deal with Ballinluig, which John Swinney raised. I am deeply disappointed about progress on the junction and frustrated by the delays in bringing the project to fruition. The only feasible location is constrained and technically challenging. As well as the road and railway, which Mr Swinney mentioned, the River Tummell passes very close to the site and, needless to say, there are significant environmental issues to address. The level of commitment that I can give Mr Swinney is that although the upgrade, with the grade-separated junction and the flyover that will be in place, on which construction will start next year, will be twice as expensive as normal grade-separated junctions elsewhere in Scotland—the upgrade at Ballinluig will cost twice as much as did the work between Perth and Dundee, for example, with which Mr Swinney might be familiar—I consider and all our analyses and value-for-money exercises show that the work is worth doing. The construction of the junction will begin next year. We expect to publish the statutory orders by 7

October and the drawing-board stages that John Swinney mentioned have been completed.

I am also committed to delivering the Bankfoot improvements that have been mentioned and will announce as quickly as I can the preferred scheme.

I accept that there is much to be done on the A9 and I remain concerned about the relatively high number of fatalities on the road. I have asked my road safety experts to investigate in detail the nature and location of the accidents on the road and have worked with the A9 road safety group on recommendations about how the number might be reduced. That work is being done in addition to the work on the A9 that is already planned and the people involved will report back to me on it before the end of the year.

My commitment and the commitment of the devolved Government is to establish a safe trunk road network. We will spend resources on targeted improvements and continue to keep Scotland's people and its goods moving safely.

*Meeting closed at 17:50.*

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