

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 9 March 2006

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 9 March 2006

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Point of Order

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer, you will recall that I raised at close of play last night the question of the votes, which seemed—to some extent—to be inaccurate. Having discussed the matter with officials, I understand that one of the consoles was not functioning. Although the result of the vote on the debate on the Shirley McKie case is not in dispute, the numbers are. I wish to record the fact that Margaret Mitchell voted against Cathy Jamieson's amendment.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Your point is now on the record, Mr Aitken.

Energy Policy

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The first item of business this morning is a debate on motion S2M-4074, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on future energy policy.

09:16

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): It is with a sense of déjà vu that we find ourselves standing—or sitting—in this room once again. We must also be experiencing déjà vu because the Conservatives have chosen to debate energy so soon after our last debate on the subject.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, thank you, not at the moment.

The fact that we have brought to the chamber again the issue of Scotland's future capacity to generate electricity is a reflection of the sense of urgency that we feel about the matter.

It is essential that we are able to guarantee affordable and available supplies of electricity in future. That is essential not only to the Scottish economy, which cannot function without regular power supplies, but to ensuring that fuel poverty does not become a bigger and bigger problem for the least well-off in society and those who are least able to protect themselves. For that reason, we are trying to instil a sense of urgency in the debate on how Scotland generates enough electricity to meet its future requirements.

Through our Executive, we have set a target of 40 per cent of electricity being generated by renewables by 2020. Despite the difficulties with grid connections, there is no shortage of applications to deliver on that. However, too many people in Scotland and in the chamber have accepted that 40 per cent target without considering how we will generate the remaining 60 per cent. The truth is that the lifespan of many of our power stations will expire before the 2020 deadline is reached. Unless we make radical decisions now, there will be a shortfall and all the ensuing problems will arrive on our doorstep.

We have raised the subject for debate again today because too many of the decisions that have to be made, particularly those on our large generating capacity, such as nuclear or new coal-fired stations, will take a long time to pass through the public consultation and planning processes. If we do not act immediately, we face the serious danger that that replacement capacity will not be available when it is needed, which is when the existing stations that they are to replace are being

decommissioned. That is why we have brought the issue back to the floor of the chamber so soon.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does the member accept that the market has begun to take action already with, for example, Scottish Power's decision on Longannet power station?

Alex Johnstone: The decision to install the scrubbing equipment at Longannet will lengthen the lifetime of that power station, but it will not extend its lifespan significantly beyond the time limits that we are discussing today. It is a relatively short-term measure. Ultimately, decisions will have to be taken on replacing coal-fired capacity in Scotland, just as they will have to be taken on our nuclear capacity.

The amendments are interesting. In the main, they clearly and honestly express the views of the parties that lodged them, which is exactly what we wanted to be expressed in the debate. We wanted to provide the platform for an open and honest debate, in which individuals and parties could put forward their own views and not be hampered by the restrictions that politics can place upon them. It is, therefore, disappointing that the policy that the Labour Party expressed at its conference only a few short days ago, when it indicated clearly that it wants to pursue an energy policy that includes the replacement of nuclear and coal-fired capacity, has been removed from the Executive amendment.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)
rose—

Alex Johnstone: No, thank you, not at the moment, Shiona.

Our disappointment at the Labour Party amendment is further increased by the fact that, in the debate on BBC television last night entitled "The Generation Gap", the Deputy First Minister, Nicol Stephen, felt no restriction on how he expressed Executive energy policy. From his seat in the television studio, he said exactly what he thought the Executive's energy policy for the future should be. However, the policy that he expressed was not Executive policy but Liberal Democrat policy.

Worse still, Nicol Stephen took a view that the Executive would never dare to take: he said that if we do not take the serious decisions that have to be taken, we will still be able to rely on our supplies of energy from the North sea. Although much North sea gas is found in Scottish waters, the problem is that it is part of a world and European supply network, which means that it comes at world or European prices. For that reason, not only does our domestic gas supply have a limited lifespan, but it could become extremely expensive.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Alex Johnstone was not present yesterday when we had the opportunity to sign up for personal energy tariffs under green schemes. Will he consider joining the significant number of Scottish National Party MSPs who have signed up to divert some of their energy payments to green energy suppliers, thereby helping to secure Scotland's future energy needs?

Alex Johnstone: I will consider it. Indeed, I can discuss at great length the measures that I have taken in my personal life to try to reduce my energy consumption, but perhaps that discussion is for another debate.

We have debated the need to replace nuclear and coal-fired generating capacity many times. I believe, in common with many in my party, that it is absolutely essential to the future economic well-being of our industry and our people in Scotland. If we are not prepared to address the issue now, it could well soon be too late to do so. The lead-in time for new capacity is so long and the difficulties that new proposals face are so severe that we must start the process now. Even people who oppose the replacement of nuclear and coal-fired capacity must understand the significance of the timescale.

We have brought the subject back to the chamber today because it is one of the most urgent issues that faces the Parliament. We want to ensure that the Executive takes clear and concise decisions. We are extremely disappointed that the views of the Labour Party have been completely removed from the Executive amendment. The Labour Party is being led by the nose by the Liberal Democrats, who have an ulterior motive—the decimation of Scotland's electricity generating capacity.

The arguments in favour of renewable energy, micro-generation and fuel efficiency are all worthy. We should pursue relentlessly all such avenues. However, failure to replace base-load generation capacity in the Scottish market will result in job losses and a reversal of economic growth. It will create a catastrophe of immense proportions for Scotland. Now is the time to have this argument. Now is the time to make difficult decisions. Members on the Labour front bench need to commit themselves to that. After all, Labour is the only party in the chamber that has failed to address this key issue. The time has come to address this matter. We look forward to the Executive's response.

I move,

That the Parliament calls on the Scottish Executive to support the adoption of a balanced energy policy to meet the energy needs of the nation, including the promotion of clean coal technology, new and replacement nuclear build, as well as oil and gas and renewables and therefore

considers that immediate plans must be started to replace or renew our existing coal-fired and nuclear generating stations where required.

09:25

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I am happy to reply on behalf of the Executive. As Alex Johnstone correctly pointed out, it has been only six weeks since I stood before Parliament—albeit in a different place—and stated our commitment to our continuing policy objectives of increasing the proportion of energy that is generated from renewable sources; tackling climate change and fuel poverty; and ensuring security of supply for Scottish consumers.

Much has happened in the interim, and Scottish Power's decision to make a significant investment to extend Longannet's life well beyond 2015 is, as our amendment suggests, a welcome move and demonstrates confidence in the continued development of clean coal technology in Scotland.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): Given Scottish Power's welcome announcement and the clean coal technologies that are available, does the minister agree that black is now the new green?

Allan Wilson: I have heard it said that nuclear is the new green. However, I agree that coal has a future in meeting Scotland's electricity needs. Scotland is at the forefront of clean coal technology, which will have a long and healthy future.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I agree entirely with the minister's comments about coal. However, his amendment is inaccurate. Longannet cannot supply the base-load for Scotland in the winter, which is 6,000 to 7,000MW. Hunterston and Torness together generate 2,500MW, and traditionally have helped to supply the summer and winter base-load. Does the minister agree?

Allan Wilson: I do not agree that the amendment is inaccurate, because it

"notes the progress made at Longannet to secure future base load energy supplies".

The base-load supply for Scotland—or, indeed, for the United Kingdom—cannot be secured by one energy source or by Longannet alone. I and the Executive fundamentally believe that our future energy needs must be met by a balanced mix of energy resources.

During the past six weeks, the first two volumes of the "Scottish Energy Study" have been published. They give a factual overview of energy supply and demand trends between 1990 and 2002 and provide us with good evidence with

which to develop our energy policy. However, the information in the study is only part of our approach. We are also maintaining regular dialogue with the UK Government as it takes forward its UK energy review. As I have said before in the chamber, that review will not concentrate only on nuclear power. It will assess progress on the four goals that were set out in the 2003 UK energy white paper: first, to put the UK on a path to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, with real progress to be made by 2020; secondly, to maintain the reliability of energy supplies; thirdly, to promote competitive markets in the UK and beyond; and, finally, to ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated. Affordability is critical to all those considerations. The review will consider all options for delivering on those objectives and meeting the UK's future energy needs.

Clearly, the energy issues that face the UK also face Scotland, but there is also a Scottish perspective to this whole matter. For us, the key issues are securing energy supplies, although we must acknowledge that the energy mix and infrastructure are different in Scotland; addressing the other side of the supply and demand equation by constraining growth in energy demand through energy efficiency improvements; reducing carbon energy levels to meet the challenges presented by climate change, which I suspect will be one of the key drivers of future energy policy; achieving the Executive's target of generating 40 per cent of energy from renewable energy sources by 2020; and providing affordable energy at a price that does not unduly constrain economic growth or exacerbate fuel poverty.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: Yes.

The Presiding Officer: I call Alex Johnstone.

Murdo Fraser: Murdo Fraser, actually. [Laughter.]

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Mr Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I have to say that we are not usually confused so easily.

I am sure that the minister was present at last weekend's Labour Party conference in Aviemore. Will he tell the chamber whether he disagreed with any part of the energy motion that was passed at that conference?

Allan Wilson: I was indeed present at that occasion and I made a valuable contribution to the debate. In response to Mr Fraser's question, I should say that, as a Labour Party member, I support Labour Party policy on these matters.

The policies that we develop in Scotland must recognise that we must find solutions that meet our future energy demands in a way that improves energy efficiency and reduces the environmental impacts of climate change. Our progress so far has been noteworthy, although I suspect that I do not have enough time to go into great detail on that. However, I should point out that we are developing—and will, later this year, publish—our own energy efficiency strategy, which will acknowledge the important role that the micro-generation of renewable energy could play in the drive to meet climate change objectives.

I could say much more on the matter, but I will conclude by saying that energy policy is not about knee-jerk reactions. I fundamentally agree with Alex Johnstone's point that we have to take a long-term view. The real solution to meet Scotland's long-term energy needs lies in a robust policy that does not depend on a single source, but that seeks to capture Scotland's potential to have a wide-ranging, secure and balanced energy mix.

I move amendment S2M-4074.3, to leave out from "calls on" to end and insert:

"notes the progress made at Longannet to secure future base load energy supplies; supports the Scottish Executive's commitment to the development of a wide range of renewable energy technologies in Scotland as a key element of a balanced energy supply mix; supports the Executive's target that 40% of electricity generated in Scotland by 2020 should come from renewable sources; looks forward to publication of the revised Scottish Climate Change Programme and the consideration given to the contribution of energy efficiency and renewables to reduce carbon dioxide emissions; endorses the Executive's commitment to tackling fuel poverty; acknowledges the Executive's commitment to not support further development of nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved; welcomes the release of the first two volumes of the Scottish Energy Study; recognises the importance of the UK Energy Review, and supports the Executive's engagement with the UK Government, Ofgem and the energy industry to ensure that the future energy supply needs of Scotland are met."

09:33

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): The SNP welcomes this debate on one of the most important issues that will face the nation in the years ahead. The decisions that we take over the next few years will affect generations to come and determine the Scottish economy's success.

I should begin by saying that the Tory party and the Labour Party in Scotland seem to have signed some nuclear treaty. After all, they are the two political parties that will go into next year's Scottish Parliament elections with a pro-nuclear policy. However, the Scottish Labour Party's decision at its Aviemore conference to cave into Tony Blair

and give nuclear power the thumbs up has left it with egg on its face, in light of a BBC poll that was conducted a few days later in which the people of Scotland gave the decision the thumbs down. Indeed, a few days after that, the Sustainable Development Commission, which was set up by the Scottish Labour Government that has—as I must make clear—just come out in favour of nuclear power in Scotland, also gave the move a huge thumbs down.

Allan Wilson: I am really interested to find out what the SNP's energy policy is. Does it think that the nation's future energy policy and needs should be determined by BBC opinion polls?

Richard Lochhead: I realise that a BBC opinion poll is not the be-all and end-all, but I expect that on this issue it is more in touch with the people of Scotland than is the Scottish Labour Party.

Scotland is self-sufficient in energy and, with the right policies, can remain energy independent. We must get away from the claim made by Tony Blair in London that the UK will be starved of energy in the near future, and instead discuss the facts. Scotland is an energy-rich country. We have more than 60 per cent of Europe's oil reserves, more than 12 per cent of Europe's gas reserves, 70 per cent of the UK's coal reserves, 25 per cent of Europe's wind potential, 10 per cent of Europe's wave potential and a quarter of Europe's tidal potential. Let us talk about the facts in this debate, not the scaremongering of the Tory party and the Labour Party.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): Mr Lochhead talks about potential. If—heaven help us—the SNP took over in 2007, would he just close down the nuclear power plants and have nothing on stream in their place? Can he give us some concrete dates for when he expects the energy mix that the SNP prefers to deliver Scotland's requirements? At the moment, if we switched off nuclear we would not be self-sufficient.

Richard Lochhead: The SNP's long-standing policy is that nuclear power stations in Scotland will not be replaced at the end of their technical and economic lives. The debate is about whether Scotland needs new nuclear power stations, and the SNP is arguing that the last thing Scotland needs is more nuclear power stations.

There is no answer to the waste issue. The Committee on Radioactive Waste Management has already said that the issue cannot be resolved, so the coalition's current policy is in tatters. Why cannot we update the policy, put the issue behind us and realise Scotland's potential for cleaner, safer and cheaper energy alternatives? That is the way forward for Scotland.

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Mr Lochhead give way?

The Presiding Officer: No, the member is in the final minute of his speech.

Richard Lochhead: I apologise; I do not have time to take an intervention.

If we take the disastrous decision to go for nuclear, it will undermine not only renewables—which can create new jobs and give us clean energy resources—but energy efficiency, which we have to talk about more in this Parliament.

To find a solution for Scotland's energy needs, we need to have energy powers in this Parliament. According to the BBC opinion poll, 82 per cent of Scots want decisions on Scotland's nuclear future to be taken in this Parliament, not in London. Scotland's Deputy First Minister, Nicol Stephen, said on television last night that he wants more energy powers to come to the Scottish Parliament. The Steel commission is talking about more energy powers coming to this Parliament from London. Why cannot we just do what is right for Scotland, not what is right for Tony Blair, and say no to nuclear by supporting the SNP's amendment today?

I move amendment S2M-4074.2, to leave out from "calls on" to end and insert:

"believes that there is no case for the building of new nuclear power stations in Scotland and that decisions on our energy future should be the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament rather than the UK Government, in line with the wishes of the people of Scotland."

09:37

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): Energy policy undoubtedly remains one of the most urgent and most challenging issues facing us today. *[Interruption.]* There seem to be problems with the sound system. My goodness, what are we to do if we cannot even get the sound right?

The choices that we make over the next few years will shape the future of our children and grandchildren. *[Interruption.]* I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer, it seems that I am speaking into the wrong microphone. I am sorry. We Greens cannot always be right, although I suppose that we are right about 99 per cent of the time. *[Laughter.]*

The Presiding Officer: Yes, just get on with it.

Shiona Baird: There are clear signs that too many people in the chamber are not thinking the energy issue through properly. The Tories' motion makes it clear that they consider energy policy to be synonymous with electricity supply. We need to raise our game and recognise that electricity accounts for less than a quarter of final energy use. Any energy policy that simply ignores the

other three quarters is doomed to fail from the word go, because our road, rail and air transport uses energy and our homes use energy.

I hope that everyone in the chamber accepts that climate change means that we cannot go on as we have in the past, but there is another factor, almost as pressing, that will have just as great an influence on our energy future. We have grown up in an age of cheap oil that is now coming to an end. UK oil production peaked a few years ago and the global oil peak will probably happen in the next five to 10 years. We need to move to a low-carbon economy as a matter of urgency, whether we like it or not. The profligate way in which we have been using energy in recent years will have to come to an end and we will all have to tighten our belts.

Mr Davidson: On profligacy in the use of oil, does Shiona Baird have any comment to make on the fact that Robin Harper appeared to come to Parliament today in a chauffeur-driven Lexus?

Shiona Baird: He was sharing the car. He had been having an early morning breakfast meeting and was offered a lift. Mr Davidson misunderstands the Green approach. We are not against cars as such, but let us not kid ourselves. Oil is running out and there are no magic wands that we can wave and no silver bullets for replacing cheap oil and gas.

We cannot just build more nuclear power stations. Doing so will not let us carry on as if nothing has happened. I wish it were so. If I believed that nuclear power offered a genuinely sustainable energy future and an answer to climate change and oil depletion, I would embrace it, but nuclear-generated electricity supplies less than 8 per cent of our total energy needs.

Christine May: Will Shiona Baird give way?

Shiona Baird: I cannot, as I will not be allowed extra time for interventions.

The Sustainable Development Commission spent a year examining the case for nuclear power and the role that it could play in a low-carbon economy. Its conclusion was that nuclear power is not the answer, for five main reasons: waste; economics; inflexibility; security; and the distraction that it would be from more effective energy strategies. That is not knee-jerk polemics from environmental ideologues but a carefully studied and well-reasoned analysis. It is notable that the Westminster Conservative energy spokesman, Alan Duncan, said that the Government should pay close attention to a report that puts a spanner in the works of its nuclear ambitions. Perhaps Mr Duncan should have a word with his Scottish colleagues, because it is clear that the Scottish Conservatives still have the same blinkered attitude to nuclear power,

irrespective of the growing evidence that it is a dead end and a blind alley.

At least the Scottish Tories are not going down the blind alley alone. The Scottish Labour Party, with one or two honourable exceptions, seems intent on making the same mistake. We will watch that Tory-Labour nuclear pact with interest, but one thing is for certain: whatever the Tories and Labour think about nuclear power, the majority of Scots want nothing to do with it. The BBC poll clearly indicates that nuclear power is an energy source of last resort. We are a democracy and we need to listen to what the people are saying. It is equally clear that we are no nearer to finding a resolution to the waste issue, irrespective of the First Minister's sophistry.

There are no easy answers. The future holds many challenges but also many opportunities. We need to reduce and to manage energy demand. We must recognise that we can reduce our energy use by around a third without much effort. We will not need any new nuclear if we achieve that level of energy efficiency, which we can do in far less time than it takes to build new nuclear. Why are we allowing ourselves to be distracted by a technology from the past that will play no role for at least 10 to 15 years? Evidence is now stacking up that we might not have that long before we get to the point of no return with rising CO₂ emissions. We need to recognise the enormous potential of Scottish renewables, while accepting that that sector will need a great deal of financial support for the foreseeable future. We need to think about how we generate and distribute our power, as regional and local networks are far more efficient and accountable. I was heartened to read that the Westminster Tories, too, are beginning to recognise the value of decentralised networks.

Most of all, we need energy efficiency. We must save resources, save money and protect the climate. How many more reasons do we need? There are challenges and opportunities. There are some tricky choices but no easy answers. We cannot afford to get energy policy wrong. I move amendment S2M-4074.1, to leave out from "calls on" to end and insert:

"acknowledges that the development of stable, secure and sustainable future energy policy is one of the most pressing and most challenging tasks facing the present generation; recognises that any future energy policy must consider all energy and not merely electricity, which accounts for only around one-fifth of total energy demand; accepts that such a policy must take into account the twin problems of climate change and dwindling supplies of oil and other fossil fuels; welcomes the recent publication by the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) of its position paper, *The Role of Nuclear Power in a Low Carbon Economy*; supports the conclusion of the SDC that nuclear power is not the answer to tackling climate change or security of supply; further notes the results of a BBC Scotland opinion poll indicating that a majority of Scots favour more renewable energy while a small minority

supports new nuclear power, and calls on the Scottish Executive to ensure that Scotland's future energy policy involves radical energy efficiency measures, the expansion of all renewable technologies, decentralised networks and the widespread adoption of microgeneration."

09:44

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Another debate, another opportunity to make the Liberal Democrats' opposition to new nuclear power stations crystal clear. The Tories do not agree. Their motion calls for new and replacement nuclear build. That makes the Tory position clear—or does it? Launching the Tory energy policy review in February, Alan Duncan said that his party had

"no fixed opinion on nuclear energy".

This week, he went further still and said:

"you can't go against the grain of public opinion on nuclear power ... We are open-minded but we start from a position of suspicion."

On 2 March, David Cameron says that we want decentralised energy; on 9 March, Scottish Tories call for more nuclear power, which requires a centralised energy system. Young David plans a wind turbine for his roof; Murdo Fraser calls for a moratorium on wind energy. Alan Duncan is suspicious of new nuclear power stations; Alex Johnstone is positively excited by them. How interesting it is that the Scottish Tories continue to embrace nuclear energy while the English Tories are much less happy about it.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Will Nora Radcliffe tell us what Lord Thurso's views on nuclear power are?

Nora Radcliffe: Lord Thurso has made his views on nuclear power clear. They are his own views, not the policy or views of the majority of the Liberal Democrats. We can accommodate people who disagree with us on one policy issue.

Phil Gallie: Nora Radcliffe is the only Liberal Democrat member in the chamber—

Mr Brocklebank: No, there is another one here.

Phil Gallie: I apologise to Jeremy Purvis. Is it not the case that, in the Executive, the tail is wagging the dog and constraining the minister from making the statements that he would like to make on the Executive's policy?

Nora Radcliffe: That may or may not be true. We have a four-year agreement on a programme for government that both parties are honouring. That is to be commended.

Tony Blair seems fixated on having new nuclear power stations. Perhaps he regards it as one of his legacy issues, but it seems careless that it comes with an expensive and hazardous legacy for generations to come.

Over recent weeks and months, we have been deaved by the mantra that nuclear power is the only game in town and that, without it, the lights will go out. On Monday, the Sustainable Development Commission—the UK Government's official advisory body on environmental issues—debunked that myth. Its clear advice to UK ministers is:

"there is no justification for bringing forward plans for a new nuclear power programme, at this time".

The commission rejected nuclear power on no fewer than five key grounds. Members should read its report.

Last year, the Department of Trade and Industry admitted that questions about finance, Government support, market mechanisms, public support and the storage of radioactive waste are all still unanswered.

Mr Brocklebank: Is Nora Radcliffe aware that there are other people who take an opposing view to that of the Sustainable Development Commission? According to the Royal Academy of Engineering, the cost of nuclear power is less than half the price of wind power. The fact is that the uranium that is used in our nuclear power stations is at least 97 per cent renewable. It sounds as if nuclear power should be considered on cost grounds at least.

Nora Radcliffe: Ted Brocklebank should look at the tag on the report to which he refers; I suggest that there is a strong vested interest.

I outlined what the DTI admitted last year. One year on, there are no proposed solutions to those fundamental questions, unless we count the suggestion in a leaked report from Sir David King, the chief scientific adviser, that new nuclear power stations should be funded by a levy on everyone's electricity bill.

Are we, the public, to pay twice over for new nuclear power stations? No. We must grasp the economic and environmental opportunity that renewable energy offers to Scotland and make that our priority. In Scotland, where Liberal Democrats, in partnership with the Labour Party and with the support of other parties, have put renewables at the top of the agenda, we are on track to achieve and exceed our target of 18 per cent renewables by 2010, while it looks as if the UK Government will fail to achieve its target of 10 per cent. That is no coincidence. Let us also be clear that it is the involvement of Liberal Democrats in Government in Scotland that has led to the Executive policy of building no new nuclear power stations while waste issues remain unresolved.

For many years to come, we will have a nuclear industry in decommissioning, but new nuclear

generation is not the answer to our energy needs here and now. Apart from anything else, it cannot be ready in time to replace old coal and old nuclear power stations. The future and the opportunities are in clean coal, carbon sequestration and, most of all, a revolution in renewables, energy efficiency and micro-generation.

I call on members to support the Executive amendment.

09:50

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I open with a couple of quotations:

"The UK's leading engineer, Sir Alec Broers, the President of the Royal Academy of Engineering has warned that renewable energy will not stop global warming or blackouts. He has said that the UK Government's plans to generate 20% of electricity from renewable sources by 2020 were unrealistic and investment in nuclear power was critical if shortages were to be avoided."

The other quotation comes from the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Select Committee's report "Meeting Scotland's Future Energy Needs", which is dated 16 March 2005. The select committee stressed:

"It is ... vital that decisions are taken now, to obviate the possibility of, quite literally, the lights going out in Scotland in the foreseeable future."

I cannot understand why the Labour Party, which obviously agrees with all that we have been arguing for, is frozen like a rabbit in car headlights and is not making a proper public commitment to the policy that it has just been talking about.

Richard Lochhead: Does David Davidson appreciate that he is scaremongering and misleading the people of Scotland? The statistics that he just read out are UK statistics, not Scottish ones, and our energy profile is completely different from that of the UK. Will he please tell the truth and give the facts?

Mr Davidson: To be frank, if Richard Lochhead is prepared to accept a BBC poll as the substance for his arguments, he should not be talking about numbers.

Our problems in Scotland are to do with the future sustainability of power supplies, their affordability and the fact that, although our energy requirements are increasing, we are not doing enough to become energy efficient. Energy efficiency must go hand in hand with power production; we must help people to heat their homes. I have no objection to somebody erecting mini-turbines on their house if they can get planning permission, but I do not understand why Scotland's countryside is being covered with miles of wind farms that cost energy in a way that nobody ever talks about.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will David Davidson give way?

Mr Davidson: In a moment.

The Presiding Officer: I think not in a moment; you have about one and a half minutes left.

Mr Davidson: We must think about the mix of systems. The argument should be about the percentages of different forms of energy generation that we use. North sea oil and gas are a great source of revenue for the economy of the north-east of Scotland, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer comes in through the back door and, through stealth thuggery, takes millions of pounds away from that industry to the point that the major oil and gas companies are going to cut down on investment. If they do that, many jobs will be lost so, if the chancellor is to carry on with that policy, we must ensure that we now make decisions on and invest in the two sources that will meet our energy requirements: clean coal and nuclear. Sites for those are already connected to the grid, and we have willing staff and communities that are happy to accept those installations. We need to replace the two nuclear power stations that we enjoy and there is no reason why new ones cannot be commissioned alongside them.

The long and the short of it is that the Government in Scotland is too busy trying to appease its minor colleagues—the Liberal Democrats—and must stand up and be counted. It cannot carry on messing about and giving weird and wild quotations about this, that and the other without coming to a decision. I ask the minister to commit in his closing speech to a programme of nuclear renewal.

09:53

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I have quite a lot of sympathy for the Tory motion and have been arguing along those lines for many years—a lot longer than some of my colleagues down south—but I question the Tories' motivation, which is, I suspect, to split the coalition. With Nicol Stephen doing such a good job of that, I am surprised that they are bothering to try.

The debate is about a reserved policy matter. Although the Scottish Executive has powers in planning, the UK Government will determine energy policy and I have every confidence that our colleagues down south will come to a sensible conclusion. However, as Nora Radcliffe pointed out, the Tories are slightly at odds with each other north and south of the border. Mr Cameron, their leader, has said that he is open minded about nuclear power and has appointed Zac Goldsmith, the editor of *The Ecologist* magazine and a well-known critic of nuclear power, to be deputy

chairman of the Conservative party's wider quality-of-life review.

Phil Gallie: I point out that Scotland's proportion of nuclear power is far higher than that south of the border. Will Elaine Murray guarantee that her Executive ministers will not put a block on energy policy that is set at Westminster?

Dr Murray: They are not my Executive ministers, because I am not the First Minister, so I cannot guarantee anything.

I am one of those who were pleased to support the Amicus and National Union of Mineworkers motion on coal and nuclear power that the Scottish Labour conference agreed to. I support ambitious renewable energy targets; I do not include nuclear energy as a renewable source. We need to have energy efficiency targets and targets for non-carbon-generated energy.

The most recent statistics show that Scotland has been using 175TWh of energy a year. We have six major generating stations, three of which are nuclear. Just under 40 per cent of our current power generation is nuclear. I do not think that we can keep our industries and services running without a nuclear power component and a clean coal component.

Nora Radcliffe *rose*—

Dr Murray: I am sorry—I do not have time. The alternative, which was not supported by the Scottish people according to the recent BBC poll, is importing oil and gas or energy that is generated by nuclear means in Europe. I do not support that, either.

I draw the Parliament's attention to the comments of Professor Lovelock, a fundamental green. He was one of the first people to point out the problems with the ozone layer and one of the first people to mention the likely impact of global warming. He has pointed out to us that if we had 50 years to bring on renewable technology, we might be okay, but we do not have 50 years. The problem is far more imminent. We cannot tackle climate change unless we accept that nuclear power has to play a part, at least for the next generation. That will allow us time to develop renewables and to develop nuclear fusion technologies, which mean that, in the longer term, we might not require nuclear fission.

The Sustainable Development Commission, which has been mentioned in the debate, states:

"nuclear is a low carbon technology, with an impressive safety record in the UK. Nuclear could generate large quantities of electricity, contribute to stabilising CO2 emissions and add to the diversity of the UK's energy supply."

There are a number of reasons why the Sustainable Development Commission came out

against nuclear power generation on balance at the moment. I think that there are questions about some of the issues that the commission has. However, the commission was not nearly as damning of the nuclear generation capacity as some of the reports in the media have suggested. If we have a UK energy review that accepts new nuclear generation, I do not see why my constituents at Chapelcross should be excluded from the benefits of new-generation nuclear power if, just across the Solway, the people at Sellafield and Calder Hall are not.

09:57

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): It was interesting to hear Alex Johnstone talking about the need for affordable energy and the need to look after the less well off in society. I do not know whether I am the only person in the chamber who, on hearing a different Tory tune from the one that we heard in previous decades, finds it not totally believable, even with the new, cuddly David Cameron at the Tories' head, allegedly leading the charge.

Carbon, which we have talked about a lot today, is not the only contributor to global warming. In fact, methane is a larger contributor. When Alex Johnstone was talking about his personal contribution to the problem, I was wondering whether he had been able to do something about the way in which his cows' digestive system works.

I agree with the Tories on the urgency of the situation, of course. It is true that coal and nuclear power stations are nearing the end of their useful lives, although it is amazing how the useful lives of power stations prove to be much more elastic than predicted. That gives us a breathing space at most. My worry is that the Government appears to be far too optimistic in some of its targets. The Government has belatedly changed the renewables obligation order—I think that it was considered by a committee this week. However, I am not convinced that that will mean that sufficient investment will be put into the emerging renewables technologies that we will need if we are even going to meet the Government's targets, far less exceed them. I refer to wave and tidal power technologies.

There is a limit to how much wind power can be generated. It is unlikely that the wind will ever not be blowing somewhere in Scotland, but that is a possibility that we must cater for. We must get more investment into renewables technologies to make them commercially viable and we must do that by 2020. I am very much concerned that the pace of development is not fast enough.

We have heard a lot about clean coal technology, but we should not misuse such terms. On its own, clean coal technology will not reduce CO₂ in the atmosphere by one iota. Even co-firing does not reduce the amount of CO₂ over the long term; it just reduces the pace at which the same amount of CO₂ is put into the atmosphere. Although that technology is welcome, we need to consider carbon capture much more seriously. Carbon capture is still theoretical. It has not yet been brought to market. What is the Government going to do to ensure that it is brought to market, particularly in those areas that are remote from the pipelines that lead back to the depleted oil reservoirs where the carbon can be stored?

I would point out to Labour members that there are some weasel words in their amendment. It says that new nuclear power stations will not be supported

"while waste management issues remain unresolved".

What does that mean? I suspect that it means until one or two months before the next general election, when it is no longer necessary to hold the coalition together. If Labour members vote for their amendment, they are accepting the possibility that waste management issues will remain unresolved for decades—perhaps for ever. They must have a strategy to cater for that situation. If they do not think that they can adopt such a strategy, they should vote against their own amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): We come now to closing speeches. We are quite some distance behind the clock.

10:02

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): We live in interesting times. We have a new Labour Government that has moved well to the right; we now seem to have a Conservative party that is taking up the Labour Party's positions and using its own motions to do so. We have the Liberal Democrats who, on the face of it, sound entirely clear on their nuclear policy; in fact, they have some severe disagreements, with Lord Thurso saying that he feels that he is on the edge of persuading his colleagues to take up a different position.

We have heard a lot from the Conservatives today about the costs of different forms of energy generation and the minister said that affordability is critical. However, the Government's energy review in 2002 made it clear that nuclear power is one of the most expensive options. It comes in at between 3p and 4p per kilowatt, compared with onshore wind power at 1.5p to 2.5p per kilowatt. Even offshore wind is cheaper than nuclear power. If it is affordability that we use as our top criterion, we must develop renewables and we must let the

nuclear power stations reach the end of their natural lives and be decommissioned.

The minister has talked about climate change, which is indeed a crucial issue. A nuclear power station emits as much carbon dioxide as the very cleanest form of gas-powered stations with combined heat and power. Nuclear power is not carbon neutral. Nuclear power generation emits carbon during the building of nuclear power stations, the mining of uranium, the enrichment of uranium and the decommissioning of the power stations at the end of their lives, not to mention the storage of waste for thousands of years to come.

Mr Brocklebank: Will the member give way?

Chris Ballance: No, I am sorry. I do not have time. The importance of energy efficiency was raised by both Richard Lochhead and my colleague Shiona Baird. The Government's performance and innovation unit has estimated that we can save 30 per cent of our energy requirements through cost-effective energy efficiency measures. Surely that is the very first fundamental step that we must take in considering future energy requirements. Efficiency in energy use gives us more efficient businesses, addresses fuel poverty, addresses climate change and is more effective than concentrating on the generation end of the equation.

We have heard about security. What is less secure than basing our future energy requirements on a generation of 10 new AP1000 nuclear stations, which have never been built anywhere in the world and about whose performance we know nothing, other than from computer modelling?

There is also the enormous question of waste. We still do not have a clue as to what to do with nuclear waste. Nirex estimates that to find, open and run a secure waste repository will take between 25 and 40 years.

We have heard from Elaine Murray about importing fuels. There are not huge quantities of uranium in Britain; 100 per cent of it is imported.

For all the reasons that I have given, I urge members to support the amendment in the name of Shiona Baird.

10:06

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Scott Barrie asked the deputy minister whether black was the new green. Mr Wilson believes to an extent that nuclear is the new green. Of course there are practical arguments against nuclear, such as those expressed by the Royal Society. One question that has been raised is:

"Does the fact that it is expensive to create, almost cost-free to run, and then so expensive to decommission mean

that in a private market someone will make the investment, run it, and then skedaddle leaving someone else to pick up the pieces?"—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 17 January 2006; Vol 441, c 779.]

That is a legitimate fear, which was expressed by Mr Alan Duncan, who is well placed to make such comments.

The argument is that no private investor, in isolation, has built a nuclear power station anywhere in the world since the events at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. When President Bush's Energy Policy Act of 2005 was passed by Congress in August, he said that it would reverse the fact that no new power station had been built in the United States since the 1970s. However, the act included several massive incentives to encourage the construction of new nuclear power plants, including production tax credits, loan guarantees and risk protection for the companies that decided to pursue the first new reactors.

Nuclear power plants are not economically viable as investment opportunities, unless there is massive Government intervention, as of course there is in Finland.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: If I have time later on, I will give way to Mr Fraser.

Furthermore, our experience in this country tells us that once such plants are built, they are uninsurable. The low unit price of nuclear generation has to be offset against the financial cost of managing construction, as Alan Duncan said.

It is curious that the Conservatives are campaigning to be the party of loan guarantees and risk protection for energy companies. Why does that not apply to other companies that provide services to households or businesses?

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: I wish to make progress. I will come back to Mr Fraser if I have time.

Richard Lochhead said that we are self-sufficient for energy in Scotland and that we export energy that we generate. What is wrong with that? In a previous debate on energy, it was said that we produce more whisky than we need in Scotland and we see considerable value in exporting it.

Shiona Baird explained helpfully that Mr Harper shared his Lexus this morning with his driver. She was right to say that with energy conservation we can reduce radically the need for new nuclear generation. I agree absolutely. Renewables are contributing to local and national generation, which is good for Scotland.

Phil Gallie asked in an intervention whether the tail was wagging the dog in the Executive. Much

as I am tempted, I will not ask whether that is connected with the proposals on tail docking in the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Bill.

Nora Radcliffe pointed to the curious fact that the Scottish Conservatives are calling for a new nuclear solution, which is a reserved decision, but their UK spokesman, Alan Duncan, said:

"I have had an instinctive hostility to nuclear power. I treat it with profound suspicion."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 17 January 2006; Vol 441, c 779.]

I read this week in that august journal *The Daily Telegraph* that David Cameron wants to put a wind turbine on the roof of his house in Notting Hill. Well done to him. I am sure that he cares not that that is contrary to the moratorium policy of his Scottish colleagues.

Alasdair Morgan talked about the complexities of technologies. The Committee on Radioactive Waste Management is currently considering the complexities of waste.

I agree with Chris Ballance that the starting point has to be energy conservation and efficiency. If we get that right and follow the Executive's approach, we do not need new nuclear in Scotland.

10:10

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In this interesting debate we have, yet again, seen two sides. One side—Labour and Tory members—sits in Scotland and looks to London for the solutions to the problems that arise here, instead of presenting robustly the Scottish view that our conditions are different. Let us turn the map around. Do members of Unionist parties denigrate the potential for free sources of power in this country that we could try to export to other parts of the United Kingdom?

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: No. I do not have time. I want to develop my argument.

The Scottish perspective is different and the opportunities here are tremendous, as long as there is a fair degree of investment in renewables, which many members have suggested. Given the way in which past Governments invested in nuclear, we must ask ourselves whether the UK Government is going to use incentives like the Bush incentives to kick start investment in nuclear power again. The investment will be far greater; indeed, how much will be offered is incalculable at present. The amounts that are offered for renewables development are far too small. That is why such development is so slow.

The nuclear argument is predicated on the supply of uranium. We know that if the current number of nuclear power stations in the world—

400—is doubled, the supply of uranium will run out in 30 years' time. The cost of uranium, for which there is a world market, will increase. In any argument about the development of nuclear, we must acknowledge that the planning process for new nuclear power reactors will take 10 years and they will take 20 years to build. At the end of those 30 years, there might not be any fuel to power a nuclear reactor. There will be a big full stop at the end of 30 years. That is one of the major flaws in the Conservative argument.

Alex Johnstone: Is the member aware that the fuel element of the cost of nuclear generation is very small and that if the price of uranium rises significantly in years to come, we will be able to use the brand new source of uranium dissolved in sea water, which will be economic and so plentiful that there will not be a problem again?

Rob Gibson: The Tories might place their faith in such experimental technology, but they might also tell us what the cost of the nuclear industry is. No one has taken a nuclear plant through the process from building to use to decommissioning to dealing with waste, so no one can put a figure on the costs for one nuclear plant, far less for the 400 in the world. Once again, the Tories try to make us believe that nuclear is a technology that we can afford.

There have been several speeches on the other side of the argument. Let us turn the map around. I can see more potential for power from the sea around Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, through wave and tidal power and offshore and onshore wind, than exists from coal, nuclear and other sources in Scotland at present. However, I hear nothing from Tory members about the development of such power or its transmission to the rest of the UK. The flaw is that they are in favour of big power, whereas we are in favour of a balance that is based on our free renewables.

The SNP amendment shows why members must reject the Tory and Labour approach if they want to have a Scottish perspective on energy.

10:14

Allan Wilson: In my limited time I will try to deal with all the points that have been raised.

I turn first to Shiona Baird. I would have been more impressed with the Green contribution to the debate had Shiona not voted against the revision of the draft renewables obligation order in the Enterprise and Culture Committee only this week.

Shiona Baird: I voted against the order because it promotes energy from waste and applies renewables obligation certificates to energy from municipal waste, which is not renewable in any sense.

Allan Wilson: There we go. The Greens are against something else. There comes a time or a day of reckoning when one must ask people to state what they are in favour of rather than simply what they are against.

In that context, Nora Radcliffe's speech was welcome, although I am afraid that she misrepresented the position of the Prime Minister and the UK Government on the UK energy review. There is no secret agenda and no foregone conclusion. The Prime Minister and the UK Government have made it clear that the UK energy review will be conducted as an open debate and that everyone, including the Scottish Executive, is entitled to contribute to it. It is concerned not simply with whether there will be a new generation of nuclear build; it is about our future energy needs as a nation. In that context, it is interesting that Richard Lochhead failed to address the fundamental issues—affordability, security of supply and combating climate change. Instead, we heard the pathetic excuse that policy should be determined by reference to public opinion polls.

Richard Lochhead: Energy bills in Scotland are spiralling upwards. Does the minister accept that that is an indictment of the UK's energy policy, which has failed Scotland miserably?

Allan Wilson: Electricity bills in the UK are the cheapest in the European Union. Obviously, there are challenges due to the increase in oil and gas prices in the global market, but the answer is not to do what Richard Lochhead proposes and build new gas-fired power stations. In the current climate, that would be economic madness. Governments—

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way? He made a false accusation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Allan Wilson: I will correct another basic misunderstanding. Governments do not build power stations. Governments set planning policy and other environmental policies that are informative and illustrative for the industry and the market brings forward proposals—

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: No. I will continue if the member does not mind.

Many members failed to grasp the fact that Governments do not build power stations.

Unlike Richard Lochhead, Alasdair Morgan made a thoughtful speech in which he led us to believe that the SNP is thinking about the matter for the long term and without reference to opinion polls. He commented on the important issue of carbon capture and storage. I fundamentally agree

that there is the potential for an 85 per cent reduction through the capture of CO₂. We support the development of programmes and projects to demonstrate the effectiveness of that technology, including the important developments in north-east Scotland.

Chris Ballance demonstrated a complete failure to understand the economics of the industry and issues of affordability. Wind power costs 3p to 4p per kilowatt hour. If wave and tidal power are developed, they will cost five to eight times as much. Power from biomass, which is a potentially significant source of base-load, costs about 4.5p per kilowatt hour. I accept that estimates of the cost of new nuclear power vary, but at the lower end the cost is 2.5p per kilowatt hour and the maximum is 4p per kilowatt hour. The cost of power from new gas-fired power stations is up to about 4p per kilowatt hour. If members do the arithmetic, they will come to a simple conclusion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We do come to a conclusion. I call Murdo Fraser to close the debate.

10:20

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The debate has been lively and instructive. The sight of the morning—indeed, the sight of the week—has been Labour members' flip-flopping around on the issue and trying to square the circle. I enjoyed the minister's speech and I particularly enjoyed the speech by Dr Elaine Murray. It is difficult to disagree with a single word that she said. It seems to me that she made a speech in support of the motion rather than a speech in support of the Executive's amendment.

There is a challenge for Labour members. Will they have the courage of their convictions and support the motion—we know that they agree with every word of it because it reflects the motion that the Labour conference in Aviemore supported less than 10 days ago—or will they vote for the Executive amendment, which they do not believe in? That is the question for Labour members, but we know that their hearts are in the right place. When I challenged the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning during his opening speech, he said that he supports Labour policy. We will see whether Labour members have the courage of their convictions at decision time, when they will vote either for Labour Party policy or with the Executive.

If the minister wants to give an explanation for his conduct, I will be delighted to give way.

Allan Wilson: The member will accept that we must find a solution to the problems associated with the disposal of nuclear waste. The Executive's position on that is crystal clear and is

encapsulated in our amendment. We do not support the development of new nuclear power stations until the nuclear waste issue is resolved.

Murdo Fraser: If the issue of nuclear waste is so important, it is strange that it did not feature in the motion that the Labour Party discussed at its recent conference in Aviemore. However, that is a matter for Labour members to explain to their constituency members at the weekend. If they vote against the motion today, they will have to explain why they voted against a motion that supports Labour policy. The irony is that the Liberal Democrats have no such compunction. As Alex Johnstone said, when Nicol Stephen appeared on prime-time television last night, he was billed as the Deputy First Minister but he expounded Liberal Democrat policy on energy rather than Executive policy on energy. Surely Labour ministers should display the same courage.

For the avoidance of doubt, I point out that the Conservatives are not obsessed with new nuclear power stations. We support a mixed approach. Our motion refers to that—it mentions clean coal technology, oil and gas and renewables. We heard a little—although not enough—about clean coal technology and the opportunities that arise from it. To be fair, the minister mentioned it in both his contributions. There is tremendous potential to develop clean coal technology, which will involve both co-firing it with biomass and developing new technology to allow carbon capture and sequestration.

Those of us who were in Perth on Monday to attend the presentation that was arranged by Scottish Enterprise and Scottish and Southern Energy heard Mitsui Babcock talking about technology that is being developed that will enable us to use our ample coal reserves in Scotland. We could still burn coal but do so in an environmentally friendly way. It is exciting that Scotland is potentially the world leader in that technology. With a bit of investment and encouragement from Government, we could build an industry that not only meets our energy needs but creates a new industry for Scotland in which we are world leaders. I was delighted to hear the minister say in his closing remarks that the Executive is considering supporting that technology.

We also need to consider renewables. We welcome the developments in offshore technologies such as wave power and tidal power, but we must recognise that it will be many years before they can make a major contribution to energy production. That does not mean that we should not develop them, but we must have realistic expectations. I make no apology for saying that we have serious reservations about

large-scale onshore wind developments because of the problem of intermittency of supply.

Jeremy Purvis talked about the cost of new nuclear power stations and said that they would have to be subsidised. However, the fact is that the most subsidised form of energy production is onshore wind. Nobody would be building a single wind farm anywhere in the country if it were not for the large subsidies that are put into that method of production. Let us not hear any lessons about the cost of nuclear power from those who are pro-renewables.

Chris Ballance: Does the member accept that the £76 billion cost of decommissioning current nuclear power stations is a subsidy? Does he agree that that sum is considerably larger than any other energy subsidy?

Murdo Fraser: All I can do is refer Mr Ballance to the comments of Professor David Simpson of the David Hume Institute who, in a paper that he produced in April 2004, calculated that—even including the cost of decommissioning—nuclear power is two and a half times cheaper than wind power. I can do no better than refer to that expert.

As we know, the problem with onshore wind power is the proliferation of planning applications all over Scotland. We have a ridiculous free-for-all that needs to be addressed through a review of our planning system. Communities up and down the country are under siege from planning applications. Unless we stop this madness and start considering realistic alternatives, we will be in danger of doing untold damage to our landscape and—more important—to our vital tourism industry. The SNP may want us to become Europe's giant wind farm, but we reject that ambition, as do many communities in Scotland.

A new consensus is building on energy. The BBC poll to which many members referred did not just say that people oppose nuclear power; when people were asked whether they would support new nuclear power stations if they stopped Scotland depending on imported energy, 54 per cent said that they would. We know about all the caveats that apply to opinion polls, but even that poll showed that people would support new nuclear power stations in some circumstances.

We can forgive the Greens their head-in-the-sand approach and we expect no better from the Scottish National Party. To be frank, the Lib Dems should know better, and we know that Labour knows better. There is a majority in the Parliament for more nuclear power—we and Labour members support it. Surely it is time for Labour MSPs to stop the Lib Dem tail wagging the Labour dog. They should ditch the sordid coalition fudge on energy and join us tonight in voting for what we know they believe in.

Drug Abuse

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

We ended the previous debate 12 minutes behind schedule, which has inevitable consequences for whom I can call in this debate. I also have a note of four points of order, which could impact on the debate if they are made. They all concern the same point, so it might make more sense to deal with them now.

All the points relate to the amendment in the name of Hugh Henry to the motion in the name of Annabel Goldie, on drug abuse. The amendment contains a typographical error. It says,

“leave out from ‘calls on’”

but should read “leave out from ‘notes’”. Members can be assured that the fact that the amendment was selected means that it was competent. The minister is not responsible for the typographical error and members will vote on the amendment as it should read, rather than as it is printed in the *Business Bulletin*.

10:28

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)

(Con): I thank the Presiding Officer for his explanation of the technical point about the amendment in the name of Hugh Henry. If amendments are inaccurate, that is slightly confusing for parties that are to contribute to a debate and makes it a little difficult to consider what the amendments mean. Be that as it may, I accept the Presiding Officer's ruling.

The decision to debate drug abuse in our business time was taken long before the tragic death of little Derek Doran from methadone was made public. I make no apology for calling a debate on this crucial subject and I am pleased that the First Minister at least seems to have recognised the growing drugs problem in Scotland, which the state has exacerbated by its overreliance on prescribing methadone.

I do not have much time—I realise the pressure on time—so I will focus on methadone. I make it clear that my party has never called for that drug to be dropped. Unlike those who believe that methadone is some sort of panacea, we do not believe in a one-size-fits-all attitude to dealing with drug abuse. Unfortunately, the overwhelming response to addiction in Scotland is placement on a methadone programme.

When the Parliament debated drug abuse in 2004, many members of other parties hounded me for daring to challenge the use of methadone. The former Liberal Democrat drugs spokesman, Keith Raffan, said that we needed to shout about the benefits of methadone. He said:

“Drug misuse is an addiction—a form of compulsive-obsessive behaviour. What such people want is different from what they can achieve.”—[*Official Report*, 27 October 2004; c 11192.]

I challenge precisely that dismissive and patronising attitude, which leaves many people parked on methadone. Do we really want to continue a pattern that will lead to the prescription of more than 1 million methadone scripts a year by 2012?

It is imperative that those who find themselves addicted to heroin, methadone or any other substance are given immediate support and rehabilitation to help them to end their addiction and to return to leading a normal life. The Government's job is to help such individuals but, instead, they are trapped.

The drug outcome research in Scotland study by Professor Neil McKeganey of the University of Glasgow found that most drug addicts who seek help do so because they want to become clean and to change their lifestyle. The drug misuse statistics of 2005 showed that the majority of individuals who sought help did not want a prescription-based solution.

However, finding help is far from easy. England and Wales have a central directory of rehabilitation facilities, which includes those provided by the voluntary and private sectors. That gives individuals instant information about a variety of aspects, such as vacancies and locations. I reiterate my call for the Executive to establish such a directory for Scotland. We are a small country and surely that is not beyond the wit of man.

Alongside a central directory, a dramatic shift is needed towards offering individuals help and rehabilitation to come off drugs. I will quote a chilling passage from Professor Neil McKeganey's article in *The Herald* yesterday. He said:

“There is a simple truth here but one that is rarely shared, namely that methadone has all too easily become the drug-addiction treatment for the masses. There are no superstar heroin addicts or drug-dependent doctors signing themselves up for long-term methadone programmes. Residential rehabilitation is the gold-standard treatment for those who can afford it”.

Rehabilitation and leading a drug-free lifestyle should not be an option that is open only to the well-off. Can we as a nation afford to leave so many languishing on methadone? If a person found that someone whom they cared about was addicted to heroin and that the only option open to that person was to be prescribed methadone, would they not worry and fear that the person whom they cared about was being consigned to a prescription prison? That is why I want the Executive to publish an analysis of whether the rehabilitation places that are available are

adequate to meet demands and to say what it is doing to increase the number of places.

As I said it would, my speech has focused on the use of methadone. Much needs to be done to help addicts, but if we are to conquer the drugs problem, we must stop people taking drugs in the first place. It is deeply depressing and distressing that 80 per cent of people who sought treatment for the first time last year started to take drugs when they were under 20.

As I have said many times, we need to abandon the softly-softly know the score campaign and deliver a simple abstinence message.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I draw to the member's attention a quotation from David Cameron about a just say no campaign for children. He said:

"I don't believe it would work. But if we tell children the facts and the dangers, they might just listen."

Does that represent a difference in policy north and south of the border or is it just Mr Cameron's verbal gymnastics?

Miss Goldie: Not at all. The core of what Mr Cameron says is that we need to give children sensible information, not doctored information that implies that the problem is non-existent or far less serious than it is. The statistics that I just read out underline the gravity of what we are discussing.

We certainly need to use the voluntary sector more to develop clearer and more effective messages to educate people about the dangers of drug abuse. Politicians do not always know best and we need to use the vital charitable and voluntary organisations that work so hard to deal with drugs. They have a wealth of vital expertise and experience.

I have not commented on the amendments, because I did not understand one of them and because none of the others, in so far as they related to the motion, went to the core of what I regard the problem to be.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the increasing drugs problem in Scotland which has seen rises in the number of drug-related deaths and drug-related crimes; recognises that drug abuse destroys lives, tears families apart, leads to widespread and recurring crime and the disintegration of entire communities; believes that there should be a zero tolerance drugs strategy which aims to rid Scotland of drugs; believes that such a strategy should place an emphasis on early intervention and include a coherent education programme which prioritises abstinence, and believes that there needs to be a change in the help offered to drug addicts, away from an over-reliance on methadone and towards a drug-free lifestyle.

10:35

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): This is a useful debate. Such debates are generally characterised by thoughtful speeches—I except those by Conservative members—in which members genuinely try to grapple with a difficult problem.

I was struck this week by a letter in *The Herald* from a drugs expert in California, on methadone and people who criticise its use. That expert said that the first potential problem is the impact that careless adults can have on children and that the second problem is that

"drugs most commonly cause insanity in those who have never taken them."

I thought that he was describing members of the Conservative party, to whose comments I refer members.

We must recognise the significance and scale of the drugs problem, which is why we have invested significantly in tackling it in recent years. We have invested in extra policing and the establishment of the Scottish crime and drug enforcement agency.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister said:

"drugs most commonly cause insanity in those who have never taken them."

I promise him that I am not trying to be insulting, but will he tell me which side of the divide he is on? Is he talking from experience or is he on the insane side?

Hugh Henry: What I have said about whether people should take drugs is perfectly clear. I have never taken drugs—indeed, I abhor drugs—and I hope that David Cameron will be as clear and prescriptive in such debates as I am being.

We have invested in the police and in additional resources for treatment and rehabilitation because we believe that more needs to be done, particularly where children are growing up in drug-addicted households.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the minister give way?

Hugh Henry: No, thank you. I have only a short time.

Drug addicts must be helped to move towards drug-free lifestyles. A range of interventions is appropriate in that respect, which is why I have asked officials to consider what is being done about encouraging abstinence, about methadone and about alternatives. However, we must keep a sense of perspective. Methadone has made a clear and proven contribution to introducing stability to people's lives; equally, people—including those in the Conservative party and in all

the other parties that are represented in the Parliament—are right to be concerned about it. However, medical doctors—not academic doctors or politicians—should decide whether methadone or an alternative should be used, although we must be assured about its use and ask questions about people who are on it, despite its proven success.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): The minister will be aware that the issue has come into sharp focus in my constituency in the past week and that there is serious concern that heroin addicts might be stabilised as permanent methadone addicts. Will he confirm that the objective is to get people off drugs and not to stabilise them on methadone for ever?

Hugh Henry: Absolutely. That takes me to the point that I was about to make. We must identify suitable treatment and a range of alternatives, but we need protocols for use. We must know who is responsible for allocating treatment, that there is a comprehensive care plan and an exit strategy for people who are on methadone and that someone has responsibility for monitoring the use and reduction of methadone and for getting people off it. At the end of the process, other things must be done to get people into stable lifestyles. We must ensure that they are helped into training and employment, for example. That is why we want the Scottish centre for healthy working lives to focus on helping people back into employment, but there are no easy solutions in that respect.

It is right to say that we need more information—that has already been mentioned. More information is needed about the number of addicts, where they are, what drugs they are on and the length of time that they have been on them. As a result, we have taken steps through the Scottish drug misuse database to improve the collection of data to help to shape and improve services. We need to give thought to the issue and we need consensus, not sterile, futile and—frankly—infantile political slogans.

I move amendment S2M-4073.3, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“recognises that drug abuse destroys lives and tears families apart; recognises that more needs to be done, particularly to support and protect children in drug misusing households; believes that there should be an early intervention strategy; believes that there is a need to help addicts to move towards a drug-free lifestyle by offering a range of interventions; believes that for those on methadone there should be a care plan which includes an exit strategy from methadone use; believes that there should be an education programme which continues to reinforce the dangers of taking drugs; believes that employability issues should be addressed as part of re-establishing a drug-free stable lifestyle, and welcomes the enhancements to the Scottish Drugs Misuse Database which should lead to an improvement in the collection of data to help shape and target investment and services.”

10:40

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The content of the amendment in my name does not diverge widely from that of the Executive's amendment. I had hoped, therefore, that the Presiding Officer would adjudicate and not accept the Executive's amendment so that the Executive could support my amendment, but that did not happen. That is life. Ho hum.

It is important to consider three strands in the debate on drugs. First, we must help to move addicts towards a drug-free future. I do not think that any member would object to that statement. More controversially, however, it must be said that not every addict will complete that journey—it is simply not possible for every addict to do so—but we should continue to offer those who cannot complete it every form of help that we can to move further along it and look after them as addicts, and possibly addicts who still use drugs, which they might remain. However, that is a long-stop second-best option.

Secondly, we must stop as many people as possible being captured as addicts. That strategy matters for our young people in particular, and my colleague Fiona Hyslop will say more about it.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: I cannot, as I have only four minutes.

Fundamentally, we must change the whole environment in which drug barons make immense profits. Number 10's policy unit, the Cabinet Office, has suggested that the profit margin in the illegal drugs industry is one of the highest margins for industries in the United Kingdom. Until we make progress towards reducing the profit levels and eliminating the pull for drug barons to turn to such an occupation, we will not change the environment. Reducing such profit levels ain't easy—indeed, if any member claims that they know how they can be reduced tomorrow, they simply do not understand the problem, or they are gratuitously misrepresenting it.

I want to mention a few details. There are around 51,000 heroin addicts—there used to be 55,000, so the figure is slightly down. As Neil McKeganey has said, more than half the number of addicts would like to get off drugs altogether and around 5 per cent of them want harm reduction. Are we helping them? We must provide residential programmes. Methadone is merely a bridge to abstinence and to greater help. In 2003-04, there were only around 1,200 placements on residential programmes. If that figure is set against the number of addicts, we can conclude that it will be 25 years before today's addicts are treated. That is a huge problem.

I recognise that more money has been made available. In 1999, there was £11.3 million for residential programmes, but more than twice that amount of money is now available. Therefore, some of the right things are being done, but we should not pretend that what is being done will solve the problem overnight. Incidentally, despite the Tories' protestations, I know where all the clinics for drug users are because they are listed in the Executive's research document, "Residential detoxification and rehabilitation services for drug users: A review." As usual, the Tories would rather go for soundbites than sound research.

We can debate the size of the industry, but it is worth in the range of £1.5 billion to as much as £5 billion. If it is worth £5 billion, it is the same size as our tourism industry. That is why we must focus on it and why we support every possible effort that the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency is making to tackle the drug barons head-on. Until we succeed in tackling them, we will not solve the problem.

I move amendment S2M-4073.1, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"acknowledges that drug abuse creates feelings of hopelessness, despair and low self-worth in individuals and communities; recognises that drug misusers are individuals who will vary widely as to the best approach to address their addictions and therefore dismisses single dogmatic solutions to this complex problem; believes that the Scottish Executive should focus resources on appropriate support and child protection measures for children in drug misusing families; notes that access to support for addicts varies widely across Scotland; recommends that substantial additional resources are focused on addiction services and on recovering profits from illegal drugs trade barons, and calls on all in public life to make common cause in the fight against drug misuse."

10:44

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Drug use and misuse continues to spawn real, difficult and complex problems for our country and our communities. More than six years ago, in January 2000, we debated drug misuse across the road in one of the first major debates in the Scottish Parliament's first session.

At the time, I said on behalf of the Scottish Socialist Party that we rejected the consensus-based approach that determined that we should invest primarily in drug enforcement, police and a criminal attitude to the drug problem. I argued that a step change in attitudes was required, which recognised that the drug problem in Scotland is primarily a social and health problem, not primarily a criminal problem. If that is recognised, a shift in the resources that are expended to tackle the problem is required.

During the debate, I pointed out that in 1998 there were 365 recorded premature deaths related

to heroin misuse—one a day—across the United Kingdom. In 2004, there were 356 heroin-related premature deaths in Scotland alone. The 1998 figure was for the whole UK, but the 2004 figure almost surpassed it in one country. In other words, the approach that we have adopted since the Parliament was established and in previous decades is not helping us to solve the problem. In fact, we have more premature deaths, increased addiction and increased crime. There has been an increase in the number of seizures and arrests, but that is not solving the problem, because we are not approaching it in the right way.

We believe fundamentally that part of our approach should be to shift investment from enforcement and beefing up the police into care, treatment and rehabilitation. At the time of the debate in 2000, official figures showed that for every £1 spent on drug treatment and care, £3 would be saved under other budget headings. Today it is not a saving of £3, but a saving of £9—such is the effect of that expenditure.

A shift in investment needs to be allied to changes in our drug laws, which are part of the problem, not the solution. We must end the criminalisation of millions of people for using cannabis, in order to focus on the real and serious dangers of that drug. Let us address those dangers through an adult, mature debate, instead of criminalising people for using a drug that is certainly harmful, but no more so than alcohol or tobacco. Let us take those users out of the criminal market and pilot the use of heroin substitution, as has been done in Germany and Switzerland with great success. Let us learn those lessons in order to take on the drug barons where it matters. The biggest opponents to the approach to drugs that I have outlined are not in the chamber but outside it, in the criminal drug networks. The way in which to undermine those networks is to take them on by removing their markets.

I move amendment S2M-4073.2, to leave out from first "believes" to end and insert:

"calls for a radical overhaul of the unhelpful drugs laws which cause more problems rather than providing solutions; further calls for a pilot scheme to be initiated into the prescribing of heroin under clinical conditions; calls for massive investment in drug rehabilitation and treatment, based on the fact that it is nine times more effective to treat drug addicts than pay the cost of drug-related crime, and calls for a recognition of the role of extended family members, particularly grandparents, in supporting and protecting children in families where there is drug misuse."

10:49

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Regrettably, there is confusion at the heart of the Conservative motion that we are debating this morning. The Conservatives are

calling for a zero tolerance drugs strategy in Scotland, which is a major policy shift.

What should such a strategy look like? It could look like the strategy that was adopted in New York, which had many innocent victims because it did not include a new needle and syringe programme. By 1996, New York city had reported 17,000 paediatric AIDS cases. As well as meaning that there were no needle, syringe or water programmes, a zero tolerance approach would mean that there were no maintenance programmes—involving methadone, for example. It would involve compulsory treatment or sending people to jail, stopping the provision of any advice that resembled harm minimisation because it might send the wrong message or promote drug use, and expelling children from school if they were caught with drugs. The new Conservative policy is to abolish advice and harm minimisation.

Miss Goldie: I understand the diffidence of any Liberal Democrat in contributing to this debate. I make crystal clear that since the Parliament was established the Conservative party has consistently expressed huge concern about the permissive attitude to the use of illegal drugs that exists in Scotland. Zero tolerance simply means a change in culture and attitude. From everything that we have said in ensuing debates, it is obvious exactly what our view is. I have been asking for support to be provided.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was a very long intervention. I will compensate Jeremy Purvis for it, although I scarcely have any time to do so.

Jeremy Purvis: I am grateful, Presiding Officer. Miss Goldie's intervention was as incoherent as her opening speech. A zero tolerance approach would start to reverse the trend of a 35 per cent increase in the most recent year for which figures are available in the number of new entrants into drug misuse database programmes. The figure refers to people who have embarked on reduction programmes. Such an approach would also reverse the 30 per cent fall in the number of people injecting drugs, which is one of the most dangerous ways of taking them.

The Conservatives have consistently attacked the Executive and the know the score campaign, especially for sending mixed messages, as Miss Goldie said. However, at the same time as they were making that attack up here, David Cameron was proposing to downgrade ecstasy from its status as a class A drug. Who is right? The Executive is right, and Mr Cameron was also right when he told a meeting last year:

"What people want is a realistic and sensible policy that gets to the bottom of the drugs problem."

It is clear that the Scottish Tories are the blocks to reform in the area.

What is the current scale of the drugs problem in Scotland? "Drug Misuse Statistics Scotland 2005" shows us that in 2004 7.7 per cent of people between 16 and 59 had used drugs in the previous year. The figure for the 16 to 19 age group was 22 per cent, but 21.3 per cent had taken cannabis. I do not claim that there is no problem—far from it. Drugs destroy lives and young people's aspirations, impoverish people and harm their physical and mental health.

During the February recess, I had a meeting in Parliament with 20 young people on a Fairbridge scheme. All were offenders and drug misusers. Those young people are not evil—they have damaged their health and the communities in which they live. They are certainly not helped by a facile call for zero tolerance. What they said to me in unison was very interesting. They had no view on whether decriminalising cannabis would make a bit of difference to their drug-taking patterns, but they argued strongly against the cheap availability of alcohol and its availability to people at a young age. All had started binge drinking at a very early age.

The figures for entrants to drug and alcohol programmes in the area that I represent are concerning. In 2004, there were 21 new entrants under 15 to drug schemes in the Borders, compared with 13 in greater Glasgow. There is a problem. However, one of the most extensive reviews of the effectiveness of treatment that has ever been done in Scotland found that methadone should be used. I have called for more residential abstinence programmes, which come with rehabilitation. They start with harm stabilisation and move to reduction, as the deputy minister said.

Miss Goldie's motion points to the number of drug-related deaths. There were 356 such deaths in 2004, fewer than in 2002 but more than in 1996. There were 313 deaths from mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol and twice that number from chronic liver disease. We need to have the debate, but let us have it free from hypocrisy.

10:53

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Addiction destroys lives and wrecks families. However, in treating addiction, it is sterile and unhelpful to counterpose total abstinence to harm reduction measures. A range of options is needed although, of course, freedom from addiction is the ultimate aim.

In tackling the effects of addiction, let us not overlook its principal cause: poverty, despair about which often leads individuals into addiction. The Executive's principal policy aim—economic

regeneration—can attack addiction's roots and undermine the illicit drugs economy in the process.

More people than ever are getting treatment for their drug addiction, and the use of drugs by schoolchildren is not rising, despite recent high-profile cases. The use of methadone as part of an individual's treatment is one of the range of options that are available. Where it is in use in family homes, child protection issues can arise, as in the recent tragic case in East Lothian. That is why the First Minister called for a review of Scotland's methadone programme.

Glasgow's experience in tackling addiction is illustrative of the points that I have just made. The city has 11,000 drug addicts, around 7,000 of whom are on methadone. However, they are not "parked". Two thousand of Glasgow's addicts are parents; they care for a total of about 4,000 children. By any standards, those are major challenges. How is the city coping? Glasgow City Council and Greater Glasgow NHS Board formed an addiction services partnership 21 months ago. The partnership provides specialist in-patient services, day-hospital services, out-patient services, methadone programme services and community addiction teams. There are 10 front-line teams with nursing, medical and social care specialists, who provide direct access to treatment and care for individuals with addiction problems. The service that is provided includes advice, support, rehabilitation and access to a methadone programme. The staff in the front-line teams train jointly with, and are co-located with, children and families social workers, so they are always on the lookout for hidden harm to children.

Glasgow has 800 community-based rehabilitation places, which provide structured day care, personal development programmes and access to productive daily activities for individuals—many of whom are on methadone—whose previous lifestyles were characterised by drug injecting, shoplifting and prostitution.

Glasgow's minimum guarantee to some 5,000 of its methadone users is to provide regular access to social care support through the community addiction teams to enable them to move on to meaningful employment and training opportunities with a strong rehabilitative content. The addiction services have referred 2,100 individuals to employment, training and educational initiatives in the past 18 months. Glasgow appears to be going in the right direction, but there are still gaps in services, which are being discussed with the Executive.

What I have described bears no relation to the bleak caricature that was painted by Annabel Goldie, nor should it be supplanted by her simplistic, tried, tested and failed approach of, "Just say no."

10:57

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I will focus not on the cures, but on the causes. Other members will debate the rights and wrongs of methadone; I agree that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution.

I want to look back on an inquiry that the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee conducted in 1999 and 2000—the report was published in 2000. Unfortunately, much of what was said in that report pertains today. The report began by saying that the committee

"had the impression, which was subsequently confirmed, that deprived communities, with poor housing, poor amenities and high levels of unemployment were the most seriously affected areas."

I heard what Charlie Gordon said about Glasgow. One welcomes initiatives that work, but the reality is that because of the deprivation in some council wards in Glasgow, people are 200 times more likely to be admitted to hospital with a drug-related problem in those areas than in the most affluent parts of Scotland.

Such deprivation is no longer located only in our urban conurbations; it exists in our small towns and rural areas, too. The minister referred to the Scottish drug misuse database, which is very useful. The most recent information reveals that last year in the Scottish Borders 31 young people under the age of 16 were reported to the database. That figure is an increase of 72 per cent on the previous year.

As we know, deprivation exists not only in urban areas. There are particular difficulties for rural areas because young people there do not usually access either heroin or cocaine, but take what comes down in a suitcase from the urban areas. Members of drug action teams in the Borders have told me that such young people take a cocktail of drugs, which makes their problems more difficult. Access to support and treatment is difficult in rural areas because people do not want to be identified, but in a small community it is easy for people to know who they are. If treatment is available anywhere, the person is likely to have to make a long journey for which they might not have the bus fare because they have a chaotic lifestyle. The problems are compounded in rural areas.

Deprivation has a knock-on effect on the family and when the system breaks down, the family can become a drug-using family. There are no simple answers. What the First Minister said was well meaning, but we must be careful, in certain circumstances, about removing children from parents who are drug users. The law of unintended consequences might mean that women and men who have children will not admit to using drugs because they fear that their children

will be removed. I appreciate that the issue is delicate and difficult, but it must be addressed.

We must always remember that drug users are themselves victims. In the unfortunate case in East Lothian, we must remember that there is a mother whose child has died as a result of her drug addiction. That point must always be taken into account and we should not play the blame game. Such people are often deprived, they are often homeless and they are often put into prostitution. There are issues about the role of Cornton Vale, because most of the women are in there for committing acquisitive crimes to pay for drugs. When they come out of Cornton Vale, they find that support systems are not in place.

It is all very well to say that we support the families, but 35 per cent of all social work posts have been vacant for more than six months and *The Herald* reveals today that there is a damaging shortage of foster carers. I know from speaking to people in the Borders that children are brought to foster carers in the Borders because there is nobody in Glasgow to provide that service.

Those are serious issues. I know why we are pushed for time—I understand the Conservatives' point—but we should have a long debate on the issue. I would like the Communities Committee to go back to the 2000 report and investigate what has changed.

11:01

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): If anyone has not read "Curse or cure"—the article on methadone in the *Holyrood* magazine—it is well worth a read.

I regret the tone of the minister's speech, which demeaned his office and did not add to a mature debate.

I welcome the initiatives that Charlie Gordon outlined in his speech. We must examine best practice and I think that we are all big enough to do that. However, I did not welcome all of his speech; obviously, I did not welcome the last sentence.

I welcome this debate on drug abuse and the prominence that Annabel Goldie has given to the issue since she became our leader. The media spotlight in the Highlands this week has been on the Danielle Reid case and the failure of the social work department and others to protect a vulnerable child from her own family. Sadly, we seem to hear of children being left in vulnerable situations all too often. An estimated 50,000 children throughout Scotland now live with drug and alcohol misuse problems. In a recent letter to me, Highland Council confirmed that it provides support for 2,017 children, 390 of whom are in

care. It also confirmed that 93 per cent of the 150 children on the child protection register are affected by parents with substance misuse problems.

Professor Neil McKeganey suggested recently that there could be up to 630 children in the Highlands who live with parents who misuse substances.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: No. Sorry.

Those figures are shocking, given the recent cases of Michael McGarrity; the 11-year-old who collapsed at school after taking heroin; and the tragic case, which was mentioned by John Home Robertson, of the two-year-old whose death was reported at the weekend.

When we look round the idyllic surroundings of the Highlands, which are a world away from urban dereliction, it is difficult to imagine that young children could be suffering at the hands of their parents because they are unfit to care for them. One option would be to give parents of young children the choice of detox and rehab. It would be naive to suggest that that is an easy answer for all drug addicts, but it could surely be one option when the well-being and welfare of a child are at risk. As other members have said, many addicts, before they seek help, have led chaotic lives that have impacted on other family members. Addicts have often lost jobs and family relationships have broken down.

Unfortunately, detox and rehab are not part of the Executive's waiting times initiative. If they were, many people in the Highlands would be delighted to be seen within 26 weeks, but the truth is that the latest figures that are available, from July to September 2005, show that only nine people in the Highlands were given treatment for their drug addiction, while 89 others waited on a list. Of those 89 people, a third waited for more than a year. A response from Hugh Henry to a parliamentary question indicates that, throughout Scotland, more than 130 people waited for more than a year to get on to detox and rehab. When someone has reached the stage of asking for help, they usually need it desperately. It is cruel and heartless for them to be told to wait for up to and beyond a year, particularly when places are available in the independent sector.

We can criticise and condemn parents who take heroin and other drugs and we can justifiably criticise the more addictive substance of methadone. However, what the Liberal-Labour Executive should be ashamed of is that when people seek the help and support that they need, not just for themselves but for their families, it is not there.

11:05

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):

Much has been said in the debate about the link between poverty and drug addiction. However, I want to pay tribute to the people who live in poverty but make positive life choices and care effectively for their children. We do them a disservice by saying that everyone who lives in poverty will find themselves going into prostitution, for example, and developing drug and other addictions. I pay tribute to the good parents I see every day in my constituency, who live in real poverty but make positive lifestyle choices. We should pay tribute to such parents, who are in the majority. However, I accept that there are those who suffer because of drug addiction and that they should be supported by an appropriate process.

I was enthused by the report that we received from Children 1st, which talked about the need to focus on the support of the wider family for those who suffer from drug addiction. From my experience of being an elected member for 13 years, I know that the support that is provided to the wider family could be improved throughout local authorities in Scotland. A great deal needs to be done to improve the systems that are in place. I welcome the fact that the social work review will consider the mechanisms that support families and try to ensure that they are supported more effectively. I do not think that we take sufficient account of the financial implications of not supporting families through the process and ensuring that wider family networks can support the parents and children of drug abusers.

Too often in the Parliament we do not recognise that we do not have all the answers on this issue, although we tend to say that we do. A wide range of organisations throughout Scotland, in addition to those that support drug users, can play a role in this area.

We have talked about the methadone programme and Annabel Goldie raised relevant points around the need for us to assess how effective that programme has been throughout its existence. More effective research must be put in place to ensure that such assessment is done.

The majority of youngsters in our schools do not involve themselves in drug addiction; we must recognise that and pay tribute to them. However, we must ensure that we support those who face challenges because of drug addiction. I support the amendment in the name of Hugh Henry.

11:08

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Paul Martin began by paying tribute to individuals who make positive choices in their lives and he was right to do so. However, we should also pay tribute to

other groups of people. They are the people—I have met some of them in Paul Martin's constituency—who not only make positive choices in their own lives, but work hard in their communities to encourage others to make such choices. Those people include police officers and addiction workers, and social workers who should be given the credit that they are due. It is wrong and simplistic to consider a high-profile case, however tragic and heartrending, and put the problem down, simplistically, to failure by social workers. Not only is that the wrong position to take, but it demeans a group of hard-working professionals who rarely get the credit that they are due.

Each amendment to the motion has something that I can welcome. The amendments and the motion recognise that victims of addiction are people whose welfare should be important to us. We must reject the tabloid simplicity of dehumanising stereotypes and recognise that people who are addicted are human beings. I believe—almost as an article of faith, to be honest—that human behaviour is purposeful and motivated; even self-destructive and harmful behaviour is purposeful and motivated. Human beings have a range of different experiences, attitudes, values and motivations. For that reason, a range of different responses is called for from us as policy makers and lawmakers, and from public services.

My reason for rejecting the Conservative motion is not about flexibility of approach. I do not always agree with what Annabel Goldie says, but I take on trust the sincerity with which she raised concerns about methadone. However, I believe that the approaches of “zero tolerance” and “abstinence”, to which the motion refers, have been shown not to work, not only in this country but around the world. That is why I reject the Conservative motion.

The amendments all mention flexibility and taking different approaches and we should acknowledge that. The SNP amendment dismisses single, dogmatic solutions to a complex problem and calls for additional resources. Tommy Sheridan said that additional resources should be allocated to treatment and rehabilitation and that there should be a move away from the purely enforcement approach. I think that that is right.

I also think that politicians, not only here but at United Kingdom level, need to allocate far greater political priority and resources to tackling the production end of the problem. How many of us could honestly say that, if the choice that we were faced with was starvation for our families and violence from the local warlord versus producing poppies, we would not produce poppies? I do not know how many of us could say that. We need to

ensure that the poppy farmers can make other choices. I would support, in the short term, buying the stuff in order to destroy it, if that was about creating a long-term future for the farmers.

Far more has been said in the debate than I have time to respond to. I am grateful to the Conservatives for the opportunity to discuss the subject, but I will not support their motion.

11:13

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I am conscious of time, so I will restrict my comments to two particular areas: methadone and children in drug-abusing families.

As has been said, methadone is one way of stabilising the chaotic lifestyles of heroin addicts. To think that it is other than just one of the options is naive. Annabel Goldie's suggestion was that we should make more use of the residential treatment approach. As a short-term option, that is successful. We have seen the rich and famous take advantage of residential treatment. However, that approach means that an addict will eventually go back into the circumstances that probably caused their addiction. That is fine for the rich and famous, who can continue to go back and forth to the Betty Ford Center or whatever, but it is not an option for many others.

We have considered how to stabilise people's lifestyles and we know that some heroin users' lives are so chaotic that to expect them to stop taking heroin and re-establish a regular lifestyle is too demanding and doomed to failure. However, the use of methadone should not be regarded as an end in itself. It should be part of a programme that stabilises addicts, before also withdrawing them from methadone use. I recognise that that may be a long process—for some, it might seem like for ever—but it could be necessary.

We should not think of methadone substitution as anything other than part of a process. Members referred to the tragic circumstances in East Lothian when a toddler who took his parents' prescribed methadone died. I agree that the practice of taking methadone without supervision must be reviewed. However, I understand why addicts are given scripts to take away with them. The administration of methadone in pharmacies has caused people, perhaps unnecessarily, to feel threatened by the practice. I ask the minister to look further into identifying places where those who are prescribed methadone can take their dose privately and safely.

We have already referred to the tragic death of the toddler in East Lothian, and there have been other recent examples of young people affected by drug abuse—the young girl in Glasgow who was found to be using drugs, and the toddler in

Edinburgh who was left to care for himself for a number of weeks after his mother died.

There is clearly concern about how children are affected when their parents or carers are using drugs. The First Minister has been criticised for saying that the best interests of the children should be the first priority. Some regarded that as an attack on social workers. Like Patrick Harvie, I would decry any such attack, but I did not regard the First Minister's words as an attack on social workers.

Social workers try to keep families together, and politicians should acknowledge that they put pressure on social workers to act as they do. For many good reasons, the policy has been to keep children with their parents, but the policy has not said clearly enough that keeping children with their parents is not ideal for all children. We should always consider the individual circumstances. Yes, we should support parents when possible but, as Children 1st has suggested, we should also consider the extended family and foster carers. Alternatives should exist and we must consider them. However, at the end of the day, the best interests of the children should be our priority.

11:16

Tommy Sheridan: Mary Mulligan ended with a reference to the use of foster carers as part of a support network for children in the households of drug-abusing adults. She is right. We should try to expand the use of foster care.

I want to put a point to the minister that I hope he will address when he sums up. We have to make use of an untapped resource—grandparents who can support children of drug-abusing households. I will quote from an excellent leaflet by the new fossils, which is a grandparents support group based in the east end of Glasgow:

"When the social workers arrived at Jean's home with her two grandchildren they only had the clothes they stood in. Jean had no toys, beds, bedding and little money. After six weeks Jean could not afford to buy an Electricity Power Card. She and the children would spend weekends in the dark sharing one bed. In desperation Jean sought assistance from a local charity."

Then there is another story:

"Charlie and Janet are both retired and with social work approval took their eight-week-old grandchild direct from hospital rather than have her placed in care. They received no financial support for clothes, cot, toys, bedding....nothing. For seven months they struggled to claim child benefits and income support because of the 'system' and had to use up much of their savings (at least they had some....many do not)."

I ask the minister, if we are going to pay for foster carers and a foster care network, why do we not offer grandparents financial support for the grandchildren they take into care? The majority of

grandparents do not have the financial wherewithal to support children. It is way beyond time that the Executive made the radical decision to accord the same financial rights to grandparents who care for the children of drug-abusing parents that it accords to foster carers. That would be an important move.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):

The machinery is already in place, but many of the 32 councils in the country do not make use of it. Up north, kinship carers receive £150 for each child. That should be expanded across the whole country. Some areas give nothing.

Tommy Sheridan: Thank you—that is exactly why I am raising these issues. I would like the minister to give us a positive indication that he supports such a step change.

I would also like the minister to comment on prison aftercare. Many premature drug-related deaths in Scotland are of drug addicts released from prison. Many of them die within two weeks of release because they use drugs of exceptional purity that they are not used to. We do not have enough pre-release programmes or post-release care. Can the minister tell me that we now have a seamless, joined-up approach that links community-based care with work done by the prison authorities?

Today's debate has been useful. We have not arrived at all the solutions, but we know that the simplistic, "Just say no", zero-tolerance approach of the Tories has been tried and tested and has failed over many decades. It is time to concentrate more resources on drug treatment and care, and to address the ridiculous drug laws that are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

11:21

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): Drug abuse endangers the lives of many people across Scotland. Around a third of all recorded crime is linked to drug abuse, and there are 800 drug-related offences each week. I agree with Tommy Sheridan and my colleague Jeremy Purvis about cannabis; perhaps if we took a more liberal approach, we could substantially reduce the number of drug-related offences that come to court.

Each year, more than 300 babies are born addicted to heroin or other illegal drugs. In 2004, 356 people died drug-related deaths. The minister referred to the number of children—60,000 under the age of 16—who live with a parent with a drug problem.

Mary Mulligan mentioned Children 1st. I am sure that we all know about that organisation's family group conference service. It is a method of

decision making that draws on the strengths of the wider family in finding how best to care for a child. Almost always, it is the grandparents who get involved.

I agree with Stewart Stevenson that the main task is to keep young people off drugs. Annabel Goldie mentioned the number of people under the age of 20 who get on to drugs. We have to help young people, male and female, to keep off drugs or never get on to them in the first place. I am not talking only about cannabis and other drugs, but about alcohol too.

Liberal Democrats are committed to moving away from imprisoning offenders and using enforcement to reduce reoffending. The emphasis must be on helping people to achieve a healthy lifestyle; it must not be on merely locking them away for having failed to achieve a healthy lifestyle in the past. Drugs courts will play an important role. Pilot drugs courts in Fife and Glasgow have proved successful—both in reducing use and in reducing reoffending. I therefore suggest that the Executive expand the scheme nationally.

To help people to achieve a healthy lifestyle, it is important to increase the number of people who enter treatment each year. Drug treatment is both successful and cost effective. It costs £30,000 a year to imprison a person, but the most intensive community-based drug treatment costs no more than £7,000. Almost half the offenders who have completed a drug-treatment programme have had no further convictions within two years.

The Scottish Executive has pledged an additional £6 million a year to support drug services—an increase of more than 23 per cent from the figure for 2004-05. The Executive should continue to support such treatment options.

Rehabilitation is a necessary part of reducing drug abuse. A programme that prioritises abstinence and prevention fails those who are already suffering from drug abuse. Rehabilitation serves as a type of prevention by reducing the risk of reoffending. I entirely agree with Paul Martin, Patrick Harvie and others about the dedication of the people who work in various rehabilitation services. I also agree that the vast majority of our kids are good and positive for society. In most of the issues that we have talked about in this debate, the number of children involved is small.

My Conservative colleague's suggestion to implement a programme prioritising abstinence fails to take into account the complexity of the issues. Instead, we must combat drug abuse by adopting a multifaceted approach that tackles each aspect of the problem. The most effective way of dealing with Scotland's drug situation is to cut the demand for drugs through rehabilitation and the adoption of a twin-track approach of harm

prevention and reduction. A complex and dangerous issue requires a nuanced and integrated approach.

11:25

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): If the debate has a theme, it is about methadone, whether the country has moved on and whether people can move on. If the debate has a subtext, it is about whether the Government and the Parliament have made progress in how they tackle drug use.

At the Scottish Parliament's inception in 1999-2000, drugs were an issue that brought all the parties together. There was common agreement that it was not a justice issue only, but that it had health, social care and a variety of other dimensions. I fear that the impetus that was built up by the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, the Parliament and the Executive is in danger of being lost.

Many good points have been made in the debate, but they were also made many years ago. The Parliament's job is to scrutinise suggestions and proposals and to ensure that agreements to make progress on certain matters are honoured. That is why the Conservatives are right to air their concerns about the use of methadone. We should review the progress that has been made as a result of methadone use but, in doing so, we should not be judgmental; that is why the Tories' position is a failure.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Will Fiona Hyslop give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I am sorry, but my time is limited.

I commend everyone who has sought to make changes in how we tackle the problem. In 2000, the Parliament had a full-day debate on drug misuse. I remember the conviction of Richard Simpson, Angus MacKay and Iain Gray in driving forward the Executive's proposals. Paul Martin and Tommy Sheridan have made points about family support that were addressed in recommendations 12, 13 and 14 of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report on its inquiry into drug misuse and deprived communities, which was published in 2000. What has happened to the children's change fund? Is it providing family support groups with sufficient support? In 2000, only one social inclusion partnership gave financial help to family support groups. If there is any lesson that we can take away from the debate, it is that the Parliament must refocus its attention on its scrutiny role, because there are measures that could and should be being taken.

I turn to the use of methadone as a treatment for drug addiction. The Executive responded

favourably to recommendation 23 in the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee's report, which said that methadone programmes should be expanded. The information that Charlie Gordon provided about Glasgow was extremely helpful. Such activity should be part of a regular scrutiny process because I am not convinced that progress is as rapid as it should be.

I have some specific points about children. My concern is that if tackling drug use is to be a national cause, as well as being hard on ourselves, we must scrutinise the Government on the issue. I object to the First Minister making presumptions about where children should go, when the Executive has not delivered on its promises.

In November 2002, the Executive launched its child protection report, "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright". The deadline on the proposals to improve information sharing expired in November 2005. Those proposals, which were about getting the police and health, education and social work services to work together, could have helped to prevent some of the problems that have been experienced and some of the tragedies that we have heard about. The Executive has failed to deliver a computer programme for producing integrated assessments that would help to deal with such situations and which would assist fieldworkers on the ground.

When it comes to tackling drugs, everyone has responsibilities. It is a complex area, so there is no single solution. It is easy to preach zero tolerance, but we must take our responsibilities seriously. Rather than spout platitudes, let us have accountability and scrutiny.

11:29

Hugh Henry: Unfortunately, because of a lack of time, I will not be able to answer all the questions that members have asked, but I will be happy to respond to any member who wishes to write to me.

Fiona Hyslop posed a number of valid questions. Although I would argue that, in some areas, we have delivered and moved on, she was right to say that Parliament needs to scrutinise what the Executive has done. We must think carefully about whether what we have delivered has had the appropriate effect or whether there is more to be done. I hope that in a spirit of working together, Parliament and the Executive can reflect on what we have done. Such a debate would be useful.

Stewart Stevenson mentioned education and the need to raise people's awareness of the harm that drugs do to stop them becoming addicts in the first place. The Conservatives have repeatedly made

unfortunate comments about the know the score campaign. Some of our material is highly specific and extremely hard-hitting. We have produced adverts on heroin and cocaine that are blunt and to the point. If Annabel Goldie or any other member of the Parliament wants to sit down with me and my officials to examine the material and to discuss whether it is getting the message across or whether we need to change it in any way, I will arrange that. Some of our adverts, featuring programmes such as "Hollyoaks" and "EastEnders", have had national recognition—they have featured on "News at Ten"—which shows that what we are saying is the right way to get a message across.

Mary Scanlon spoke about the provision of help and treatment, but we have made available extra resources. When we announced that we would provide an additional £4 million in 2004, we insisted that organisations would have to reduce waiting times if they wanted to get some of that allocation. Other comments have been made, that I do not have time to address.

The Conservatives were upset by the comments that I made earlier. They do not like it when people such as me are fairly blunt about the crude message that they put across. Perhaps I should reflect on the language that we use, but perhaps they should do so, too. When I listen to what the Tories say, I sometimes get angry. On such an issue, I am genuinely disappointed that they will not work with members of other parties to reach a sensible conclusion. It is in the interests of everyone in our society for us to put aside petty views and to work together.

I hope that if Annabel Goldie and the Tories will not listen to me, they might listen to David Cameron. Although I do not agree with what David Cameron says on a range of issues, including some drugs issues, I think that the Tories should listen to his views on a zero tolerance approach, for example. At the Scottish Tories' conference, Annabel Goldie described David Cameron as a joy and said that he was their political adrenaline. Perhaps Bill Aitken should listen to some of David Cameron's comments. David Cameron thinks that the debate has been held back because

"Politicians attempt to appeal to the lowest common denominator by posturing with tough policies and calling for crackdown after crackdown."

He also thinks that effective educational programmes are essential to reduce the demand for drugs and that it is no good just preaching to young people or telling them that drugs are all the same because they will not listen. His view is that

"The simple, bold answers are superficially attractive. Whether it is the authoritarian 'introduce life sentences for all pushers and zero tolerance on street users' or the libertarian 'legalise all drugs, destroy the black market and

treat, rather than punish, those who abuse drugs', both offer seemingly easy solutions to a problem that haunts all western governments."

David Cameron is at least taking a more thoughtful approach to such matters. It is just unfortunate that the Conservatives in the Scottish Parliament are not doing the same. Even at this late stage, I appeal to the Scottish Tories to wake up, look around and be a bit more mature. As David Cameron said, drug abuse affects us all. Some people would prefer a tougher approach involving stiffer penalties, a pretence that illegal drugs are all as bad as each other and a just say no campaign for kids. I do not believe that that would work, but if we tell children the facts and explain the dangers, they might just listen; perhaps the Conservatives in Scotland might just listen, too.

11:34

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): An intemperate approach, such as that of Hugh Henry in his opening speech, usually indicates vulnerability, and indeed the Executive is vulnerable on the issue of drug abuse. I remind Hugh Henry that we would not be having the debate if it were not for the Conservatives. We make no apology whatever for raising the matter time and again, against a background of stark and chilling figures. In 2004, 356 deaths were caused by drug addiction. In 2004-05, there were 41,283 crimes related to drugs. It is estimated that 50,000 children in Scotland are living with drug-addicted parents, while 411,000 methadone scripts are issued at a cost of £12 million. Are we not entitled to raise this matter? Should we perhaps be raising the matter even more forcefully?

Let us be clear: the Executive's response has been woefully inadequate. It is not that it does not know, but it underestimates the scale of the problem. It is not that it does not care—it does care—but its attitude sometimes verges on complacency.

Helen Eadie: Will Bill Aitken give way?

Bill Aitken: Sorry, but I have only four minutes left.

The Executive's approach is that drug abuse is a problem that should be managed and contained and that, like the poor, drug abusers will always be with us. It need not be that way. Unless we take a different view, we will lose a generation to drug abuse and all its accompanying difficulties.

Some useful contributions have been made. Jeremy Purvis's was not one of them, but he made the commonsense point that we need this debate. He is right.

Charlie Gordon talked about Glasgow. I have some difficulties with the figures, but that might be

because the city council and health board areas are not coterminous. I am surprised that there are only 11,000 drug abusers in Glasgow—perhaps that figure might need to be looked at. Charlie Gordon mentioned poverty, but Paul Martin correctly pointed out that many people from poor backgrounds lead perfectly ordered lives, so poverty is no excuse. We should address that issue.

Christine Grahame and Fiona Hyslop referred to the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee report, published in 2000, on the effects of drug abuse on poorer areas. There was much to be learned from that report. One of the most depressing aspects of the problem, which was referred to by Tommy Sheridan, is that many youngsters from Glasgow are being looked after by grandparents. The drugs problem is getting worse. In some families, there are three generations of addicts: the youngster, the parents and the grandparents. We cannot be complacent when we have a situation such as that. I reject the overall sense of Tommy Sheridan's speech, but he made the point that prison post-release care is largely missing. The Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee visited Barlinnie. Is it not ironic that there was a unit at Barlinnie to which prisoners could volunteer to go to stay off drugs? That was the only way to prevent their being tempted by drugs. What is the Executive doing to prevent continuing drug abuse in prisons? The answer is very little indeed.

In a somewhat more conciliatory closing speech, Hugh Henry referred to various points made by David Cameron. There is nothing that the Conservatives are saying that is inconsistent with a greater degree of education about the evils of drug abuse. With the split message sent out by the Executive, such education is simply not happening. There is nothing inconsistent about a crackdown on those who seek to peddle human misery. The one thing that the Executive can perhaps claim is that drug seizures have increased, largely as a result of the commitment and effort of Grahame Pearson and others in the SDEA. Despite the Executive's inhibitions, the SDEA has made a positive impact. I do not, as Hugh Henry suggested, recollect any Conservative member saying that there should be mandatory life sentences for drug pushers. That was a misrepresentation. If I have misunderstood Hugh Henry, I fully concede, but that seemed to be the sense of what he was saying.

The Conservatives recognise that there are no simple solutions, but unless we approach the issue in a much more robust and determined manner than the Executive is prepared to do, we will continue to see many lives wasted, many crimes committed and, in many respects, an unbalanced and unstable society. Fiona Hyslop

was right to say that a multi-agency approach is required. Drug abuse is not a justice or a health issue in isolation. The Executive seems unable to reconcile itself to the fact that what it is doing simply is not working. Why, for example, are drug treatment and testing orders not being made available in district courts? Why are the drugs courts geared at those with 40 or 50 convictions, when the street prostitute who is desperate to get off drugs, for example, is denied treatment? Is it not ironic that if someone wants drug treatment and rehabilitation in Glasgow, the easiest and quickest way to get it is to commit more and more crime, so that they will be sent to the drugs court? Surely that should be regarded as utterly unacceptable. The chamber should vote for the motion, as it represents the only constructive way forward for a situation that is becoming graver and graver as time advances.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:41

Paramedics

1. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Scottish Ambulance Service regarding the working hours of paramedics. (S2O-9181)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): Officials in the Scottish Executive Health Department have met the Scottish Ambulance Service on a number of occasions in recent years to discuss the working hours of paramedics.

Richard Lochhead: The minister may be aware of the concern that is being expressed by ambulance workers at rural stations in Grampian, and nationally, about on-call working. Some shifts extend to 106 hours, leaving ambulance staff exhausted and leading to what staff have called antiquated and dangerous conditions. Given the potential risk to patients, will the minister investigate seriously the concerns, which are shared by all of us in the chamber with the ambulance workers? One of my constituents, who on 13 February e-mailed the minister in detail about the concerns, is still awaiting a reply. Will the minister give an assurance that he will personally investigate that serious issue?

Mr Kerr: The member can rest assured that I will investigate that serious issue. I have had discussions not only with paramedic trainees and ambulance crew trainees but with the management of our ambulance service. We need to bear in mind that while the ambulance station at Edinburgh north receives 70 calls a day, the Kinlochbervie and Bettyhill stations receive 100 calls per annum. The Ambulance Service has a large population area to cover. We can also reflect on the fact that action that has been taken to date has reduced the number of staff working under such arrangements from 640 to 420 since 2003-04, which suggests that significant action is being taken.

Of course, we want always to do more. Where stations are most under pressure, we are trying to deal with the issues. Some stations, such as Dunoon, Fraserburgh and Stranraer, have gone from part-time to full-time. Other stations are doing more joint working in order to ensure better rotas.

However, the substantial point remains about clinical safety and safety for patients. We are open and honest in our recognition that a degree of on-call working will have to remain in our health service in order that the service can cover the geography of Scotland. However, the average for any on-call ambulance crew working in Scotland is 38 calls per annum. We need to understand the context. Nonetheless, I do not seek to underestimate the concern that is being expressed by Richard Lochhead.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister recognise the effect that the rationalisation of accident and emergency services will have on the ambulance service? In South Ayrshire, if the Ayr hospital accident and emergency service was transferred to Crosshouse, it is estimated that 35 per cent would be added to paramedic-hours requirements. What guarantees will the minister give on that issue?

Mr Kerr: I must be cautious—I do not intend to go into specifics about consultations that are going on around Scotland. However, integral to any reconfiguration of the health service in Scotland is the inclusion of the Scottish Ambulance Service, to ensure that the implications of such reconfiguration are taken into account by the professionals who provide that service.

I remind Phil Gallie that, at the end of the day, given our modern health care and ambulance services and the huge amount of paramedics who work in the service with clot-busting drugs and analytical equipment in the back of their ambulances, what is important is how long they take to get to the patient. The patient's destination will be chosen based on the patient being stabilised and treated in transit to the local accident and emergency unit.

Development (Perthshire)

2. Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment has been made of the length of time it will take to remove development obstacles in Perthshire created by problems with water and drainage infrastructure. (S2O-9249)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): We are determined that development constraints that are caused by water and drainage infrastructure will be addressed in the next investment period. In the forthcoming investment programme—the quality and standards III exercise—ministers have set Scottish Water the objective of providing sufficient strategic capacity to meet the needs of all proposed new development. It will be for developers to fund local connection costs, including the cost of relieving any local constraints that arise. However, Scottish Water will make a

reasonable contribution to those costs. Today, I have laid before Parliament regulations that will increase those contributions, which will assist all developers who are required to fund the resolution of local infrastructure constraints.

Roseanna Cunningham: Considering the number of times that this issue has been raised, that is a disappointing answer. It has consistently been raised over the years, most recently by me in a letter last month. Of course, the issue has been overtaken by the recent row and Professor Alexander's departure. Still, however, we wait for reassurances. Developers in my constituency are still waiting. I have to ask why the minister is not yet in a position to put a timescale on the lifting of embargoes. The direct result of the problem will be that construction industry jobs will be lost. That is a serious possibility in my constituency. Can the minister put a timescale on the lifting of the embargoes?

Rhona Brankin: Scottish Water has already been in dialogue with the councils and met a delegation from Perth and Kinross Council last month to discuss the need for investment in water supplies and waste water treatment. I understand that another meeting with the council is planned in a few weeks to discuss concerns about the local plan. The programme for all local authorities will be spread over the eight-year period of the next investment programme. It is for Scottish Water and local authorities to agree local authorities' priorities.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Does the minister understand the severe impediments to economic growth in rural Scotland—particularly the parts of Perthshire in my constituency—that are due to lack of action? Will the minister give us a definitive commitment that, as a result of the resignation of Professor Alan Alexander and the non-agreement of a Scottish Water business plan for the forthcoming period, there will be no deceleration of the investment programme that Scottish Water has proposed and that there will be a guarantee that the improvements that are required to sustain economic growth in rural Perthshire will be made?

Rhona Brankin: Absolutely. Economic growth is our number 1 priority. It is for Scottish Water to work with local authority partners and others to deliver our objectives. We must bring about improvements in the planning and delivery of that new capacity. To aid that process, I have asked Scottish Water to prepare an annual strategic capacity report that will set out specific investment plans. It is required to publish it by 1 April this year and to update it annually thereafter. Of course, the report will cover Perthshire and will provide useful clarity to all parties.

Ministers have stated that we are absolutely determined that development constraints that are

caused by water and infrastructure will be addressed in the next investment period. I give Mr Swinney a categorical assurance that the resignation of Professor Alexander will not stand in the way of that.

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

The minister should be aware that social development, as well as economic development, is being held up by development constraints. For example, affordable housing schemes cannot progress. I ask the minister to be definitive in her answer to my question. Has the resignation of Professor Alexander caused any delay in the programme that is being pursued by the Executive?

Rhona Brankin: I assure the member that the resignation of Professor Alexander should not cause any delay. We are concerned to get another chairman in place as quickly as possible. I also assure the member that £14 million is being made available annually to ensure that affordable housing interests continue to be met.

Tourism

3. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact on tourism in Scotland is anticipated from the London Olympics in 2012 and the 2014 Commonwealth games being held in Glasgow. (S2O-9228)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): Australia's experience of the 2000 Olympic and Paralympic games in Sydney was that an estimated £296 million-worth of publicity was generated for Queensland—which is the same distance from Sydney as Scotland is from London—as a visitor destination as a result of the games. During the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth games, Manchester saw an additional 1 million visitors, many of whom went on to visit other parts of the country. We expect the 2012 games and a Glasgow games in 2014 to have a similarly positive impact on tourism. Both events will support our commitment to achieving the goal of growing Scotland's tourism industry by 50 per cent by 2015.

Christine May: I welcome the support that has been given to this issue by the First Minister, the Executive and the delegation that will leave for Australia today, which includes the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Patricia Ferguson. What steps are being taken to spread the anticipated tourism benefit as widely as possible, including to the kingdom of Fife, part of which I represent?

Robert Brown: I would not expect Christine May to ask about anything other than the effects on the kingdom of Fife. That is quite appropriate.

As she rightly mentioned, the First Minister and Patricia Ferguson are currently on their way to Melbourne to support Glasgow's bid—[*Laughter.*] I am sorry, they will soon be on their way. They will make a presentation on Glasgow's bid for the 2014 Commonwealth games and Patricia Ferguson will attend the Commonwealth sports ministers meeting.

As part of the structure of the London Olympic games arrangements, a nations and regions committee has been set up in order to spread the benefits across the country. A Scottish steering group is involved in that. Julia Bracewell, the chair of sportscotland, is involved in both bodies—she chairs the second body—and the objective of the exercise is to spread the good activity around the country. A series of issues relating to sport, tourism and other activities are expected to be raised by the two events, assuming that Glasgow wins the Commonwealth games bid which, I am confident, it will.

Dentists

4. Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to address the shortfall in the number of dentists in Scotland. (S2O-9244)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald): We are increasing the number of graduates from Scotland's dental schools from 108, which the figure was five years ago, to 135 this year and 143 by 2008. We have given health boards new powers to recruit salaried dentists and we have helped with the recruitment from Poland of dentists for the Scottish national health service. We have put in place golden hello payments for new and returning dentists who want to practise in the NHS in Scotland. Furthermore, we will from September this year offer bursaries to dental students in return for a commitment to work in the NHS in Scotland after they graduate. Those bursaries will be worth up to £4,000 per student per year.

Tricia Marwick: I am sure that all that will be a comfort to the Presiding Officer this week.

The Executive must be aware that a third of all graduate dentists leave Scotland to take up their first posts. Although the Polish dentists are welcome, they will provide treatment for only 80,000 patients. Given that more than 1 million under-16s and over-65s are not registered with an NHS dentist and that, from 1 April 2006, free dental checks will be available to all, how will the shortfall be met?

Lewis Macdonald: I hope that Tricia Marwick listened to my answer to her initial question. I was delighted to read in the press this week that the

Scottish National Party is supporting our proposition for bursaries for students who will commit to work for the NHS in Scotland.

I hear comments by members from sedentary positions. It is a shame that those members did not listen to Rhona Brankin on 17 March last year, when she said that

"we plan to introduce a bursary scheme for dental students who commit to NHS dentistry on graduation".—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2005; c 15535.]

Indeed, if Tricia Marwick had read the dental action plan that was published on the same day last year, she would have seen exactly the same point in it.

A range of measures are being introduced—including bursaries—to tie students. Dental students who receive four years' bursary will commit to work in the NHS in Scotland for four years after they complete their training. I hope that Tricia Marwick will welcome that measure.

Athletics

5. Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure that Scottish athletes succeed at international level. (S2O-9187)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): The Executive is fully committed to ensuring that our top athletes have the best possible support to allow them to perform at their best on the international stage.

Michael Matheson: I am sure that the minister will want to support not only the ministers who are heading over to the Melbourne games but our athletes, to whom we wish every success at the Melbourne games.

The minister may be aware of the athlete personal award scheme, which UK Sport runs and which it describes as being

"to ensure that athletes can train and perform to the highest levels"

in the run-up to Olympic games.

He may also be aware that, at the last winter Olympics, some 40 per cent of the athletes in the Great Britain team were Scotland-based athletes. However, is he also aware that, under a freedom of information request, UK Sport published a document this week that highlights that only 20 per cent of athlete personal awards had been made to Scottish athletes? Why is that the case, and what action does the Executive intend to take to ensure that Scottish athletes get a fair share of that funding?

Robert Brown: The question of support for Scottish athletes is a complex one in which facilities, coaching and training, broadening the

base and, of course, individual support need to be taken on board. The Scottish Institute of Sport's six area institutes also support that general activity.

On the general point, I will ask the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport to respond specifically to the detail of the question. I am standing in for Patricia Ferguson this morning and I am not fully acquainted with the detail of the matter. However, I can say that various organisations and bodies that represent the different areas of Scottish sport are involved with sportscotland in distributing money and support to Scottish athletes. I will ensure that Michael Matheson gets a detailed reply.

Specialist Teachers

6. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how many full-time equivalent specialist teachers were employed in primary schools in 2000 and 2005. (S2O-9258)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): The only available figures are for 2003, when 2,218 specialist teachers were employed and for 2004, when the figure had increased to 2,262.

Robin Harper: Surely the minister must accept that that is still a very low figure, given the number of primary schools in Scotland and the contribution that those teachers make? Does he agree that the contribution of full-time equivalent specialist teachers, whose work is much appreciated by the children and staff in all our primary schools, is vital to the delivery of a rounded and holistic education that develops the skills of all children? Does he also agree that those services are too often the first to be cut? Finally, does the Executive have a policy on specialist services to primary schools and, if not, why not?

Peter Peacock: Several points arise from the questions. On the first point about the figure being low, I agree that it needs to increase, which is why we have committed ourselves to providing an extra 1,000 specialist teachers who will move between secondary and primary schools. They will be employed centrally and will move out to visit schools in rural areas and elsewhere. We are on the move on that and we are increasing the number as part of the major commitment that we made to increase our teacher numbers to 53,000. Our universities are bulging at the seams with new students. That will help to fulfil that commitment.

I also agree that those teachers are a vital part of our education system. We are very clear that we want to see an increase in the number of visiting teachers because of the impacts that they make on young people. We are seeing a gradual improvement in that in the cluster arrangements

and learning community arrangements that we have put in place between the primary and secondary schools in our cities. Under those arrangements, secondary science and modern languages teachers will move down to help in primary schools. That is happening in addition to the work that traditional visiting teachers undertake.

Robin Harper also queries whether local authorities are reducing the number of visiting teachers. That is something that I would very much regret because it would mean that authorities were heading in exactly the opposite direction to the one that the Executive wants them to take. Such action is not what we are funding, which is an increase in the number of our teachers.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Nuclear Submarine Facilities

8. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what its role is in the planning process in respect of nuclear submarine facilities in Scotland. (S2O-9182)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): If a proposal requires planning permission, Scottish ministers play their usual role within the planning system. Whether a proposal requires planning permission will depend on the particular circumstances of the case.

Mary Scanlon: I welcome nuclear developments in Scotland, but will the minister clarify why her colleague at Westminster has said that there is no planning veto with regard to such developments when, in fact, there might well be?

Johann Lamont: I am blessed with many things, but a requirement that Mr Cairns be answerable to me is not one of them. He is accountable to Westminster for his answers. However, the position on this issue is clear: defence is a reserved matter, and planning is devolved. As I said, if a proposal requires planning permission, the Executive might become involved in the decision-making process.

Points of Order

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): It is now 12 noon. We move to questions to the First Minister—

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Is your point of order so urgent that we have to take it now? Can I take it at the back end of First Minister's questions?

John Swinburne: I would prefer that it was taken now, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Right. On you go.

John Swinburne: I rise to highlight the most flagrant breach of the Parliament's principles. I refer to discrimination—age discrimination, in particular—which is covered by rule 6.9.1 and 6.9.2 of standing orders. I am 75 years old. However, having reached that age, I find that I am being discriminated against in this place. I should point out that I am raising this not for myself but on behalf of the others who will follow me in 2007. I want the Presiding Officer's good self to look into and rule on the matter.

Basically, under the parliamentary pension scheme—

The Presiding Officer: What is your point of order, Mr Swinburne?

John Swinburne: I am allowed three minutes in which to expand upon my point—

The Presiding Officer: Only if you are speaking to a point of order.

John Swinburne: I am being discriminated against because, of the 129 MSPs, I am the only one who comes into a separate category. If I and one of my colleagues were knocked down by a bus on the way up to this place, my colleague's family would be awarded three times his basic salary. However, I would receive nothing because I am too old. That is discrimination of the worst kind.

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry that you find yourself in that situation, Mr Swinburne. I know that the matter is of personal importance to you, but I think that it would be better if you wrote to me. I will ensure that the parliamentary authorities respond to you.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): On a different point of order, Presiding Officer. I will be very brief. Last week, for the first time ever, the independent MSPs were given a slot at First Minister's question time. Unfortunately, Margo

MacDonald lost the opportunity to ask her question because the roof fell in. Why is she not being given the opportunity to ask her question this week, in the same way that last week's votes were simply postponed until this week?

The Presiding Officer: We have already agreed the schedule until the end of June. I am afraid that we will just have to live with it.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues they will discuss. (S2F-2155)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I hope to meet the Prime Minister again soon to discuss a range of issues. In particular, I expect to discuss his support for Scotland's bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth games in Glasgow. I hope that this weekend I take to Melbourne the whole chamber's support for that bid. Indeed, I will be delighted to pass on to the athletes who are representing us at the games the support of everyone in the chamber for their efforts over the next fortnight.

Nicola Sturgeon: I assure the First Minister that he has the Scottish National Party's full support in putting forward in Melbourne the case for Glasgow to host the Commonwealth games.

I remind the First Minister that, at a press briefing on Monday, he said that it took nearly five years for the Government to pay Shirley McKie £750,000 in compensation because

"The compensation requested was originally much higher, and that was why we defended the action."

Does he now accept that what he said on Monday was simply untrue?

The First Minister: I do not think that that is the correct link to make between a particular question and answer from the press briefing on Monday. It is the case that, in the discussions on the settlement and the court case over the years, the McKie family were looking for a significantly higher amount of money. It is absolutely their right to do so, and I do not dismiss it at all. However, it was also right that, in such negotiations, we looked after the public purse and ensured that the eventual settlement was just not only to Shirley McKie but to the taxpayers of Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: Several newspapers have precisely quoted the First Minister as saying that the claim was "originally ... higher" than £750,000. However, I have court documents that prove that what he said on Monday was untrue. They show that, over the four years between day one of Shirley McKie's court action and last September, she was claiming £750,000—which is exactly the amount that was eventually paid to her.

Does the First Minister accept that the Government's decision to fight the case not only needlessly put Shirley McKie through the wringer

for five years but resulted in hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money being wasted on legal costs? The question that the First Minister must answer is why. Now that we know that the explanation that he gave on Monday was false, will he please tell the chamber the real reason why it took the Executive so long to settle the case?

The First Minister: First of all, I should say that Ms Sturgeon is not accurate. The original claim was for £750,000 plus interest, which is more than £750,000 for any of us who understand money or numbers. However, more fundamental issues are at stake—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order. We have to hear what the First Minister is saying.

The First Minister: I know that the SNP does not like facts, but facts are important in any discussion. I do not think that that particular fact, although it is a fact, is central to the discussion. What is important is that, when it became clear last year that a settlement was appropriate, the Minister for Justice took the right steps to secure a settlement that was fair to Ms McKie and was also fair to the public purse. That move towards a settlement resulted in a letter from Ms McKie's father to the Minister for Justice thanking her for her approach and welcoming the steps that she was taking. That was a positive indication from the McKie family that they welcomed the approach at the time. The Minister for Justice took the right steps to settle, in the interests of the public purse and of Shirley McKie. The family having accepted that the mistake made by the Scottish Criminal Record Office was without malice, and the Executive having accepted that we have a responsibility to ensure that Ms McKie is compensated for what she has gone through, now is the time to move on.

Nicola Sturgeon: Is not there an obligation on the First Minister to tell the public the truth? I have a copy of the original court document and the claim was clearly for £750,000. I think that the First Minister should reflect that in the public statements that he makes. Is not it the case that Monday was not the first time that the First Minister has misinformed the public about the McKie case? On 9 February, he told Parliament that everyone concerned accepted that an honest mistake had been made, and that is just not true, is it? Is not it the case that, as we saw on the BBC "Frontline Scotland" programme, no one in fact accepts that it was an honest mistake? The SCRO experts still do not accept that it was a mistake, and the McKie family and a long list of fingerprint experts do not accept that it was an honest one. Who exactly was the First Minister talking about

when he said on 9 February that everyone accepted that it was an honest mistake?

The First Minister: We all know that the settlement was, from our perspective, a fair and just settlement for Ms McKie and a just settlement for the public purse. In accepting that settlement and in accepting that the original mistake was without malice, the McKie family took an important position, and that is reflected in the statements that have been made. It is important to recognise not only that we now have a settlement, but that never in the course of recent weeks, in any of the statements from the nationalists, who have tried to politicise what is essentially a legal debate, have we had one question about any of the recommendations from the two independent inquiries that took place. Those inquiries produced recommendations about the future of the fingerprint service, all of which were accepted and implemented. At no time in recent weeks has Ms Sturgeon, Mr Neil or any other SNP member who is involved in the debate accepted that fact or even questioned whether it is true.

What is important is the integrity of the work of the fingerprint service and of the justice system. Those who are now responsible for the fingerprint service are acting in the public interest to ensure that the service has improved and will improve further as a result of the changes that were outlined by the Minister for Justice just two weeks ago.

Nicola Sturgeon: I suggest that it is the integrity of the Scottish Executive and of the justice system that it is on the line.

I accept that there have been reforms to the SCRO, but we cannot know whether those reforms will sort out what went wrong in the Shirley McKie case, because we do not know what went wrong in that case. I refer the First Minister to a comment by Derek Ogg QC—one of the many non-political advocates of a public inquiry—who says that we need to

“shine a light on how we got here and make sure that where we’re going is not beset with the same traps.”

Is it not time that the First Minister took his head out of the sand and took some decisive action to restore confidence in the Scottish justice system?

The First Minister: This is a democratically elected Parliament. Last night, it voted and expressed a clear opinion on behalf of the people of Scotland, whom we represent. I hope that Ms Sturgeon will note that fact, despite her continuing efforts to undermine yesterday’s vote, which showed clearly what the will of the Parliament is.

I do not accept that Ms Sturgeon shows an interest in the work of the fingerprint service because at no time in the parliamentary debate, in

the questions that followed the statements from the Minister for Justice and the Lord Advocate in recent weeks or at First Minister’s question time has she questioned the recommendations that were made by the independent reports into the fingerprint service or the implementation of those recommendations since then. The fundamental point is the action that has been taken. The action that has been taken was based on independent reports from independent investigations. That action has been implemented and, as a result of that, we can now move forward.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive’s Cabinet. (S2F-2156)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The next meeting of the Cabinet will still, in my absence, discuss issues of importance to Scotland.

Miss Goldie: I hope that drug abuse and, in particular, the use of methadone will be high up the agenda. This is not an issue on which I wish to pick a fight. I have no doubt that the First Minister is as saddened as I am at recent tragic events. My desire has only ever been to shift the debate in a more constructive direction. In that spirit, does the First Minister accept that, to deal with the problems that are associated with methadone, we need to establish the extent of those problems and, therefore, need more information? How many people are on methadone, how long have they been on it and how many of them are looking after children at home?

The First Minister: I will come back to Annabel Goldie’s central point in a second, because I welcome the fact that she has asked the question and raised an important issue for the Parliament. It should be of great concern to others, as it is to her and me.

The current figures for methadone prescription in Scotland are about 19,200. In my view—and, I believe, in Annabel Goldie’s—we do not have enough information about the individuals who are prescribed methadone and the plans that they are on to end up, eventually, with a drugs-free lifestyle, but we are expanding the Scottish drug misuse database precisely to collect that information and to ensure that practice is more consistent throughout Scotland. That information should be available soon and will give us a chance to apply guidelines more consistently and have a more consistent objective in each individual case.

Over recent weeks, Annabel Goldie has made positive contributions on other areas such as the provision of rehabilitation services and the national

data that we hold on them. I hope that, in all of that, she is not suggesting that there is no place for methadone prescriptions in the system. Her leader clearly believes that there is, and I agree with him that we need a flexible approach. However, I believe that Annabel Goldie is genuine in her approach and I hope that, in addition to participating in this exchange, she is willing to meet the Minister for Justice and her deputy soon to try to bring some of the parties together on the issue and to provide a way forward that we can all agree and see through to successful implementation.

Miss Goldie: I thank the First Minister for his response. We have made singular progress today, which I appreciate, and I make it clear that my party has never said that there is no place for methadone.

Establishing the extent of the problem is only the first step, because it must be crystal clear that everything that we do is geared towards helping people to end their addiction to drugs, which must mean telling them where they can go for help.

That brings me to the First Minister's response on rehabilitation facilities. In England and Wales, there is a central directory of rehabilitation facilities. Will the First Minister give me a commitment to provide such a directory for Scotland?

The First Minister: I certainly want to do that. I now have figures for the number of establishments that offer such services as well as for the number of individual beds that can be made available. Those beds are in the system in Scotland. Sometimes—correctly—they are used for drug rehabilitation, and they are also used for alcohol rehabilitation and other purposes. As I have said in the chamber on many previous occasions, I believe that there are not enough rehabilitation services in Scotland. There are not enough residential places, and there are certainly not enough services directed at people adopting a drug-free lifestyle at the end of their rehabilitation.

We have allocated additional resources and we are expanding the number of places. I hope that we can go forward. I believe that the cross-party approach that I have just suggested might help us to ensure a consistency of approach over several years. In the meantime, I would be happy to secure a level of detail on the matter for Annabel Goldie as part of this continuing discussion. I am sure that, in the weeks ahead, we will be able to outline the plans that are available in some areas of Scotland to expand the number of places.

Miss Goldie: I am grateful to the First Minister and, once again, I wish to say that I think that progress is being made. The key point about this issue was made by Professor Neil McKeganey. He

said that people with money can afford choice and that having that choice means that they tend not to use methadone to end their addiction. Although I am partially reassured by what the First Minister has said to me in response to my previous question, I point out that, in the absence of clarification on facilities, the capacity within those facilities and unused capacity in Scotland, we have a two-tier system. Is it not about time that we committed ourselves to ending that two-tier system, under which the well-off go to residential rehab while the masses make do with methadone? Is it not time that we began to give everyone the choice of getting effective help to get off drugs?

The First Minister: I am certain that there will be times in the course of this debate when it will be right for us to make debating points on behalf of our different parties and for policy choices to be made in front of the electorate and debated in the Parliament. I am also certain that there are times when, if at all possible—and as was perhaps pioneered by the former Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland Michael Forsyth—we should rise above party politics on the issue and try to move forward together.

The number of admissions in Scotland was 3,902 at the latest count, I am told. There are problems with the system, and I entirely agree with Annabel Goldie: it is unacceptable that, while some people can buy their way to a rehabilitation place, other people, despite indicating an interest, do not have the necessary resources available. That is the case for the vast majority of problem drug users in Scotland. In many cases, they have to remain on a waiting list.

Some members will perhaps have heard this story before. Not that long ago, I met a family in the north-east of Scotland who had agreed with their daughter that she would go into rehabilitation. The daughter, having made that brave decision, was told that a rehabilitation place would take a year to become available. I regard that as absolutely unacceptable. The outcome was that the parents had to help her to get drugs so that she could keep her lifestyle stable while she was waiting. That is an entirely unacceptable situation in any part of Scotland, and it is one that I am determined to do something about. I hope that, in building on the changes that we have made over recent years, and if we come together, we can provide more permanent solutions on which all parties can agree.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-2164)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I meet the Secretary of State for Scotland regularly to discuss a range of issues, which are all of importance to Scotland.

Shiona Baird: With energy issues so high up the media and political agendas, does the First Minister believe that small-scale micro-renewable energy for our homes and businesses can play a part in providing our future energy needs? Is his Executive committed to supporting the micro-renewables industry?

The First Minister: Yes, and yes.

Shiona Baird: I was hoping that the First Minister might expand a little bit on his support. I would like to have suggested that his words were not being backed up by action.

The First Minister might not be aware that the Scottish community and household renewables initiative is oversubscribed and has run out of cash. It gets a mere, paltry £2.2 million a year, which is miserable compared with the multimillion pound support that the nuclear industry receives from the Government. Will the First Minister commit his Executive to increasing support for micro-power? What is his message to those who want it but cannot get it and to the businesses that are—rightly—alarmed that the market is not getting the boost that it really needs to take off?

The First Minister: I am happy to expand on my earlier lengthy answer. I believe that it is important for the Government to support and encourage micro-renewables within the public sector, within businesses and within individual households. I strongly support further development in that area. I am delighted that the current programme is oversubscribed, which I think shows an increasing interest and demand in Scotland, which can only be healthy not just for the industry but for our environment in the years to come. What I suppose is a change in attitudes and an increasing interest in this area in Scotland is a good thing, which I am sure that the Green party would acknowledge and support.

That raises a budget issue for us, which I know that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and his deputy are considering. I am absolutely certain that if we can increase the resources in years to come, we will do so, but I would rather leave a statement on that to them.

Methadone

4. Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether, following the tragic death of Derek Doran, the Scottish Executive has any plans to review arrangements for the dispensing of methadone. (S2F-2169)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): First, on behalf of everyone, I express my sympathy to everyone affected by that tragic death. I hope that members will acknowledge that I cannot comment on the circumstances of the case, given that it is the subject of investigations.

Protection of the most vulnerable children in our society is our absolute priority and must be the absolute priority of Government. Events over recent weeks, including this and other shocking cases, reinforce my determination to ensure that children in drug-taking households are properly protected, safeguarded and supported.

The 1999 guidelines on the clinical management of drugs misuse and dependence, which cover the prescription of methadone, are about to be updated on a United Kingdom-wide basis. However, that updating will take some time to complete. Therefore, I have asked for an immediate review of the current guidelines here in Scotland and of their implementation locally.

Mr Home Robertson: This is the second tragic death in East Lothian caused by methadone prescribed for somebody else. Does the First Minister accept that the real and fatal risk from what is supposed to be a cure for drug addiction is just not tolerable? Will he set two specific objectives for the review? The first is to ensure that the supply of prescription methadone is absolutely secure without the risk of it being sold on or used to spike people's drinks and without the risk of the kind of tragic accident that appears to have happened at Elphinstone. Secondly, does he agree that the objective must be the cure of addiction, not just the stabilisation of addicts on methadone?

The First Minister: Absolutely. In these situations, we have a duty to strike an appropriate balance between the medical judgment that is required of professionals, independent of politicians, and the need for Government to give clear guidelines and to ensure consistent implementation of them wherever possible. Although I cannot comment on the particular case until the current investigations are complete—we do not know what happened—I believe that there is a need to ensure that where methadone is being prescribed to be taken outside the pharmacy or surgery, there is a clear reason and justification for that.

Secondly, I believe that it is absolutely critical that where methadone or any other dangerous drug has been prescribed to be taken at home, or away from supervision, appropriate safety measures are in place to ensure that children—who can die not just from methadone but from a number of other things—are safe and secure. I also believe that a fundamental plank of our drugs policy must be not only to catch dealers, seize

drugs and provide rehabilitation services, but to lead people to drug-free lifestyles. That must be our central objective in the discussions that I mentioned earlier to Annabel Goldie, on which I am happy to receive comments from any other member.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Does the First Minister agree that we should build on the inquiry into methadone use and widen its work by establishing a standing commission on the misuse of substances, including alcohol? We cannot judge our policies on drugs and alcohol without seeing them in the same light. We need a genuinely radical approach, because we have tried the same mixture of policies for more than 20 years—since the time when I was chair of the Scottish Drugs Forum—but nothing has improved. Surely we can say that the policies have failed and that we need better alternative ones.

The First Minister: We need to be careful about being too comprehensive in describing it as failure. A number of people who work in various parts of the public and voluntary sectors in Scotland have made a difference in the area in recent years. We now know more about the problem in our society than ever before and—certainly in relation to the supply of drugs in Scotland—we are more effective than ever before. However, we cannot deal only with the supply of drugs; we must deal with demand as well.

I am not sure that a standing commission is the right answer, but I am certain that, in the discussions that we have, we should be willing to consider all suggestions. In doing that, we should build upon our strategies on both drugs and alcohol and strengthen them rather than simply dismiss them. I hope that, if we can agree on that as a basis, the work that Annabel Goldie and Margo MacDonald have done on the issue over a long period will be input to those discussions.

Steel Commission

5. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive supports the recommendations made in the Steel commission report. (S2F-2172)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Executive does not have a formal view on the report, which is an interesting contribution to the debate.

Richard Lochhead: The First Minister will be aware of the growing consensus that the Scottish Parliament requires significant additional powers. Is he part of that consensus?

The First Minister: Actually, what we have is a growing consensus that the SNP has “lost its way”, to quote the comment that its former leader Gordon Wilson made this week. We know that,

despite the occasional clever question from the nationalists, they do not support further powers for the Scottish Parliament; they support the replacement of the Parliament with an independent Scotland. I welcome the interesting debate about the Parliament’s powers, but we must have an honest debate, with each party stating its position honestly and clearly. It is dishonest of the SNP to come to the debate claiming that it wants more devolved powers for Scotland when what it really wants is a separate, independent Scotland. It should stop doing that.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): As a member of the Steel commission, I ask the First Minister whether he accepts its conclusion that we should explicitly reject independence and full fiscal autonomy, which the commission said would be a Trojan horse to independence. However, does the First Minister agree that there is a case for more devolution of both legislative and fiscal powers to the Scottish Parliament? Further devolution has taken place since 1999—for example, in relation to rail—and would be consistent with the view that was expressed when the Scottish Parliament was set up, that devolution is a process and not an event.

The First Minister: Like Jeremy Purvis, I welcome the growing consensus in the Parliament and in Scotland that independence is not the right solution for Scotland. I hope that that will be demonstrated again in next year’s elections, as it was last year and in the two previous years. It is important that we use our powers effectively for the benefit of the people of Scotland, but the Parliament should also be a place for debate about the future of Scotland. I welcome the debate on that and other matters, but I want it to be an open and honest debate. I respect the Liberal Democrats’ position of support for a federal United Kingdom as part of that debate and I will be happy to contribute to a debate on that position. As soon as we get a little more honesty from the SNP, I will be happy to take part in its debate too.

Scottish Enterprise

6. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the outcome has been of recent discussions with Scottish Enterprise regarding its current funding position. (S2F-2162)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Scottish Enterprise has succeeded in encouraging more demand for its services from companies that want to grow in Scotland. Therefore, there are more projects to fund this year than resources allow, which means that Scottish Enterprise is prioritising projects. The prioritisation process will ensure that Scottish Enterprise moves forward with a focus on high-quality projects.

John Scott: The First Minister is aware that the most recent debacle at Scottish Enterprise has destroyed business confidence in the organisation and further damaged its reputation in Scotland and worldwide for sound financial management. How will he restore confidence in Scottish Enterprise nationally and internationally?

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

The First Minister: What would damage the Scottish business community's confidence in Scottish Enterprise most would be the abolition of or a cut in the services of Scottish Enterprise, which the Tories have consistently proposed in recent years. Yet again, I ask for consistency from our opponents. If they believe that Scottish Enterprise should be cut back and that we should do less to support business, they should say so when they ask a question about it.

From a variety of meetings with businesses large and small in recent months, I believe that Scottish Enterprise's leadership enjoys more confidence than it has for a long time. The strategy of prioritising national industries and ensuring a Scottish focus that is designed to grow our economy in the sectors in which we can be more successful is the right direction for Scottish Enterprise. However, that must be balanced by local input, local judgment and local participation. A job is in hand in Scottish Enterprise and in discussion with ministers to achieve the right balance between national and local expenditure and between national and local decision making.

In a country of 5 million people that faces an increasingly competitive global market, if we do not have a clear national focus on the sectors in which we can grow and do not give those priority in the years ahead, we will fail and fall behind.

The Presiding Officer: We started two and a half minutes late, so I will allow a last question from Alex Neil.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I agree with the First Minister's last statement.

Is it true that £30 million of Scottish Enterprise's budget for next year is to be transferred to this year's budget? If so, what are the implications for next year's projects and programmes?

The First Minister: The specific amounts are under discussion between the enterprise ministers and Scottish Enterprise. However, I say clearly—as I said in my earlier answer—that one piece of good news in Scotland's economy is that more projects have been proposed than the budget allows for, so Scottish Enterprise has the chance to choose the highest-quality projects. That is good for Scottish Enterprise and for businesses in Scotland. I agree entirely that it will be important to examine the implications of that for next year and I am sure that the details will become clearer in the weeks ahead.

14:15

On resuming—

Point of Order

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon. The first item is—

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I gave notice of my intention to raise a point of order on the Glasgow housing stock transfer.

On Tuesday, at the Chartered Institute of Housing conference, the Minister for Communities announced:

“The fact that there will not be 63 second stage transfers is widely recognised, including among Glasgow’s local housing associations.”

That was news to me. It was also news to the chair of the CIH, which is the body that represents housing professionals. Today, the chair of the CIH said:

“The minister’s announcement on Tuesday came as a surprise. We knew there were challenges ... but I do not think that anyone was expecting to be told that the 63 second stage transfers will not be going ahead.”

The minister’s speech represents a departure from the position that ministers have repeated in the chamber. In November, the First Minister said:

“we did not encourage the establishment of the Glasgow Housing Association, support enthusiastically the transfer of ownership and put so much money into the venture simply to see one large organisation replaced by another ... We want local housing organisations to own and manage houses and have responsibility for them so that people have maximum control”.—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2005; c 20338.]

Also in November, the Minister for Communities, who has responsibility for housing, said:

“Our commitment to second-stage transfer and to devolving power to local communities remains absolute.”—[*Official Report*, 24 November 2005; c 21157.]

Presiding Officer, do you agree that the minister’s speech represents a substantial change in policy by the Scottish Executive and that it breaches the Parliament’s protocol on when statements should be made in this place? Do you also agree that any announcement should have been made first to the Parliament to allow members to question the minister on the issues that surround second-stage transfer in Glasgow? Do you agree that it was discourteous in the extreme for the minister not to come first to the chamber?

The Presiding Officer: You have made your point in some detail and, in so doing, put it on the record. Neither the Minister for Communities nor the Deputy Minister for Communities is in the chamber. The point is essentially one for the

Executive to consider. Ministers will no doubt read the *Official Report* and take note of what you have said at some length. If you are asking for a statement to be made, you can raise the matter through the normal channels at the Parliamentary Bureau.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Justice and Law Officers

Mobile Closed-circuit Television

14:17

1. Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart (Lab)): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it believes that mobile closed-circuit television has a contribution to make in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour. (S2O-9219)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): Yes. Mobile CCTV is one of a range of measures that can be used to assist in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour. I will shortly be announcing the successful bidders for flexible-response CCTV projects in the financial year 2006-07, in line with the commitment that we made in "A Partnership for a Better Scotland" to expand CCTV in shopping and other areas, thereby supporting businesses and others to reduce crime. We will then undertake an evaluation of the impact of public-space CCTV.

Mr Gordon: Is the minister aware of the innovative use that Strathclyde police and Glasgow City Council are making of mobile cameras to combat youth disorder in the King's Park area of my constituency, alongside measures such as fixed cameras, curfew bail conditions, action on underage drinking, the deployment of special constables and diversionary youth activities?

Hugh Henry: Yes. The mobile camera vehicles represent an innovative use of CCTV. Indeed, along with Charlie Gordon, I visited one of the vans in Castlemilk, where it was stationed at the time. I was extremely impressed with the quality of picture and size of area that the camera captured and with the way in which the data were stored and, ultimately, used. The visit helped to convince me that mobile CCTV has a wider application. I am also aware of some of the issues in King's Park. People there could benefit greatly from the siting of such a van in the area. I know that the local agencies—police and others—are favourably disposed towards that. I hope that Charlie Gordon makes the case to those agencies that such a deployment would benefit the local community.

Community Wardens

2. Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is evaluating the effectiveness of the community warden scheme

and Executive funding in diverting young people from antisocial behaviour. (S2O-9238)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): We have commissioned an evaluation of the implementation and impact of community warden schemes, which is expected to report by early 2007. The research will include interviews with young people to explore the impact the schemes have had on their behaviour, as well as surveys to assess the perceptions of residents. We are also funding diversionary activities for young people through the £5 million local action fund. That is being evaluated through the provision of twice-yearly monitoring reports.

Dr Murray: I will be interested to hear the results of the evaluation. I know that the minister is aware of the success of the community warden scheme in north-west Dumfries, in my constituency, which was recently the subject of a brief television report. Not only has the scheme made people feel more secure in their homes, it has engaged with local young people and supported them in finding alternatives to antisocial behaviour, such as midnight football. How will the Executive ensure that other areas of Dumfries and Galloway and Scotland benefit from the introduction of community warden schemes? Other communities in my constituency are keen to get a piece of the action.

Hugh Henry: Elaine Murray is right to point to the success of the community warden scheme throughout Scotland. A number of people were sceptical about the deployment of community wardens. In my area, the sceptics are now clamouring for the schemes to be extended. Community wardens are well received by communities and work well in partnership with the local police. As well as helping to identify and report potential problems, wardens engage constructively with young people.

We provided a finite amount of money for schemes and asked local authorities to identify priority areas, because it is not for the Executive to dictate to local authorities on the matter. We tried to restrict the use of schemes to certain areas, so that wardens would be seen to have an impact. However, a number of people, including Elaine Murray, have made representations to me that a degree of flexibility might enable councils to respond to particular problems as they arise. As long as the core purpose of the wardens is not undermined and key areas are serviced, I am prepared to consider a degree of flexibility to allow a response in particular areas. However, other agencies must be signed up, so that it is not just a case of wardens working in an area for a limited period.

European Justice Agenda

3. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is engaging with United Kingdom ministers to influence the European justice agenda. (S2O-9239)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with the United Kingdom Government on a wide variety of European Union-related issues and is represented as appropriate at meetings in Brussels, whether at working groups of officials or at councils at ministerial level. Last month, I joined UK Government ministers in representing the UK at the justice and home affairs council in Brussels, to take forward, among other issues, a pan-European approach to the fight against organised crime.

Irene Oldfather: The minister is aware that the European arrest warrant has been in place for some time. Will she indicate what role the warrant is playing in tackling cross-border crime? Notwithstanding the progress that has been made, will she also give an assurance that further European measures to tackle crime, including the European evidence warrant, are consistent with the traditions and principles of Scots law?

Cathy Jamieson: Irene Oldfather makes an important point. The European arrest warrant is a vital tool in the fight against cross-border crime. Work is continuing on the European evidence warrant and the Scottish ministers are fully engaged in that work. We have provided information to our UK counterparts and we have made points to ensure that Scots law is protected. We have made strong representation that we require to operate on a basis of mutual co-operation, rather than alter our legislation. We will continue to take that approach.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister recall that one of the Executive's EU priorities is an investigation into the European Court of Justice's decision on environmental protection? Is she aware that the Austrian presidency of the European Union has declared an ambition to stop the creeping influence of the European Court of Justice, although the presidency wants to extend the court's powers through articles I-7 and I-29 of the proposed constitution for Europe? What representations has the minister made to UK ministers on the issue?

Cathy Jamieson: As I said, the Executive is involved in a range of matters that relate to the justice and home affairs agenda. I am aware that the matter that Phil Gallie raises is up for consideration. However, it is for the Austrian Government, during the Austrian presidency of the European Union, to decide how to proceed. If Mr

Gallie wishes further information on the issue, I will provide it to him. I am sure that he will find that useful, given that he intends to seek a career in the European Parliament at some point.

Fiscal Fines

4. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it believes that the use of fiscal fines is in the public interest. (S2O-9242)

The Lord Advocate (Colin Boyd): Yes. Fiscal fines are one of a number of effective alternative options to prosecution that are available to prosecutors in dealing, in the public interest, with reports of crime. In many cases, fiscal fines can be used as a prompt and proportionate response to criminal offending.

Karen Whitefield: I am grateful to the Lord Advocate for his reassurance. As the Scottish Executive intends to extend the use of fiscal fines, will he advise me of the benefits that will arise as a result? Will he reassure me and members of the public that when fiscal fines are used, they will be the correct disposal for the offences concerned?

The Lord Advocate: The summary justice reform proposals in the Criminal Proceedings etc (Reform) (Scotland) Bill, which is before the Parliament, include the extension of the upper limit of fiscal fines to £500 and the introduction of fiscal compensation orders, which will be for up to £5,000. The bill will also introduce work orders, which will be offered as an alternative to prosecution to people who are before the fiscal. It is important that procurators fiscal use the powers responsibly and proportionately, so a training programme will of course be involved. Under the bill, the Scottish ministers will be able to make regulations on work orders. It is envisaged that communities may be consulted on the work that needs to be done in their areas.

I recognise Karen Whitefield's point about fiscal fines. Once an offender has accepted an offer of a fine, then, on request by the victim, that will be communicated to the victim so that they can be reassured that the matter has been dealt with properly. Of course, that will be the case only when there is a victim, which is not the case in many instances. I hope that that gives the member the reassurance that she seeks.

Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill

5. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill will have on the privacy of innocent people. (S2O-9254)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):

The bill will be an effective piece of legislation that will play a valuable role in helping our criminal justice system to tackle criminality better. All the measures that are included in the bill will be entirely compatible with human rights legislation.

Patrick Harvie: I thank the minister for the commitment to ensure that the bill is compatible with human rights, although I want to go beyond strict compliance with human rights. The minister has already ruled out the inclusion of amendments on mandatory blood testing, which would compromise the privacy of innocent people or of people who have not yet been convicted of a crime. Will the Executive resist or support amendments if they are lodged on the—I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer, I came in with a rush. I am terribly sorry, but I will have to withdraw my question.

Women Reoffenders

6. Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made to reduce the number of women who reoffend. (S2O-9221)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):

The Executive is fully committed to reducing the number of women who reoffend. We have taken action to address the needs of drug-misusing female offenders and fine defaulters who might otherwise end up in custody, and we have set up the innovative 218 time out centre. We expect the new arrangements for more joined-up management of offenders in prison and the community to offer further opportunities to tackle the issue.

Janis Hughes: I thank the minister for that information. The minister will be aware of the high incidence of self-harm among women offenders. Can she advise me what steps the Executive is taking to tackle that matter of concern?

Cathy Jamieson: The Executive is concerned about that. A significant amount of work has been undertaken in Cornton Vale prison to address the problems of the women—in particular the young women—who end up in that environment with a range of problems including drug misuse, who are often also the victims of sexual abuse or domestic violence. I extend an invitation to Janis Hughes to discuss the matter in more detail. If she has not yet met the staff at Cornton Vale prison and seen the innovative work that is being done there, I hope that she will take the opportunity to do that. I can facilitate that.

Crimes Planned in Prison

7. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many

people have been prosecuted since 1999 for planning or encouraging, while held in prison, a crime committed outside prison. (S2O-9203)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Mrs Elish Angiolini):

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service case management database cannot be used to distinguish between offences that are committed in prison and offences that are committed outside prison.

Stewart Stevenson: I thank the Solicitor General for that not wholly illuminating answer. She may be aware that a written answer has told me that, between 1 April 2004 and 30 September 2005, 281 mobile phones were taken off prisoners—62 of which were in Saughton prison. Does she share my concern that the use of mobile phones held illegally by prisoners to facilitate communications with the outside world will enable them to continue to have control over their evil empires—especially in the area of drugs—outside prison?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: I am sorry that my answer could not be more illuminating. It would come as no surprise to any member of the public that when criminals are put together in one place, they are likely to conspire to commit crimes. Although we do not have a database as such, we know that there have been prosecutions for crimes that have been planned, and sometimes committed, in prison.

Although mobile phones are a great blessing for innovation in industry and commerce and communication, they also facilitate crime, so Stewart Stevenson's point is well made. The possession of mobile phones in prison, which would be unlawful, would be of concern to members of the public. All communications in prison, other than privileged communications, are subject to monitoring and surveillance, although we would not want to indicate when and where. The use of mobile phones in prison is a particular challenge and I am sure that, subject to a regulatory and statutory regime, any innovation that could counter that more effectively would be a matter of interest to my colleague, the Minister for Justice.

Spousal Evidence

8. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is concerned that the institution of marriage is open to abuse by people accused of crimes, including crimes of violence, and whether it will amend the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 to compel people to give evidence against their spouses, including in cases where they are not the victims themselves. (S2O-9215)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):

This is a complex issue, but we are sympathetic to amending the law and recognise that work needs to be done in the short term. In particular, there are some child protection issues that we want to ensure are addressed. I will bring forward, in the near future, a short consultation on the options for amending the law on spousal compellability.

Helen Eadie: I am delighted with the minister's response. Does she agree with me—I speak as one married woman to another—that the protection of vulnerable people is more important than marriage and that steps should be taken to protect our communities and bring to justice those who are accused of crimes? I welcome her announcement.

Cathy Jamieson: I thank Helen Eadie for her comments. It is important that we do whatever we can to ensure that vulnerable people are protected. I am especially keen to ensure that we serve the best interests of children and young people. I hope that Helen Eadie will engage actively in the consultation process. I am sure that she will, as she has made representations on the matter before.

Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and Transport

New Ferry Routes (Highlands and Islands)

1. Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to encourage new ferry routes to the Highlands and Islands. (S2O-9186)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): The final service specification for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services will encourage bidders to propose improvements to, and enhancements of, those services.

Mr McGrigor: In light of the Executive's failure to find a bidder for the Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry route, which was a major disappointment to many people in Argyll and Bute, why was Dalriada Shipping, which was willing to take on the contract, rejected? It was classed as a new entity, despite the fact that the company is owned by Pentland Ferries, which successfully runs services between the Scottish mainland and Orkney without any subsidy. Dalriada has again offered to run the Campbeltown to Ballycastle service using the boat that previously operated on the route. Will the minister give me and those in Argyll and Bute who would benefit from the service assurances that Pentland Ferries' excellent track record will be taken into account this time when Dalriada's new offer is considered?

Tavish Scott: I apologise to Mr Mather, who will ask exactly the same question later.

All that I can say at this stage is that, with officials in the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department, I am examining the options, following the exercise that was undertaken under the European and domestic procurement rules that we must follow, with which Mr McGrigor is familiar. It was not a case of the Executive or anyone else failing; it was a case of no compliant bid coming forward. I hope that Mr McGrigor is aware of that—I am sure that he is.

I absolutely appreciate the point about the economic importance of the route, and we will continue to consider all the options. I hope to make a further announcement on the matter as soon as I possibly can.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I intend to get to question 6, but I will take a supplementary from Jim Wallace now.

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): The minister will know that the announcement of the preferred bidder for the new franchise for the ferry service to the northern isles is anxiously awaited. Is he in a position to inform the Parliament about that? Will he give an assurance that, when the new bidder is identified, every effort will be made to ensure both that adequate shipping arrangements for livestock are secured and that there is a seamless transition for onshore and seafaring staff, passengers and freight users?

Tavish Scott: As Mr Wallace knows, we had hoped to be able to announce the preferred bidder by the end of February. Following some further work and further economic and financial analysis, we are able to confirm today that Caledonian MacBrayne is the preferred bidder for the northern isles tender. A process will now be undertaken to establish the precise contract details. That will take some time, but I hope that, by the early summer, we will be in a position to confirm the contract and the operation that is to be undertaken in the northern isles.

Mr Wallace makes a fair point about the continuation of the service being as seamless as possible. It is indeed our intention to work hard to achieve that. I will write to him on the matters relating to staff, but as far as bookings for passengers and freight businesses are concerned, we want to ensure that the service continues as it has done and that there is no disruption to booking arrangements.

Park-and-ride Railway Stations

2. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken to expand park-and-ride railway stations. (S2O-9222)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): In addition to our funding of local authorities and other bodies for specific projects to increase car parking facilities, we have secured additional car park enhancements through the ScotRail franchise. We are in discussions with First ScotRail and Network Rail to unlock additional investment and to provide a programme of car parking enhancement.

Dr Jackson: As the minister knows, the Stirling constituency has a high number of commuters to Glasgow and Edinburgh. A case has already been made for more car parking at Dunblane railway station, and we hope that a solution will be found soon.

I ask the minister to consider seriously the case that is also being made for a rail halt to the east of Stirling at the site of a major growth area, which is soon to be decided on, and for suitable car parking spaces at any such halt.

Tavish Scott: I would be happy to consider the specific argument that Sylvia Jackson makes with regard to development in the Stirling area. It seems eminently sensible to ensure that, as the planning process continues, we build in the need for improvements in the availability of public transport. As the detail comes forward, I will be happy to consider the matter in conjunction with colleagues who have responsibility for planning.

I take Sylvia Jackson's point about pressure on car parking spaces at certain stations. To some extent, such problems are victims of the service's success, but we obviously need to try, where possible, to enhance car parking facilities to encourage more people to use the First ScotRail system. I am aware that the Bridge of Allan station car park has recently been expanded to more than double its previous size. I hope that a considerable amount of such investment happens in the future, not just in Sylvia Jackson's constituency but throughout the country.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Sylvia Jackson referred to overcrowding at Dunblane station, but many of those spaces are taken by people from Strathearn and further north, for whom Dunblane is the closest station. The minister will be aware of the campaign to reopen Blackford station, which would relieve some of the pressure at Dunblane. Will he give us an update on where the Executive stands in its response to that campaign?

Tavish Scott: I cannot give a precise answer to Mr Fraser's question today, but I am happy to write to him on that point. I can say only that all of us who believe in the future of rail in Scotland and in providing other forms of transport as alternatives to the car must take considerable encouragement from the fact that there are so

many strong campaigns throughout Scotland to reopen stations such as the one that Mr Fraser mentioned.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Can the minister confirm whether his list of stations requiring improved car parking includes Inverkeithing station, which benefits from the highest frequency of rail services of any station in Fife and therefore tends to have a full car park by about quarter to 8 in the morning? If he solved that problem, he might also ease the pressure on the Forth road bridge, which is the other problem on his desk.

Tavish Scott: I wondered how Mr Morgan would get that in, but as usual he was able to mention it. In recent times, some of us have become very familiar with Inverkeithing station. Indeed, I came through that station on the train last night.

In all seriousness, Mr Morgan has made an entirely appropriate point about the pressure on the bridge. I will be happy to sit down with Fife Council, First ScotRail and Network Rail to look again at the particular pressures on that station and on other stations on the Fife circle. Given the evidence of increased growth in passenger numbers, we need to respond as positively as we can by considering car parking improvements where it is possible for those improvements to be made.

Broadband Access

3. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that people who live in remote areas can obtain access to broadband. (S20-9252)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): We have already taken major steps to achieve that, including the successful implementation of the largest broadband project of its kind in the United Kingdom. That has extended broadband access to 378 remote and rural telephone exchange areas and more than 1,600 communities. We have now fulfilled our commitment to bring broadband coverage into every Scottish community. More work is now being done to tackle the particular problems that individual households and businesses face in accessing broadband.

Mr Swinney: On 19 January, I asked the minister a similar question after a constituent had approached me about his difficulty obtaining access to broadband. Following some modest local publicity about that question, I have been somewhat inundated with requests and notifications from members of the public who,

because they live a considerable distance from their broadband-enabled telephone exchange, cannot get access to broadband. What practical steps will he take to ensure that such individuals and businesses can be connected? Will the Executive take a clustering approach to ensure that groups of houses and settlements are brought together so that we can find a technologically proficient solution to the problem?

Nicol Stephen: The short answer is that, yes, we will do all of that. As I mentioned in my response to John Swinney's question in January, we are commissioning a study for which independent consultants are due to be appointed next week. The study is due to report by the end of May and will consider all the technological solutions that can be implemented.

By 2006-07, we want to deliver broadband to as many households and businesses as it is possible to reach cost-effectively. As John Swinney suggested, in the first instance that will mean that significant benefits might be available by grouping together or clustering demand so that we can find cost-effective solutions.

I want to make sure that every household and business that cannot be provided with that solution by 2006-07 at least gets a reasoned technical response, including an explanation of what can be done and the timescale within which that can be achieved. A budget has been allocated for that work—for procurement reasons, I have been asked not to disclose the amount involved—which will be used to continue to find the technical solutions that will allow more communities in remote and rural areas access to broadband by 2006-07.

Rail Infrastructure (North-east Scotland)

4. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in developing rail infrastructure, including Aberdeen crossrail services, in the north-east. (S2O-9200)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): With the support of Scottish Executive funding, the north-east Scotland transport partnership is leading the development of the Aberdeen crossrail proposal and is responsible for delivering the completed feasibility work by the end of 2006. Elsewhere in the north-east, the Scottish Executive and Transport Scotland are working closely with scheme promoters and rail industry partners on implementation of the Mossend to Elgin freight gauge enhancement scheme, the range of improvements to be delivered by the £40 million station improvement plan under the First ScotRail franchise agreement and the development of proposals to reopen Laurencekirk railway station.

Nora Radcliffe: The crossrail project is about the movement of people, but the movement of freight is essential to the economy. The minister mentioned the Mossend to Elgin freight gauge enhancement scheme, which will enable freight to be moved on standard rolling stock. Can he give me any more information about how quickly the enhancements will be made?

Tavish Scott: Nora Radcliffe makes a good point about the importance of freight and the benefits of the enhancement scheme, which will enable the track to be used in the way that she described. My understanding is that the project will be delivered by the summer of 2007 at a cost of about £4 million. If any additional information is available, I will be happy to write to Nora Radcliffe.

University Research

5. Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what role it plays in ensuring that research in Scottish universities is world class and what steps it has taken to achieve this. (S2O-9246)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): About half our higher education research base is already rated as world class and we are committed to further enhancing that. We have therefore provided unprecedented increases in funding to enable the Scottish funding council to increase support for university research by 40 per cent in real terms between 2001-02 and 2006-07.

Mr Welsh: I guide the minister towards the other half. Does he accept that, although Scottish universities perform superbly well, as measured by the traditional yardsticks such as the number of articles published and number of citations, Scotland underperforms in terms of growth in gross domestic product and entrepreneurial activity compared with similarly sized countries such as Ireland and New Zealand? Those countries have unified strategic policy functions that co-ordinate and guide science and technology research and enable their universities to make the optimum contribution to economic growth and development.

How does the Scottish Government propose to measure the economic impact of higher education research in Scotland, to reform our nation's science and research policy and to enable our universities similarly to maximise the economic impact for the benefit of the nation?

Allan Wilson: The Executive's progress report, "A Science Strategy for Scotland", was published on 28 February and sets out our progress on science since 2001. Although good progress has been made overall, the report recognised that we must accelerate our efforts if we are to maintain

global competitiveness. I think that that is the point that Mr Welsh makes. We plan to consult on refreshing the strategy, which will provide a major opportunity to shape future policy. Our research base has to be flexible and responsive to global pressures and industry's needs, and it has to build entrepreneurial activity. Our strategy, which is for us to work with the Scottish funding council and for it to work with the institutions to support initiatives, is bearing fruit.

Campbeltown to Ballycastle Ferry

6. Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what reasons are emerging for the lack of bids to provide a ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle from its investigation into the matter and what steps it will now take to establish this economic artery. (S2O-9206)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): We are examining the feedback that has been received and considering whether there is a feasible and practical way forward within the terms of the current tendering process. We are also in close touch with our colleagues in Northern Ireland.

As I have said, I recognise and well understand the strong feeling locally that we should look seriously at any possibility that has been brought to our attention, to ensure that all the options under the tendering process have been considered. We will make further information about our position available as soon as we can.

Jim Mather: Given its vessel availability, its involvement with Pentland Ferries and its experienced personnel, will Dalriada Shipping be included in the options that the Executive considers? Will the process include an evaluation of the negative effect that non-fulfilment could have on the population and on economic activity? Will we see a justified reconciliation of the subsidy that is paid on the route to bolster the local economy with the subsidy that is paid on other routes, such as those that NorthLink Orkney and Shetland Ferries serve?

Tavish Scott: The short answer is yes. As I said, any option that we can consider within the procurement rules that we must follow will be examined. I assure Mr Mather that any particular company will be taken into account in that exercise, subject to those caveats.

I take the point about the disbenefits of not having—or the economic advantages of having—the link. We take that into account seriously when considering what can be done to promote the economic viability of the Kintyre peninsula. Mr Mather advanced an argument by making a comparison but, as he well knows, comparisons

can sometimes be misleading. The subsidy that was sought to attract bidders for the route to Ballycastle has been the figure for a considerable time. A decision to look again at that number would be difficult.

Glasgow Crossrail

7. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in respect of the Glasgow crossrail project. (S2O-9212)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): Transport Scotland is considering the technical and operational feasibility study into Glasgow crossrail and hopes to respond to Strathclyde Passenger Transport with comments during the spring. Projects of such magnitude require detailed examination before final decisions can be made.

Bill Butler: I note the minister's response with interest. He will be aware that the detailed technical feasibility study by SPT showed that considerable strategic benefits from the crossrail scheme could be delivered to the whole of Scotland—not just Glasgow—for a relatively modest investment in railway infrastructure. Given that, does he agree that the Glasgow crossrail proposal would benefit Scotland's economy and provide further much-needed rail network integration? Will he accept an invitation from me, as convener of the cross-party group on Glasgow crossrail, to attend a cross-party group meeting to discuss in detail the benefits that would accrue from that sensible proposal?

Tavish Scott: I am happy to take up Mr Butler's invitation to attend a cross-party group meeting and to hear the detail that I am sure he would impart. The advantage of the consultation on the national transport strategy, on which we are about to embark, and of the corridor-by-corridor assessment under the strategic projects review is that they will allow detailed consideration of the arguments that Mr Butler and others advance for crossrail. However, ultimately, funding for a project—no matter what its magnitude—is subject to the usual disciplines of government.

Credit Unions (Trust Deeds)

8. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any concerns about the impact of trust deeds on credit unions. (S2O-9208)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): We are satisfied that both measures fulfil different, though related, needs. Credit unions supply a preventive measure against debt by providing single-source savings and lending whereas trust deeds offer

debt redemption for debts that have been accumulated. The proposed trust deed reform will help creditors such as credit unions by introducing a new minimum payment and a cooling-off period if a trust deed is not protected, so that debtors can examine other options.

Jackie Baillie: The minister will be aware that as credit unions are community-based mutual organisations, they are disproportionately affected by losses through protected trust deeds, whose use has increased dramatically in recent years. I know that he is consulting on protected trust deeds; that is welcome. Will he agree to meet credit unions to discuss their concerns and to consider how protection can be afforded to those important community organisations, which are part of the solution to debt management, not the problem?

Allan Wilson: I am aware of the issues that the member mentioned—not least because she has brought them to my attention previously—and would be pleased to meet credit union representatives.

What the member said about the increased use of protected trust deeds is correct. It is generally accepted across the political spectrum and across the industry—if I may call it that—that protected trust deeds, which the previous Government introduced, must be reformed. Given the experience of credit unions in that field, the opinions and advice that they can provide will be useful to us as we move in that direction.

Agriculture

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-4081, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the agriculture strategy.

14:56

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): As members will be aware, I launched the updated agriculture strategy, as set out in “A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps”, on Friday. This debate is therefore timely.

Agriculture remains at the heart of life in rural Scotland. Its headline 1.3 per cent contribution to gross value added greatly understates its full contribution to our economy, our rural communities and our environment. It has important direct links with two other major industries—food manufacturing and tourism. As primary producers, our farmers provide 36 per cent of the total inputs to our food industry, and as custodians of the countryside, they are responsible for maintaining almost 80 per cent of the land. Therefore, they create the landscape in Scotland that is important for attracting tourists.

Our agriculture industry has a long history of facing up to challenges, as it must do now. We work increasingly in a global marketplace. Following the World Trade Organisation meeting in Hong Kong last December, we can expect further reductions in export subsidies by 2013. In Europe, there will be a ceiling on common agricultural policy funding from 2007. There will also be a review of the whole post-2013 European Union budget, including CAP funding, in 2008-09. We are working hard with the United Kingdom Government and other member states to ensure that the best interests of rural Scotland are reflected in the developing scenario and in negotiating positions so that Scotland's position is put forward.

The WTO and the CAP provide an overall framework, but I have always believed that it is imperative that we in Scotland work to our own strategy, which we should try to mesh in with those overarching strategies. That is why we worked with the industry to produce our first-ever agriculture strategy in 2001. After five years, there is no doubt that that strategy needed to be updated to reflect progress and to respond to new developments, such as the 2003 CAP reform. As with the original strategy, we developed the “Next Steps” strategy in partnership with stakeholders, who represented farming, crofting, environment, food, research and business interests.

The "Next Steps" strategy reviews progress since the original strategy and the recovery that has taken place in many areas. It shows what can be done when we work together, but many issues are still to be addressed. Sadly, there are still big differences between the best performers in Scottish agriculture and those at the other end of the scale.

The very best Scottish farmers are already very good by any standards, but the challenge is to bring up the rest of the industry to that high standard. That means encouraging an enthusiastic and innovative spirit that is underpinned by technical expertise, encouraging a willingness to co-operate and learn from one another and increasing people's business acumen. Our ambition remains that we want to see a prosperous and sustainable farming industry that is competitive in markets, a driver of rural development and renowned for its high-quality produce and high environmental standards. It must also be a major contributor to key animal health and welfare and human health and well-being objectives.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): With respect to the prosperity of the agriculture sector, I have a question on regulation. The minister is aware that the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 will be implemented on 1 April. Will any revised guidelines on the charging scheme be available before the reduced fee application period ends on 31 March? If not, what advice does the minister give to individuals who want to apply but do not know on what basis they can do so during the reduced fee application period?

Ross Finnie: I am conscious of the issue that the member raises; the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Rhona Brankin, and I have received many representations on it. I assure the member that the information to which he refers will be available. An announcement on the matter will be made very shortly. It will deal with the scale of charging and will provide what has been missing so far—a much more detailed explanation of the benefits that will accrue from the scheme. The announcement will be made in days, rather than weeks.

I have set out our ambition. Our first goal in "Next Steps" is to assist primary producers to work better and more closely with food producers, retailers and the food service sector to identify, inform and meet more successfully market demand. That means developing different and stronger relationships up and down the food chain, and working together to understand and meet consumer and customer demand and, as a consequence, to get a much better deal.

It is important that farmers benefit from sharing experience and ideas. One of the major successes

of the previous strategy was the monitor farms initiative, which enabled many farms in Scotland to benchmark their activities and to make considerable progress. At present, there are only seven monitor farms across the country. An eighth is being developed, but under "Next Steps" we intend to roll out the initiative as far as possible throughout Scotland, because of the benefits that were accrued previously.

A second goal is that agriculture should contribute fully towards vibrant rural communities and stronger rural areas. Diversification in its many aspects plays a part in that. There is a need to understand better what can and cannot be done and what is and is not successful. The "Next Steps" group was absolutely clear about the need to increase the amount of information that is available, so that a range of intra-farm and extra-farm activities can take place.

There are close links between the strategy and the new Scottish rural development programme for 2007-13, which will be an important delivery mechanism for the strategy. Our aim is to build on progress that has been made since 2000 on business development and diversification, while delivering environmental goods and encouraging public enjoyment of the countryside. Recently, we launched a consultation on the use of resources in the new rural development programme, and in a month or so we will launch a consultation on the programme. I assure the chamber that that will include consultation on the less favoured area support scheme, which will remain a key element of the programme.

The third goal is that Scottish agriculture should continue to be a leading player in the protection and enhancement of the environment, with an increased emphasis on climate change and the promotion of a landscape-scale development approach. We will continue the good work that has been undertaken to implement Scotland's biodiversity strategy and will maintain our efforts to tackle diffuse water pollution.

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): The minister refers to the importance of the environment. Does he acknowledge that in the past year many farmers were disappointed that they did not qualify for the rural stewardship scheme, although they had gathered points that in previous years would readily have qualified them for it? What encouragement does he give them that it will be worth their while to apply again in the future? Will he ensure that smaller farmers, who do not have as many activities on which to notch up points, will not be disadvantaged and that all the proceeds will not go to larger estates and farms?

Ross Finnie: As Jim Wallace and others in the chamber are aware, the situation to which he refers was a direct consequence of the huge

increase in popularity and attractiveness of the scheme, which resulted in a 57 per cent increase in the number of applications. With a demand-led scheme, we run the risk of setting a target level that has to be raised because of financial constraints, which results in serious disappointment, as Jim Wallace properly points out.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Ross Finnie: No, I must finish the point that I am making.

As a consequence of what has happened, we will revise the procedures for allocation of points. However, I am bound to say that simply raising the number of points that is required is not always the answer. We will seek to address the issue in the guidelines that will be issued with subsequent schemes.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): What is the current points level? Did the minister make an announcement on that yesterday, or will he make an announcement on it in the near future?

Ross Finnie: The announcement is imminent, by which I mean today or tomorrow. I will write to John Scott if he wants more information.

The "Next Steps" strategy has 22 specific action points, on some of which we will make progress immediately. "Next Steps" provides the strategic framework within which we operate, but we recognise that within the overarching framework—through which we believe we can make progress—there are always pressing day-to-day concerns. Those concerns include considerable worries about the operation of the marketplace. I welcome, as I am sure that every member does, today's announcement by the Office of Fair Trading that it will enter consultation on a possible reference to the Competition Commission.

I want to be clear about the issue. I have never said that the operation of the supermarkets works perfectly. What I have said consistently to the industry is that it should not believe that supermarkets are the only cause of the problems in the food chain. We need only consider what happened last week when there was a decline in the cream and butter-fat price, which resulted in a reduction in farm-gate prices. That had nothing to do with supermarkets, but was part of the complex relationship between supply and demand in the market.

There are concerns about how regulations work and the threats that are still posed by avian flu and other exotic diseases. All those issues must be taken into account.

The decision was taken in Brussels yesterday to lift the European Union beef export ban, which

was imposed in 1996. I am sure that everyone in the chamber joins me in acknowledging what excellent news that is for our farmers, for rural Scotland and for the Scottish food industry. I pay tribute to the whole industry for its forbearance during those 10 years, but I pay particular tribute to those who have worked hard to put a case that was not only successful but unanimously successful in yesterday's vote. We must now work extraordinarily hard as we try to recapture markets that we had to give up 10 years ago, which were worth approximately £120 million to the Scottish agricultural economy. I hope that the lifting of the ban will also stabilise prices in that very important sector for Scotland.

On that optimistic note, I ask that the Parliament welcome those achievements and the publication of the strategy, which will form the framework within which Scottish agriculture will take its own steps to set its own pace and its own targets. Although the agriculture sector will be constrained in many ways by the CAP, the WTO and others, it will have its own agenda. We will try to ensure that the agriculture sector remains healthy and sustainable for the benefit of the whole of rural Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment as set out in *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps* to secure a prosperous and sustainable farming industry in Scotland, focussed on producing food and other products for the market, contributing to sustainable rural development, protecting and enhancing the environment and contributing to improvements in animal health and welfare and human health and well-being, and approves the actions outlined in the strategy for achieving these objectives in partnership with other stakeholders.

15:08

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): The SNP very much welcomes the debate and much of what is in the Government's strategy document. We all accept the need for a prosperous farming sector to continue to deliver benefits to consumers, our rural communities and Scotland's environment.

Our talented farmers and crofters throughout Scotland contribute a great deal to the nation, and the food that they produce enhances Scotland's reputation throughout the world. They operate in a challenging environment; they have done so for many years and continue to do so. Farm incomes are on the increase, but they are still playing catch-up with the incomes that were achieved in better times a few years ago. Given the recent reforms in agriculture policy, this is a challenging transition period for our farmers.

Many farmers whom we speak to in our constituencies are still not sure of their role at the

beginning of the 21st century; in essence, they are not sure whether they are there to produce food for the nation or to act as guardians of the countryside. That issue will no doubt be the crux of today's debate.

The strategy that we are debating must deliver stability for our farming sector and it must allow farmers to plan ahead. They want to know that the support mechanisms that are in place will be there for some time to come. We welcome the minister's comments about the LFA support scheme being secure, because that has caused concern for many people in Scotland.

We do not want to see Tony Blair, the UK Prime Minister, go to Brussels and use our farmers as political pawns by raising, out of the blue, the prospect of further reform of the CAP just after our own industry has come through a period of transition. However, our farmers are resilient and will overcome any obstacles that are placed in their way.

We welcome this week's good news about the beef export ban being lifted. That is a great boost for the beef sector. We must now market our beef in Europe to ensure that it gets back on to supermarket shelves and dinner tables as soon as possible. As the minister said, we must recapture markets that may have been invaded by other markets from around the world through the increase in imports to the European Union.

Our farmers seek an assurance that Government intervention will not simply amount to policing the common agricultural policy or implementing European directives. Our farmers want to be assured that ministers' interventions in the industry will be about increasing profitability and incomes for farmers the length and breadth of Scotland. Customers and consumers rightly demand quality food that is produced to the highest animal welfare standards. However, despite the fact that the farming community has been meeting those demands, the market is still failing our primary producers in Scotland. We know that from the poor farm-gate prices that we have witnessed in recent years.

We just have to look at the dairy sector for that to be confirmed. Over the past six years, one in four dairy farmers in Scotland has gone out of business. On our supermarket shelves, milk is cheaper than water. Currently, the farmers get only 18p or 19p a litre, but milk on supermarket shelves sells for 54p a litre. Today, Asda has announced that it will cut the price of milk and that it and not the farmers will take the hit. Of course, the farmers are expressing concern that Asda's cut could lead to a price war between the supermarkets and even more of a squeeze at the bottom of the supply chain, which is where the farmers find themselves.

When we debated agriculture in 2000, we discussed the fact that the farmer got only 15p of every £1 that was spent on groceries. We are now in 2006 and I think that few members would expect the situation to be much better six years on. We do not know what the figure is now; perhaps the minister can investigate that. We know, however, that the supermarkets in Scotland are abusing their power and taking more than their fair share of every £1 that is spent on groceries.

In recent weeks, Kettle Produce Ltd, which is a major customer for many farmers who produce vegetables, announced a loss of £800,000. In the past few days, Marks and Spencer has sent out a letter to all its suppliers announcing, out of the blue, a 5 per cent cut in what they are paid. There is no negotiation—the cut is being made on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. That is a straightforward abuse of power. Marks and Spencer is usually regarded as one of the better supermarkets in terms of its treatment of suppliers.

Of course, farmers are in a David and Goliath situation. They want to know that the minister will get behind David in this battle and do everything that he can to ensure that there is more fairness and transparency in the sector's supply chain.

We welcome today's announcement by the OFT about the likelihood of an investigation. Of course, that is not necessarily directly related to what we are discussing, but it could have an indirect benefit for our farmers should the supermarkets' powers and their dominance of the grocery sector be curbed in the future. However, our farmers must be able to give evidence privately to the OFT investigation because we know of the blackballing and other despicable practices that are undertaken by some supermarket chains in Scotland. For example, they cancel orders at short notice or demand two-for-one offers for the supermarket shelves at the supplier's cost—again, the supplier has no choice in the matter. Many of our suppliers do not even have a proper contract with the supermarkets and the contracts that they have can be cancelled at short notice, leaving the suppliers to carry the pain.

We must arm our farmers and that can be the purpose of the strategy. We must ensure that our farmers have information about what consumers want, so that there is a demand for their produce and they can produce the right kind of products. The supermarkets would then have to stock what the consumers want. We need a level playing field for our farming industry, which means that the imports on supermarket shelves must meet the same strict criteria that produce from this country must meet. Currently, the playing field is unfair. For example, beef that comes in from Brazil or elsewhere in South America does not have to meet the same animal welfare or quality standards

that are laid down for beef that is produced in this country. That situation is unfair and it must change. Country of origin labelling would help; if such labelling were clear on products, consumers would be educated about what they are buying.

Addressing the issue of red tape would be another way of achieving a level playing field. Time and again, farmers come to our surgeries to complain about red tape and the amount of paperwork that they must undertake each day of the week. Indeed, the farmers say that one of the directives that the minister will implement will mean that they will not be allowed to keep field stones in their fields because they will be deemed to be commercial waste. The minister must ensure that that ludicrous directive does not lead to a ludicrous situation. I know that he is looking into the matter, but that is an example of the unreasonable red tape and regulations that our farmers have to deal with.

We can help our farmers by increasing the demand for local food. In its public procurement, the Government has huge influence over that. It can increase the demand for local food in our schools, in the public sector and in Government sectors. That would greatly help our farmers. Let us think global but eat local, as one witness said to the Environment and Rural Development Committee during its inquiry into the supply chain. Doing so would cut food miles and help the environment.

We have to help our farmers to access new customers and not only the supermarkets. We have to consider energy crops; that issue is now high on the agenda. Our farmers can be recruited to tackle climate change and global warming by growing energy crops. Biodiesel is an option for farmers. They can grow willow for co-firing in our power stations. It is said that one area of set-aside the size of a football pitch could grow enough oil-seed rape to power 20 cars. Set-aside in Scotland amounts to 100,000 football pitches, which means that 2 million cars could be supplied with biodiesel thanks to our farmers.

We agree with many measures in the strategy. There is a lot of motherhood and apple pie, and no one could disagree with much of what the minister said in his opening speech. However, the SNP will address three or four major challenges in our speeches in this debate. Those challenges, which must be the minister's priorities, include dealing with supermarket power, the need to improve local food, and the need to find new markets.

Our farmers contribute a lot to Scotland. We have to ensure that they play on a level playing field and have a prosperous future. We can do that if we tackle some of the challenges. We must ensure that the industry remains viable and attractive to new blood, so that it is around for

generations to come. I urge members to support the SNP's amendment.

I move amendment S2M-4081.4, to leave out from "and approves" to end and insert:

"while approving many of the actions outlined in the strategy, regrets the lack of support and initiative from Ministers for the farmers' campaign to curb the power of the supermarkets and secure a more equitable trading relationship throughout the supply chain; calls for more effort to allow agriculture to compete on a level playing field by addressing the issue of inferior imports and costly red tape; further calls on Ministers to do more to promote locally produced food, especially through the use of public procurement, not only to boost the industry but to cut the number of food miles, and urges the Executive to accelerate the production of energy crops."

15:17

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): It has been a long time since Scottish agriculture had much to celebrate. We welcome the lifting of the EU's iniquitous ban on United Kingdom beef.

As everybody knows, Scottish beef is the best in the world. As the minister said, beef exports a decade ago were worth £120 million. With inflation alone, that figure would by now have reached some £200 million. That would have been a considerable amount of money for Scotland in exports. To European consumers who have been denied Scottish beef over the past decade, I say, "You have a gastronomic treat in store." To our beef cattle producers, I say, "Go forth and multiply your herds."

I wish that I could be as positive about other aspects of the farming industry. Against a background of uncertainty and despondency throughout the sector, it brings no pleasure to report that average wages for Scottish farmers are currently £13,000 a year. For those who can do the maths, that is approximately a quarter of what members of the Scottish Parliament are paid. Of course, many farmers are funded at an even lower rate. Even more disturbing is the fact that the median age for farmers in Scotland is around 60. The next generation is simply not coming through.

At last week's NFU Scotland conference, the president, John Kinnaird, identified the factors that were driving the lack of confidence: poor farm-gate prices; uncertainty over the future of support payments; and the increasing and costly burden of regulation—we have been hearing about that. Although we can welcome and support the vision part of the Executive's, "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps", real leadership requires more than an industry-approved wish list in an expensively produced document.

Rural Scotland no longer knows what is expected of it. History shows that when the

farming industry does not know where it is going, the result is confusion, misunderstanding and despondency. Nowhere has that been more apparent than in the dairy sector, where more and more producers have chosen to vote with their feet and get out of the industry. The industry can no longer afford to sell milk at farm-gate prices that are lower than the cost of production.

People who soldiered on under the old subsidy system in the hope that things would improve have seen their hopes dashed with decrease after decrease in the farm-gate price. The most recent decrease happened only eight days ago.

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Is the member aware that milk production in Scotland has increased? Although the number of producers has decreased, the amount of milk that is produced has increased. I would have thought that that was good Conservative policy.

Mr Brocklebank: As a farming journalist, perhaps Mr Arbuckle would be happy to tell the producers who have had to get out of the dairy sector that it is good that they have had to give up doing the only thing that they can do.

Today's decision by Asda to slash its price by 9p a litre only proves how much room there is for cuts in the price of milk.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the member give way?

Mr Brocklebank: No, I will carry on for a little while.

As we have heard, Asda's action could well trigger a price war as other supermarkets join in. Guess who the eventual casualties of such a war will be.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Ted Brocklebank agree that Asda cannot cut the price of milk at the expense of workers' wages and workers' representation? Asda is trying to derecognise the trade unions, which is not acceptable.

Mr Brocklebank: I have a lot of sympathy with what Tommy Sheridan says. Asda says that it is funding the decrease in price out of its profit margin, but who knows how the other supermarkets will fund similar cuts. The price might be forced down to the detriment of workers in all sectors of the food production industry.

No one could fail to have been shocked by the fact that producers from all sectors recently gave evidence to a parliamentary committee under the cloak of anonymity because they feared what public criticism of the supermarkets might do to their businesses. We heard from vegetable producers who were tied to long-term contracts by supermarkets that could fix whatever price they wished to pay for the produce. We heard of

farmers who were commissioned to produce and package food items for a particular supermarket, only to learn—days before delivery—that the order had been cancelled. Dairy farmers repeatedly pleaded with us to find out why the lowest farm-gate prices in Europe are paid to Scots producers when some of the highest milk prices in Europe are charged by Scottish supermarkets.

Whether the Environment and Rural Development Committee can provide the answers to those questions is yet to be seen, but it must be noted that the Westminster committee that carried out the same investigation over a far longer period failed to come up with any answers. The truth seems to be that there is something rotten somewhere in the supply chain between the producers, the processors and the retailers. Unless the committee can get straight answers to straight questions at the 11th hour, my fear is that our inquiry into the food chain in Scotland will come up with precious few answers. Notwithstanding what Andrew Arbuckle said, that will come as scant comfort to the milk producers in the south-west and elsewhere who cannot diversify because it is simply impossible for them to use the land on their farms for anything other than dairy farming.

Farmers have a responsibility to ensure that they deliver the right product to the supermarkets at the right time and to the right specification, but the supply chain and the Executive have a responsibility to ensure that the market does not fail farmers who do precisely that. Quite simply, the supermarket code is not working. I welcome today's announcement that, nationally, the Office of Fair Trading is to mount an inquiry into the supermarket dominance of the UK grocery market.

I will use the time that I have left to discuss diversification. In particular, I ask the minister what support and pump priming the Executive is prepared to offer farmers who wish to diversify into areas such as agri-forestry and, specifically, into the large-scale production and processing of oil-seed rape for biodiesel.

I have been approached by farmers in the part of Scotland that I represent who are keen to become involved in a major expansion of oil-seed rape, which, as the minister knows, grows well in Scotland, from the Borders to Orkney. Those producers need to be confident that the Executive recognises the market's potential, especially given the increase in fossil fuel prices and the environmentally friendly nature of the diesel that is made from oil-seed rape. They must also be confident that the Executive will work with the Treasury to ensure that the duty on biodiesel is reduced to make it competitive with traditionally produced diesel.

At the moment, there are only 25 filling stations in the whole of Scotland at which biodiesel can be bought. What steps can the minister take to encourage councils and others to use environmentally friendly fuel in their vehicles—I understand that the Forestry Commission Scotland has adopted such a policy—thereby helping to build up the supply chain? I believe that if the Executive is to restore confidence to the agriculture sector, it must adopt just such a proactive, imaginative approach. I commend the Conservative amendment to Parliament.

I move amendment S2M-4081.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“notes the aims for the Scottish agricultural industry set out in *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps* and acknowledges that the vision outlined in that document is one with which we can all agree; notes that under Scottish Executive stewardship, Total Income from Farming statistics show that returns are down by 11% and average net farm incomes have fallen by 34%, indicating that the agricultural sector is beleaguered by uncertainty and despondency, and calls on the Executive to act to restore confidence to the sector in order to reverse the current trend of young people deserting the land.”

15:25

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the publication of the agriculture strategy. I note that although it is a strategy and not a definitive list of every single aspiration we have for farming and crofting, nor is it a detailed route map of how we can get from where we are now to where we want to be. However, it gives unequivocal signposts on the direction in which we wish to travel. Many of the issues that are highlighted in the strategy have been discussed recently in the Environment and Rural Development Committee.

We all realise that this is a time of transition for agriculture, from grant payments linked to production to payments linked to good land management, but we should not underestimate the uncertainty that many farmers and crofters feel about their future. The old certainties have gone and people are asking themselves what

agriculture's purpose now is and what farming will be like in the future. Those are serious questions.

Nearly 80 per cent of Scotland is agricultural land of some sort; we have to use it in a way that will bring well-being to our rural communities and which will protect and enhance the environment. We have to grow food—we should grow it locally and the people who grow and produce it should get good prices for it. Public procurement must support local production. At the Environment and Rural Development Committee recently, neither Ross Finnie nor the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning were able to tell us how public procurement could be used to support local production. Surely there exists in the Executive expertise in finding ways of writing contracts that support local farmers and growers, but which would still be European Union compliant.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Is the member aware that the Welsh Assembly includes in its contracts conditions such as “Potatoes must have been harvested in the 24 hours before delivery”, which promotes the use of locally sourced products? Could that be done in Scotland?

Maureen Macmillan: I am aware of that—it was one of the possibilities that was raised in the Environment and Rural Development Committee. To put the emphasis on freshness might not be enough, however, so we have to think of other approaches. One of the witnesses at the recent inquiry into supermarkets said that “local” should mean Scotland-wide and should not just apply to a small area.

Farmers need to know that they have markets for their produce. They need to be able to keep up to date with consumer demand and to work co-operatively with processors and retailers, but co-operative working has been difficult to achieve. As we have heard, there are issues about how the food-supply chain operates and where exactly the money sticks in that chain, but there are also issues to do with co-operation between producers and processors. We appreciate that that problem cannot be solved by the Scottish Executive either, and that it is a matter for the Office of Fair Trading, but we have to work with our colleagues in the United Kingdom Government to put pressure on the OFT to address it. I note the Executive's commitment on that.

I welcome, too, the commitment to encourage innovation and new product development. Farmers will have to be proactive and to work with one another. I am interested to see the proposals for an internet information portal for farmers, processors and so on. Internet sites are already being set up locally to connect producers with local shops and hotels. I would like to see that practice widened.

Support for diversification will be crucial for successful rural development. I welcome the inclusion of energy crops and biomass in the section of the document on rural development. I look forward to the swift development of policy in that, not all of which is in the gift of the Executive. Agriculture policy can play a key role in mitigating the effects of climate change, for example by making it worth farmers' while to invest in woodland. Growing woodland is a long-term commitment rather than a cash crop, but it has benefits that go beyond the provision of biomass; for example, there is potential for benefits to leisure and tourism. I would be interested to hear how the minister will encourage farmers to invest for the long term in woodland. Can that be done through land management contracts?

Land management contracts could be used boldly and flexibly to encourage farmers to embrace new ways of working. I am still waiting to hear whether the Executive will use those contracts to encourage farmers to restore wetlands to their original purpose of acting like sponges when rivers flood. That has been done on the Spey, but many other rivers could benefit from it—the Tay is a good example. As climate change progresses, flooding will be more prevalent and we will need such schemes. How are farmers to be encouraged to go down that road?

Protection and restoration of the environment are as important as—but not more important than—the social and economic dimensions of agriculture. Farmers like to think that they have always been the guardians of the countryside, but that is not necessarily true. Some farming practices have damaged the environment in the past. I hope that such practices are left firmly in the past.

The vision in the strategy is one to which we can all sign up and one that I believe will lead to sustainable farming and crofting, and to a sustainable wider rural community.

15:31

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Agriculture is an industry that has to be assessed for the long term so that we can determine the impact of particular changes and circumstances and develop a comprehensive picture of its prospects.

I will begin by talking about the industry in my constituency in the past 10 years. When I was elected to Westminster in 1997, the agriculture sector in my constituency was in a perilous situation in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of BSE. That, coupled with the outbreak of foot-and-mouth in parts of Scotland in 2001, meant that the prospects for the sector were poor.

I am glad that, from carrying out the long-term review, we can say that there are a number of points about which we can be more optimistic. The minister was right to speak on behalf of the whole Parliament about the impact of the lifting of the beef export ban and how that improves the prospects for Scottish agriculture. We have to consider carefully the issues that are of concern, but there are also issues about which we can be slightly more optimistic.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): Given that veal crates are on the verge of being made illegal throughout Europe, and given the much-improved conditions of transport, does the member agree that it is equally important that we try to reopen the live export market, which would bring huge financial benefits to the dairy sector, just as the beef sector has benefited from yesterday's announcement?

Mr Swinney: Mr Fergusson makes a fair point. Obviously, however, the animal-welfare issues have to be properly assessed and considered.

In considering the long-term perspective, to which the agricultural strategy document refers, we have to be aware of what has happened to agriculture in the past 10 years. The document states that over the past five years there has been an increase of about 40 per cent in income from farming. However, in the past 10 years, total income from farming in Scotland has fallen by 50.3 per cent. I see that members are questioning the figures that I have given: I state for the record that in 1995 total income from farming in Scotland was £878 million and in 2005 it was £436 million. There has therefore been a 50.3 per cent decline in real terms in total income from farming. That is the context of what has happened to the industry over the past 10 years.

I urge ministers to do all that they can to reduce cost burdens on the industry, which is having to deal with a host of cost burdens while trying to remain afloat. Producers in my constituency tell me that the cost of fuel for agricultural vehicles is rising by between 40 and 50 per cent. Electricity costs are rising—as they are for most people—by about 30 per cent, as are fertiliser costs. There are significant increases that are not matched by increases in income through producer prices, which will undermine the total income from farming in the period ahead. I urge ministers to minimise the additional burdens that they put on farming, which might impact on costs.

I turn to regulation. In an intervention on the minister, I raised some of the practical issues that are involved in the measures that the Government is to introduce in translating the European Union water framework directive into domestic legislation. Farmers want to co-operate with the Government in the process of compliance with the

directive, but as things stand, they do not have access to the information that will allow them to complete the forms that they need to use in the application process. The deadline for applications is 31 March, but as at today—9 March—farmers do not yet have the information. Whatever their walk of life, people are entitled to reasonable time in which to access information that is critical to their needs. I urge ministers to publish speedily the documentation and to ensure that it is made available to farmers. That is only one example of the increased regulatory burden on farmers

Already in the debate, the minister has discussed supermarkets and their dominance in the market: I welcome the announcement that the Office of Fair Trading has made today that it is to examine the issue. A detailed interrogation of the food-supply chain is needed if we are to guarantee that producers—who are largely being made to carry the can in this regard—are given a much fairer and better deal than they have been given to date. I urge ministers to look carefully at the way in which costs and regulation are treated, the aim of which should be to minimise cost burdens. I encourage ministers to operate with zeal in assisting farmers to strengthen their position in the supply chain and in marketing Scottish produce.

Before I close, I have one point of irritation to raise on the new regime. Maureen Macmillan also mentioned it. I refer to the single farm payment regime. I am glad that payments are now being made and that they are producing a bit of stability for people in the industry. However, one of the points of irritation that I have with the new regime is that farmers who have left the industry are able to claim single farm payments even if they rent only a very small piece of largely unproductive land. That practice is going on in my constituency and is prejudicing the abilities of good people to expand their agricultural enterprises. They cannot do so because the single farm payments are being held by people who are no longer involved in agriculture. In one constituency case—with which the minister is very familiar—two individuals who are in receipt of the single farm payment live in Canada and South Africa. It is an absolute obscenity that money is being spent in this fashion and that good and decent people who want to make a living and to build our rural communities cannot do so because the money that they need is going out of the country. I hope that the minister will do everything in his power to bring that obscenity to an end.

15:38

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I congratulate the minister on his achievements and on his efforts in getting the beef ban lifted. The minister was halfway through his

speech before he mentioned the lifting of the ban; until that moment, I thought that he had been overcome by a bout of shyness and reticence on the subject.

The reality is that we will never get back to the tonnage that we used to export a decade ago. We managed to export so much beef at the time partly because of the weakness of sterling under the then Tory Government. That said, the lifting of the ban has given a tremendous psychological boost to the industry: the tonnage may not be great, but the lifting of the ban is no less important.

A decade has passed since the doors banged shut. Throughout the intervening period, the perception abroad was that there was something wrong with Scottish beef. We knew that that was not true, but it still became the perception. The ban was not lifted not because of any question about the quality of the product but because of political manoeuvring and machinations abroad.

I also congratulate the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department on getting a large percentage of the single farm payments out to farmers. We are well ahead of the position in England. I share John Swinney's concern about the money that is being lost to productive farming. I am in the strange position of having two brothers who have retired from farming, one of whom is getting the single farm payment while the other, who retired two years earlier, gets not a penny. The single farm payment is causing a family problem for me.

Before I proceed, I want to say to Stewart Stevenson that what he said about the potatoes that the Welsh parliamentarians eat being harvested 24 hours before they were eaten is total mince. Stewart Stevenson is a former pupil of Bell Baxter high school, so he should have been taught that if potatoes are not lifted by the end of October they will freeze or become waterlogged. Unless the National Assembly for Wales does without potatoes from the end of October until May, Stewart Stevenson's information is wrong.

I think that I am the only person present—apart from the minister—who attended the official launch of the Executive's forward strategy for Scottish agriculture in 2001. At that time, farmers were still receiving production subsidies and the reform of the common agricultural policy was far from complete. In that context, the strategy document set out a radical agenda for the future of what was, and still is, one of Scotland's largest industries. The launch generated comment in the agricultural press because the photomontage of Scottish agricultural products on the document's cover showed a pig, not in a field or a sty, but against a blue background, which led one cynical journalist to wonder whether it was supposed to represent pigs flying.

Five years later, it is obvious that pigs do not fly in the Scottish agricultural economy and that financial rewards have to be earned in the marketplace. Some sectors that were traditionally outside the support system have received a return from the marketplace for many years: the soft fruit, potato, poultry and pig sectors have long known about the demands of exacting customers, especially supermarkets.

I agree with John Swinney that the increased costs of fuel and fertiliser are a big issue for agriculture. People who are used to working in a market economy are suddenly facing increased costs of production but can do nothing about that.

Richard Lochhead: The member mentioned higher transportation costs. Does he agree that one of the beauties of growing energy crops is that farmers might become self-sufficient in their energy needs in a few years' time?

Mr Arbuckle: The Executive's strategy document mentions energy crops. There is support for biofuel crops.

Traditional sectors such as beef, lamb and cereals have taken more time to change from the old system of subsidies to the new one. Currently, many farms' returns are lower than their costs of production. However, the minister was right when he told the National Farmers Union Scotland last week that the top 25 per cent of the sector is doing well and is operating on the plus side of the balance sheet. That is important. As the minister said, we must raise standards. It is inevitable that the changes that the industry is experiencing will cause pain. Those who are less able are leaving the industry, perhaps at a higher rate than is generally known.

Change is on the way and it will be helped by the recommendations in the strategy document. The monitor farms initiative, which the minister mentioned, allows neighbours openly to compare their efforts and to identify areas in which they can trim costs. The NFUS was right yesterday to support the strategy document's call for more and better communication within the industry. I am pleased that the Executive wants to promote the production of green energy crops—I agree with Richard Lochhead on that. Scottish farmers would readily support a biodiesel initiative and the forestry industry is equally enthusiastic about biofuel.

The strategy document says that a quarter of farms in Scotland generate an income from sources outwith crop production. Such diversification is welcome.

The industry faces hurdles, such as supply to the big supermarkets that have massive purchasing power. I am glad that the Executive promotes collaborative supply chains to achieve

sustainable contracts for primary producers and I welcome the minister's news that the OFT has taken up the issue.

I agree with John Swinney that bureaucracy is a bugbear for farmers. The bureaucracy that is associated with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's implementation of the European water framework directive is a particular problem. I am glad that there has been a shift of position from the approach that SEPA first proposed—the question to whom credit is due for that is irrelevant—but further moves are required to bring the approach into the realms of common sense.

If we in Scotland want a successful and enterprising agriculture industry, we must help it to achieve that by ensuring that it is not overly burdened by bums. I support the proposals in the "Next Steps" document.

15:45

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): It is interesting to follow what sounded like a winding-up speech, even though we are not yet at that stage of the debate. As a former farmer—I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests in that regard—I welcome every opportunity to discuss agriculture in Parliament. It is more of a pleasure to do so following yesterday's joyous news that the beef export ban has at last been lifted and today's news that the OFT is to reopen its investigation into supermarket activity. Those are two rare pieces of good news for an industry that is desperately in need of more—it has been agonisingly short of good news in recent years.

As our amendment states, the aspirations that are set out in the updated forward strategy document are hard to disagree with. However, we also highlight the reality in the farming world that there is despondency and uncertainty about the present and future prospects for agriculture, which are at a level such as I have never witnessed. The situation has been brought about by a lack of profitability in almost every sector. On that subject, the document is mischievously devious. It trumpets the fact that, since 2000, net farm income has risen by 202 per cent, but the truth is that a 202 per cent rise from practically nothing equates to net farm income in 2004-05 of just £13,122. According to the strategy, net farm income

"measures the level of return to the farmer and spouse for their manual and managerial labour".

A return of £13,122 is pretty scant reward for that input and, although it may be 202 per cent up on the 2000 figure, it is down 11 per cent on the previous year. That points to the real damage to

the rural economy, which continues to deteriorate under the Scottish Executive.

Mr Arbuckle: Will Mr Fergusson take an intervention?

Alex Fergusson: I do not think so. Mr Arbuckle has just spoken, and very well.

As I have said before and will no doubt say again, when a farmer stops spending, he is the last to suffer, because all the suppliers, tradesmen and contractors who depend on him suffer first. When they do not get work, the economic chill enters the village shop, pub, post office and local microbusinesses, which contribute greatly to the rural economy. That is why I agree totally with the second bullet point of the vision on page 1 of the strategy document, which is that the farming industry should be

“a major driver in sustaining rural development”

and in

“helping rural communities prosper”.

That is exactly right, but the problem is that practitioners in the industry are not being made to feel that they are major drivers of anything; they are too busy trying to ensure that they do not make mistakes when they fill in the massive array of forms to which members have referred. I note in passing that, although the Executive established a committee to cut red tape and bureaucracy, it has in fact presided over a massive increase in it.

Farmers must concentrate on filling in forms, because if they make the tiniest mistake in doing so, they are penalised ferociously. The imposition of massive penalties, the levels of which grossly outweigh the supposed crime that has been committed, has done more to undermine farming morale than any strategy can ever correct. The Environment and Rural Affairs Department has stooped pretty low lately in withholding, until the farmers have paid the penalties, single farm payments from farmers who are appealing such penalties. None of that leaves any farmer feeling that their political masters believe that he or she has a major role in driving the rural economy. Farmers are too concerned with surviving to be driving.

In an effort to be positive, which I always try to be, I will in my remaining time focus on one little ray of sunshine in the strategy. Action point 12 refers to the planning to succeed initiative, which was one of the few positive things to emerge from the foot-and-mouth disease disaster of 2001. It should be a matter of great concern to all members that the average age of farm managers is 58 in Dumfries and Galloway and 56 in Scotland. The planning to succeed initiative was developed by Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway along with the original farm business

steering group in order to encourage more young people to take effective management roles in the industry and to drive it forward.

The initiative has been successful and I welcome the plan to expand it, but I ask the minister whether its remit could be expanded to include rural business leadership courses. Last Tuesday, I hosted a visit to Holyrood by representatives of a south of Scotland rural leadership pilot project, which is aimed at developing leadership skills in the rural community. It aims to equip future leaders with a set of leadership tools that are designed to help rural businesses to lead the way to success and to enable them to continue to contribute to the local economy. It is based on an American model that has enjoyed considerable success. Although it is not wholly agriculture related, I believe that it would sit well within the planning to succeed programme. I hope that the minister will consider that possibility.

I take this opportunity to put on record my thanks to the cross-party group of MSPs who spoke to the group of people who came to Parliament and gave of their time to make the day valuable.

The aspirations of the strategy are fine—no one is arguing with them—but will they deliver to the agriculture industry the clear and decisive pointer that it desperately needs? I rather doubt it. The document is subtitled “Next Steps”. Let us hope that those steps are in a forward direction for the sake of our agriculture industry, which remains the single most important driver of our rural economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I call Alasdair Morgan, to be followed by Eleanor Scott. Sorry—I meant Alasdair Morrison. I was just testing you, Alasdair.

15:50

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): I accept your apology, Presiding Officer.

This has been an important seven-day period for all who are involved with agriculture in Scotland. Last Friday, the strategy document that is under discussion today was published, as was the Crofting Reform etc Bill, which was launched by Rhona Brankin in Inverness. Yesterday, as other members have mentioned, we learned that the 10-year export ban on Scottish beef has been lifted. That is a welcome, although overdue, announcement. I am sure that Ross Finnie, Rhona Brankin and the department will do their utmost to assist farmers and crofters to reclaim lost markets and exploit new ones. It is especially good news for those who used to be involved in the live trade with European countries. I agreed with Alex Fergusson's intervention on John Swinney's speech.

Speaking of John Swinney, I cannot recall the last time that I applauded a John Swinney speech. Indeed, I cannot recall ever applauding a John Swinney speech; however, I applaud the points that he made in relation to the single farm payments being given to people for non-activity in agriculture. That nonsense is amplified when money is being wired across continents—I think that he mentioned Canada and South Africa. I assume that both ministers are addressing that issue as a matter of urgency.

Alex Fergusson: Does Alasdair Morrison not see that there is a case for single farm payments being made to some farmers who are of an age and need to retire? Such payments would allow them to remain on holdings where they may have lived all their lives and enable young entrepreneurs to take over the tenancy of their farms at a low rent, thus expanding their businesses.

Mr Morrison: Although that is a valid observation, it is not the point that John Swinney raised. I am sure that both ministers are aware of those issues.

Yesterday's announcement was important for crofters who sold pedigree cattle at excellent prices to buyers throughout the European Union. With some legal formalities to be finalised, I hope that resource and political capital will be put at the disposal of those who wish to resume trading across the continent.

I want to mention a few matters of importance to the thousands of crofters who live in the Western Isles. One of the phenomenal success stories of agricultural support was undoubtedly the crofters building grants and loans scheme, which provided support to enable many families to build their own homes. The scheme ensured that people continued to live and work in the crofting counties. It was recently revised, and I was pleased to learn from Rhona Brankin that, in the past year, 88 individuals have secured a grant of £22,000 to build homes on crofts. I hope that ministers and the department are monitoring closely how that system of support is working.

I serve notice of the fact that, when the system is formally reviewed in January next year, I will press for an uplift in the amounts that are available to crofters and their families. The level of support has certainly not been tracking the rise in building costs—a rise that is far more pronounced the further people are from large centres of population. I hope that the review of the croft house grant scheme will also examine the issue of the loan that used to be a feature of the old system. I know that the minister will have an open mind when it comes to the review, and I have served notice of what my contribution will be to that review in the early part of next year.

Last Friday, in Inverness, Rhona Brankin published the Crofting Reform etc Bill. I am delighted to serve on the committee that has been charged with examining the bill. Yesterday, at the Environment and Rural Development Committee, we discussed how, when and where we will hold our evidence-taking sessions. Many welcome and needed changes are proposed in the bill. Regrettably, however, in spite of repeated attempts to secure changes to the principal area of contention—allowing a free market in croft tenancies—the bill, as drafted, proposes that we legislate to allow just that: a free-for-all. Like any other piece of land, crofts will be bought by and sold to the highest bidder.

I have no doubt that the proposal to allow a free market in croft tenancies will be the most contentious aspect of the bill that we will debate over the next few months. It will be not only the focal point of my efforts; it will be the issue that will ultimately determine how I vote on the bill. I can assure the ministers that I will not be party to, or involve myself in any way, shape or fashion in, the promotion of legislation that would dismantle a system that has protected the interests of crofters and families for generations—a system that has helped underpin many of the villages and communities that I represent.

After Labour came into government in 1997, a green paper was prepared that outlined what was needed to reform the system of land ownership here in Scotland. After this Parliament was established, we were to develop that document and place on the statute book legislation that generations of highland socialists had campaigned for. However, the first draft of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill that we discussed bore little resemblance to the document that had been left to us by Labour ministers in the then Scottish Office. It had been sanitised by cautious and unsympathetic civil servants. It took months to restore to the bill the radicalism that had featured in the document that had been produced by the ministers, Brian Wilson and Calum Macdonald. However, we restored that radicalism, and we ensured that sound legislation was passed.

Why do I make that historical footnote? Because I believe that the same forces are at work in relation to the Crofting Reform etc Bill as were at work in the abortive attempts to sanitise the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. Some people in the civil service obviously do not understand, and do not want to understand, what the crofting system is. In their eyes, it is an irritant.

It will come as no surprise to both ministers that this MSP will not sit idly and nod in agreement to proposals that will destroy our precious crofting heritage. I am looking forward to engaging positively with Rhona Brankin in both formal and

informal committee sessions. I am also looking forward to engaging with people who will help inform and, ultimately, transform, the Crofting Reform etc Bill that is now before us. Once that job is done, we will genuinely have a forward strategy for agriculture and a forward strategy for the future generations who will continue to live and work in the crofting counties.

15:57

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): As other members have said, there is little to disagree with among the aims of the strategy document. It is a pity, however, that those aims are not backed up by targets or firm commitments. The document is not a full review of the Executive's agriculture strategy: it was produced by the agriculture strategy group and was not consulted on more widely. I will be interested to hear whether the Executive intends at some point to conduct a full review.

I recognise that the minister must make difficult choices, particularly with respect to agri-environment schemes. He has already made it clear in response to questions that if the organic aid scheme runs out of money, which seems likely judging by the budget as it is currently presented, he will top it up from the rural stewardship scheme. I am pleased that the minister has pledged to meet any commitment to the organic sector, but I note that the RSS has been successful in delivering environmental goods in many areas. I would be concerned if that scheme ended up being underfunded.

We have heard from the minister today about the increase in applications. If there are two, competing, demand-led schemes, that seems to be a recipe for disappointment. That highlights the problem with the current subsidy arrangements. I argue that the single farm payment delivers little in terms of public good. The only stipulation—

“keeping land in good agricultural and environmental condition”—

merely avoids deterioration. The historical basis on which the single farm payment was decided will become untenable the further we get from the reference year. I hope that, sooner rather than later, we will move to a different system, which reflects current needs and adequately funds the pillar 2 measures that are so important for maintaining our landscape and biodiversity.

Like everyone else here, I want a sustainable future for our farming industry. Where political support and leadership are needed, I think the Scottish Executive should provide it. I think it is clear—even the Office of Fair Trading seems to be admitting this at last, to judge from today's announcement—that there is a gross imbalance of

power between producers and some sections of the market. I do not believe that the Scottish Executive has fought hard enough for farmers in that respect, and I look forward to the Executive's response to the Environment and Rural Development Committee's inquiry on the subject.

The CAP reforms were supposed to encourage farmers to produce for the market. I believe that the Scottish Executive has a role to play in directing that market where it can. It could do much more in the way of public procurement to ensure a market for high-quality local produce. Public bodies should be encouraged to source local produce where possible, and the Executive should give a clear lead on that.

The report has a section on sustainable development, which is at least a start. Under the sub-heading “Using sound science”, the report mentions the need to take into account the precautionary principle. I agree with that, but I was given cause for concern by the recent report that the First Minister's office had issued a letter that appears to concur with the UK's recent shift on terminator technology. Such a shift threatens to undermine what has, since 2000, been a global moratorium on this manifestation of genetic modification. That is a retrograde step.

A system of organic production would deliver better than any other the objectives that are laid out in “The Vision” section at the start of the document. On producing food for the market, the demand for organic produce is growing and our producers should be able to reap the benefits of that. On sustaining rural development, organic production employs more people and keeps people on the land and in our rural communities. On the protection and enhancement of the environment, organic farming is about much more than just avoiding toxic chemicals as it means truly sustainable stewardship. On contributing to animal and human health and welfare, organic systems have stringent welfare standards for animals and they do not involve human handling of potentially dangerous chemicals.

With the lifting of the beef export ban, today is an auspicious day for this debate, but let us not forget that the whole sorry BSE episode was fuelled by practices that would be unthinkable under an organic regime. The strategy document envisions an industry that is keen to embrace change and market opportunities, but the opportunities already exist for organic farming. We just need the supports in place to get people through the conversion process so that they can reach the stage at which they can reap the full benefits. We need not just direct organic aid support for farmers but more investment in infrastructure, such as small local abattoirs.

I will conclude with a general point. I do not believe that our farming subsidies can continue as

they are, but the forward strategy's objectives could be achieved by making better use of the money so that we invest much more in rural infrastructure and in processing and marketing. If our rural areas are to thrive, they need to have much more going on than primary production. Some of the added-value activities need to take place close to where the food is produced so that employment is created that will underpin our rural communities.

16:02

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Perhaps I may respond to Mr Arbuckle's comments at the outset. I confess that one of my sins of omission as a pupil at Bell Baxter high school was my failure to cross the road to Elmwood College for the course on potato roguing, which would have equipped my purse with sufficient money to do more things than I was able to do as someone who could howk but could not rogue. I stand corrected by Mr Arbuckle who is a fellow Bell Baxter alumnus—as is Mr Smith who represents that part of Fife.

I draw attention to my entry in the register of interests.

It must be acknowledged that farming practice is affected by nature as well as by the actions of the Scottish ministers and others in other jurisdictions. When I left home in rural Banffshire on Monday, the snow was above my eyeline on both sides of the road as I sat in the driving seat of the four-by-four. The vehicle in front, which had had to be scraped off the edge of a snowdrift, had lost its front bumper and number plate. But the first of the season's lambs were already in the fields. Not everything is under the control of the minister, so I will not attempt to blame him any more than farmers would for some things that directly and critically affect farming, although the rules that come from other jurisdictions can often hit us much harder.

Whereas weather changes are part of the usual cycle of things, the rules that come from the minister and from other jurisdictions—no matter how daft those rules might be—seem to be incapable of being dislodged. That point is illustrated by an e-mail communication that I received last night at 6.43 pm. The e-mail highlights the difficulties that one farmer in my constituency is experiencing.

Before I read the e-mail and put the matter that it contains to the minister, I draw his attention to the forward strategy's action number 21, which states that the Executive will

"Encourage farmers to make greater use of electronic information sources and on-line facilities for communication with SEERAD."

The fact that this correspondence was delivered by e-mail perhaps illustrates the rather different characteristics of broadband in rural areas.

I will read from the e-mail. I have, of course, passed a copy to the minister. I hope that, when he puts a response on the record, it will not be as intemperate as the one he gave me in the coffee lounge. Anyway, the farmer writes:

"The chieels at DEFRA ur suddenly and maist unexpectedly siccin tae withdraa the eese o' Cypermetherin sheep dip. He is awaar that there micht huv been a wee bit o' a clamjaffrey fin some o't fun' its wye intae a wee bit burnie in Wales - bit that did'na get a' the wye there fae the Buchan - as ye micht hiv jelused fur yersel. The scunner is that there is a gye shortage o' alternative efficacious medicaments for the dousing o' scabby yowes - the ither being organo-phosphates and they're real coorse buggers - far waar nor cypermetherin."

I will leave a bit out there. [Laughter.] He continues:

"there's nae muckle by wye o' chemist billies tryin tae concoct ither options forbye - which leaves injectin' - bit aat's rael fichery syne, an nae muckle eese uvva."

He goes on to say that he

"his nae doot ataa that Ross Funnie 'ill nae be ower hard tae persuade that withdraan cypermetherin wis a gey ill-tricket thing tae dae - in fact, it wis doonright feel".

I hope that the minister will be able to respond in the appropriate way later in the debate, or perhaps the Highland origins of the deputy minister will allow her to do so. Of course, that is precisely the sort of language that farmers use in their local dialect when something happens out of the blue, intemperately and without consultation. That happens far too often.

Ted Brocklebank made the valid point that the median age of farmers is now 60—an age at which they will receive their bus pass from the Executive, which will be a blessed relief, I am sure. That illustrates the big problem with getting youngsters into farming and the significant barriers that prevent young people from working in the industry. I know that the minister agrees that the age profile of the agriculture industry is simply far too high.

Other countries have schemes to help new entrants to go into farming. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland launched such a scheme on 5 June 2005. It supports the establishment of young farmers under 40 by providing an interest rate subsidy on loans. In my submission to the rural development consultation, I made the point that the minister has an opportunity to address the age profile of the agriculture industry in Scotland. I hope that the matter is still on the agenda, notwithstanding the fact that no scheme has been introduced yet.

The issue of local produce should undoubtedly be mentioned again. The Executive, in its many arms, buys a lot of food. It buys food for civil service canteens and for the 7,000 prisoners whom it houses. It can make a significant contribution both financially and by setting an example. It can show other institutions and commercial ventures that there is value in buying locally. After all, as commercial operations, the supermarkets can hardly be criticised for not buying locally and not supporting local suppliers if the Government does not do that. The minister should address that point in his future deliberations.

Agriculture continues to be at the core of the local economy in much of Scotland. Rural areas are defined as local authority areas where the population is less than one person per hectare. In those areas, agriculture accounts for 5 per cent of the economy, but, of course, many hamlets and small villages depend on agriculture for their survival. Too many communities become commuter shells or holiday-home shells when people have no realistic opportunity to work in agriculture. That affects agricultural engineers, veterinarians, the smithy, the mart staff and so on.

Support for agriculture is vital. It will preserve rural life, which many people who live in towns value highly. It is their countryside as well as the countryside of farmers, but the countryside of people in towns will not exist in a form that they recognise and appreciate unless we support farmers to the maximum degree. I hope that the amendment in my colleague's name will attract widespread support come decision time and I look forward to hearing more about the Executive's response to cypermethrin.

16:11

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I wonder what the Doric word for cypermethrin is—I do not think that there is a Doric word for it.

The original document "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" was welcome and the updated "Next Steps" document has been equally welcome, particularly because farming is at a threshold. Agriculture has come through really hard times—the nadir was perhaps foot-and-mouth, but the industry has recovered from that low point.

Until recently, the industry operated largely in an externally applied and pretty rigid framework, but those constraints have gone. Freedom is heady stuff, but it is pretty scary, too. The future is opening out ahead with all sorts of potential and opportunity, but exploiting that potential and grasping those opportunities require confidence and the courage of one's convictions. The single

farm payment provides a financial safety net, but that will not last for ever, as the industry realises. The single farm payment needs to be used to fund transition into and out of the industry and transition into and out of different sectors, crops and activities.

At one time, society asked farmers simply to be food producers. They are now asked to fulfil a much wider and more complex role—as custodians of the countryside and as the backbone and foundation of the rural economy, which contributes hugely to the economy as a whole.

The occasion of the debate is the update to the agriculture strategy, which was launched last week and which the NFUS welcomed. I will pick out some of the comments that John Kinnaird made. First, he welcomed the Executive's commitment

"to work with UK authorities to address competition issues".

He has pinpointed the crux of the matter. Much concern is felt about inequities in the food supply chain. The issues are complex, as Ross Finnie is right to say. There is no use in pointing the finger at one link in the chain; it is not that easy. However, one body has the remit and the authority to investigate and sort out such issues—it is the Office of Fair Trading, which has bottled it. If the OFT is now to get to grips with delivering on its responsibilities, I am delighted to hear it.

John Kinnaird mentioned environmental regulation. I have been dismayed by how regulations under the water framework directive have been applied, at least initially. The water framework directive can deliver huge benefit, but that depends on all the stakeholders working together constructively. I sincerely hope that the process will recover from a less-than-constructive episode.

John Kinnaird also highlighted the importance of communication, which includes matters that have been mentioned, such as proper labelling and telling the public that they must look for and interpret those labels. Communication means educating people about their food, about how farming works and about the fact that the countryside is a workplace. If people are to access the countryside, they must do so responsibly.

Communication is about sharing best practice. On that subject, it is instructive to look behind the averages when discussing farm incomes. The difference in performance between the best and the worst is telling. The best show what can be done; the less good must be helped to improve to reach the standards of the best.

Climate change concerns all of us, but the resources that are deployed to combat it can offer farmers good opportunities. Some of those

opportunities have already been rehearsed in the debate. Fuel crops and local energy projects represent economic opportunities that can offer good returns.

Increased access to the countryside, especially as core path networks develop, means that there will be many more people in the countryside who should be seen as customers who need services and business opportunities. The general public's increased awareness of food mile issues will deliver more local customers and more support for farmers markets and will perhaps lead to more people checking labels of products on supermarket shelves. Such awareness will also put pressure on the public sector to brush up its procurement practices.

"A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps" has been widely welcomed, and its action points will be helpful and productive. Again I quote John Kinnaird, who said:

"It is a time of significant change for Scottish agriculture, which presents both challenges and opportunities."

The strategy offers help in finding the way forward.

16:16

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I must begin by declaring my interests. I am a farmer, a council member of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, a regional committee member of the Moredun Research Institute, a member of the National Farmers Union and chairman of Ayrshire Farmers Market Ltd.

Ross Finnie: And a structural engineer, too.

John Scott: I thank Ross Finnie. I made a mistake.

It is important to welcome the lifting of the beef export ban, as other members have done. That is the best news that our beleaguered industry has received for a long time. I also welcome the latest Office of Fair Trading inquiry into supermarkets.

As the minister said, it is almost 10 years to the day since BSE struck in 1996. The price of fat cattle with market-ready beef has not returned to its 1995-96 levels in that time. I ask the minister what other industry in Scotland could survive in the face of constantly rising costs and regulation with incomes that are lower than they were 10 years ago. The answer is that no industry could and none has done so in that time. Regrettably, prices are not depressed only in the beef sector; dairy farmers are being forced from the industry in droves and sheep farming incomes are horrifically low. What is to be done?

First, the Government must note that, as a result of declining agricultural production, self-sufficiency in United Kingdom food production is now heading

back to a level of 70 per cent, having peaked in 1984 at 82.6 per cent—I am sure that the minister is aware that it peaked at that level. That is making the country strategically vulnerable. Recently, we have seen what will happen to gas prices when the ability to produce our own gas runs out. I have huge concerns about the UK's declining ability to sustain the self-sufficiency in food production that there last was in the 1930s—I suspect that the minister is not quite old enough to remember that.

That said, I welcome in principle the Government's next steps strategy and its 22-point action plan. I accept that if all the action points were implemented, the industry would thrive and be prosperous. However, it is regrettable that many of the action points form little more than a well-intentioned wish list. Again, I ask the minister what is to be done. It is regrettable that the industry is slowly disintegrating, on his watch and before his eyes, and that he is apparently powerless to help significantly from the sidelines, notwithstanding the upbeat and optimistic tone of "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps".

Before the minister makes a possibly good-natured intervention, it is only fair to say what should be done and to talk about what is already happening to some extent. First, farmers and landowners must take a critical look at the likely ability of their businesses to continue with declining incomes. Such evaluation needs to assess methodically all the unused attributes of the land, the geographical location, the family that is involved and the people who farm the land. Self-sufficiency—which is ever the expected way of life of the farming and rural communities—must increase while Governments casually reduce support. That means finding other sources of income to sustain businesses that are currently subsisting on an average net farm income of £13,000 per holding.

Mr Arbuckle: Is the member aware that that net farm income figure includes rental? The majority of farmers are owner-occupiers and do not pay rental, so the figure does not indicate the true picture.

John Scott: I thank Mr Arbuckle for his helpful intervention. Is he aware that net farm incomes are no higher today than they were 10 years ago?

Farmers markets, catering and, indeed, politics have helped me to diversify. Every family that is left in mainstream farming has a duty to future generations to see now where other income streams can be found. In these times of adversity, co-operation has a huge role to play in supporting people with entrepreneurial and business ideas, so that they can take them further, initially often on a part-time basis, with neighbours and other like-minded people. Farmers markets are the best and

most recent example of such co-operation. We now need to consider the next step in developing such markets. In Ayrshire, a farm shop has just been opened at Auchincruive. I understand that it is the first farm shop to be operated and run by a farmers market co-operative.

Although farmers markets have been a huge success, as yet they are only a small part of the answer. Each farming business must work out for itself, perhaps with the help of advisers, what the critical path to sustainability will be. A different solution will be arrived at for each farming unit. Such solutions will range from direct selling, adding value locally and environmental enhancement to moving off the farm for part-time work. There is no point in my taking time to enumerate more of the possible opportunities, because they are infinite. However, it is important that the minister plays a role in facilitating the realisation of those ideas, which will need to be developed to allow future generations of farmers to survive.

At the same time, it is important that the unique skill set of farmers and farm workers is maintained, should the country again need to increase food production from its own resources. We must not lose that strategic capability, as we are currently in danger of doing because of the exodus of young people from the land and the aging profile of those who remain. In the meantime, Government must support unique and tailor-made diversification packages. I hope that the minister will consider putting further appropriate mechanisms and resources in place to do so. If the minister actively sells his willingness to help in that regard, farmers will respond positively. Active engagement in the process by farmers and Government is vital. The minister is uniquely placed to drive forward an enhanced diversification agenda, which is the best way of describing what I see as one of the critical paths to industry survival.

Local food procurement, which Maureen Macmillan discussed, needs to be developed further. The minister and his officials are well aware of my interest in developing the concept. That is now a matter of urgency, because every day lost is a market opportunity lost in an industry that is fighting for survival and is desperate to find outlets other than commodity selling to supermarkets.

I urge Parliament to support the Conservative amendment, which, as one would expect, offers the only reasonable way forward for Scottish agriculture.

16:24

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I hope that the minister has got the message that

Labour members support the new strategy. We welcomed its publication last week, want it to be implemented and want opportunities to be brought to farming and rural communities in Scotland.

Ross Finnie started his speech by talking about the importance of a healthy, sustainable agricultural community for the whole of rural Scotland. We concur with that view. We must recognise and acknowledge that uncertain times are ahead for many farming communities, but I hope that the document provides a clear framework of policy support from this Executive for the farming communities. It is important to put that on the record at the start, because I was disappointed by the tone of the nationalist and Tory amendments, and by the tone of some of their speeches; I will not say all their speeches, because positive and constructive remarks have been made by members on both sides of the chamber.

I was surprised by the lack of reference—particularly by the nationalists—to consumers. Little reference was made to consumers, yet they are the people who must be persuaded to buy our farmers' produce. I was also surprised that so little reference was made to developing countries around the world and to the historical unfairness of the trade agreements and subsidies that we have lived with in the west since the second world war. That historical unfairness is what is driving the CAP reform process. It is important that we understand that political process and ensure that our farmers are equipped to respond to it.

Procurement must be a central plank of the Executive's response. The Environment and Rural Development Committee raised that issue with the minister last month and his response to the committee made it clear that the Scottish Executive is beginning work on the procurement process. Seminars are being held to work with local authorities so that they can meet EU procurement rules, but we do not yet know about the results of the seminars. It is important that the minister reports back to us on the responses of those who are involved in the seminars—such as public purchasers, caterers and their customers—about the key blockages to their buying not only local produce but, as was said during the debate, Scottish produce.

There must be appropriate, practical advice from the Executive before the national health service, local authorities and, as was mentioned, the Scottish Prison Service will buy Scottish products. There is nervousness about breaking procurement rules and guidelines, so the advice must be clear and strong. I ask the minister to give a commitment this afternoon that he will come back to Parliament—be it to the committee or to the chamber—to let us know how procurement advice

and guidance is being developed. The Scottish public sector is a huge potential source for good in ensuring that we support our agriculture sector and our rural communities; I hope that we will see positive responses to the process in the future.

A strong sense of gloom and despondency came from the Tories. That tone features in the amendment and although it did not totally dominate Ted Brocklebank's speech, John Scott's speech was the gloomiest that I can remember him making in the chamber. As Nora Radcliffe said, the NFUS—the representatives of the farmers—are very positive about the strategy. They see it as an opportunity for change and as an opportunity to support the changes that the industry is going through and will have to go through in the future. I will not repeat Nora Radcliffe's comments, but it is important to make that point.

There are core messages in the agriculture strategy. It is not fair to say that, as Ted Brocklebank suggested, farmers do not know where the industry is expected to go. A clear framework is laid out in the agriculture strategy, if people work to it. The strategy is about producing food and other products for market, about seeing agriculture as a major driver in a sustainable rural economy and about how we help rural communities to ensure that agriculture remains an important industry for Scotland in the future.

I welcome the minister's announcement today that he is about to consult on the rural development strategy. I would like to see more reference in that strategy to agriculture. In particular, I would like more reference to support for agricultural diversification, for finishing at a local level, for farmers to work together to develop and market new products, and for farmers co-operatives. Farmers co-ops come up time and again at the Environment and Rural Development Committee as a key issue on which other European countries are way ahead of us. One of the disappointing facts that we came up with in our recent inquiry on the food chain was that, in the milk industry in particular, the opportunity for integrated and co-operative development is being frustrated by current rules. I hope that we see a response from the minister and from his UK colleagues on that issue.

We need to move on some issues. I did not agree with all of John Swinney's speech, but he was right to raise the unfairness in how single farm payments are currently being administered. I take Alex Fergusson's point that single farm payments must be part of the process in order to let some farmers leave the industry and encourage new farmers to arrive in the industry. I think that we would all agree on that.

John Scott: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No. I must move on.

Can it be right that there is a loophole that means that it is possible for an ex-farmer to receive single farm payments when there is no use of the farm or stewardship of it for environmental purposes? If there is such a loophole, it must be closed. There is clear support across the chamber for that.

Alex Fergusson: Will the member take a small intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, I need to move on.

Alex Fergusson: The member will enjoy it.

Sarah Boyack: That might be a pleasure that I am unwisely forgoing, but we will never know.

One issue that has been mentioned in the debate needs more emphasis. It is the process of drawing in new people and skills to the farming community. As we go through the major change that is ahead, there will be an increased emphasis on training and support for new farmers. Several colleagues around the chamber have made that point. What new markets and opportunities will be available in the future? What skills will be required to seize such opportunities?

During the recent biomass inquiry, I was struck by how many of us suggest that energy crops are a clear opportunity. The challenge of climate change is bringing such opportunities and they must be grasped. Somebody who is currently in agriculture might be thinking of converting their crops to biomass, particular biofuels and the new energy crops, and raising money for that investment, which might take three to five years to develop. However, will there be a market for them? We all talk about the fact that there will be a market. It makes sense that there will be and we need it to happen. However, there is also a need to ensure that, as part of the encouragement for farmers to take the financial risk, there is a coherent strategy for that sector of the market. We need to ensure that there are sufficiently accessible processing facilities so that we do not raise new, environmentally friendly energy crops only to produce CO₂ emissions to get the products to where they can be processed. There is a real challenge there and we must ensure that it is addressed.

Crucially, we also need a market for the end product. It would be crazy to encourage people to produce a product when we do not have a market in place for it. Again, I come back to the public sector. Parts of the public sector are clearly responding to this agenda. For example, Forestry Commission Scotland has set itself a target for the use of biofuels. Why do we not encourage other public sector organisations to do the same? Why do we not make that part of the targets across the

Executive, so that we are not just talking the talk, but thinking about how markets can practically be created? There will also be an issue about the duty that is levied. That will need a joined-up approach in Scotland and at a UK level.

The debate has been interesting, but it has perhaps been dominated a little too much by people who are involved in the process themselves. It is important that we get the views of farmers and others who are involved in the agriculture sector, but we need to make links to those who will buy the products, such as consumers—as Eleanor Scott and Nora Radcliffe rightly said—who demand high animal welfare and environmental standards and want to know from where the products come.

There is a real opportunity for our farming communities and we need to ensure that they get the support to work together to deliver. However, in discussing the forward strategy for agriculture and where we take it next, let us ensure that we have a joined-up approach that goes right across the Executive and which listens not only to what the farming community is telling us, but to what the consumers are telling us. We must ensure that we get a real market for the future. This is a challenging time for agriculture. It could also be an exciting time, but only if we seize the opportunities.

16:34

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I begin by drawing members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, where they will see that I am still a partner in my family's farming business. To add greater detail to that, it is a business that relies mainly on the dairy industry. It is also my duty, therefore, to apologise to Sarah Boyack for the fact that, as a farmer, I may well continue the doom and gloom that we have experienced so far in the debate.

There is cause for that, but not exclusively so, in the motion that lies before us. In effect, we have had two debates this afternoon: a debate on the forward strategy and a debate on the industry—an industry that unfortunately seems to be dying an untimely death. The new forward strategy document is based on a strategy that Ross Finnie, the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, has followed for a number of years. It sets out all the basic means by which the industry can be defended and can make progress. That is done against the backdrop of Executive decisions last year and the year before. In many ways, those decisions corresponded with what we were encouraging the Executive to do, which has allowed us to move our farming industry significantly closer to the marketplace than it has been for many years. However, on the darker side,

that change to market reality has coincided with a series of events that have led to what I fear may be market failure. That is why any verdict on Scotland's farming industry would have to be that, if it dies, it may have been death by misadventure.

Let us consider what the minister said in his speech. He made all the right noises. He said that farms are still very important to rural Scotland. As Sarah Boyack said, nobody in the chamber will argue with that. Farming should be the bedrock of our rural economy. Whether it is in primary production or in secondary food processing, there should always be opportunities to create jobs in rural Scotland through the farming industry.

Ross Finnie also mentioned partnership with stakeholders; the whole process that he has gone through reflects that. He wants farming to be competitive in markets; but there we find the difficulty beginning to arise. He gave us the good news that the less favoured area scheme is likely to survive the current round of negotiations. He also mentioned the rural stewardship scheme—which is something of a concern to me, because, as has happened in previous years with predecessor schemes, there is not enough money to go round.

Some in the farming industry are gravely concerned that money that is largely raised through the modulation of pillar one measures is then used in such a way that some get money back but others do not. The Executive must take steps to do what Conservatives have been asking for for many years: it must ensure that pillar two schemes can deliver the same money to the same people, but for doing radically different things. The shortfall in the funding for the scheme this year means that that has not happened. As a result, farmers will be less and less willing to accept modulation in years to come.

One of the best bits of news that we have heard for some time is the lifting of the beef export ban. However, as Andrew Arbuckle pointed out, the news is perhaps not as good as it might have been. The successful days of beef export were when the value of our currency made us strong exporters. If we are to regain that export market, it will be with one hand tied behind our backs if our current currency values continue. I therefore ask the minister to take the opportunity, either today or soon, to outline the advice and assistance that can be given to people who are seeking to establish export markets within the liberalised regime that is now available to them. That will allow us to set about restoring our markets, even if we find ourselves going up a hill in our efforts.

Members have raised subjects that are worthy of support. I liked Richard Lochhead's defence of the dairy industry—I will thank him for that every time he mentions it. In a very good speech in support of

an amendment in which I find nothing to disagree with, he spoke about regulation. John Swinney also spoke at some length about regulation. Both of them did us a service. It is time that regulation in the farming industry and in rural support mechanisms was considered very closely—especially the recent imposition of the regulation of water through SEPA.

Ted Brocklebank raised the subject of biofuel. When I go around talking to farmers, biofuel is one of the subjects that they want to talk about the most. It is not something that has been widely produced in Scotland in the past, but it is something that Scotland's farmers are ambitious to produce in future. It is important that the Executive and the minister take every opportunity to streamline the process by which support—whenever it is available—can be made available to farmers and farmers co-operatives to underpin the development of biofuel. The production of biofuel will be a major industry in future. Although it may not produce the massive profits that we would like, it will provide a welcome floor in grain and oil-seed rape markets.

I support those members who called for the return of live exports. I understand why many people disapprove of that practice but, as a young man starting out in the farming industry, my experience—which I have mentioned to members on previous occasions—was that every life was precious and that every calf that was born on the farm was to be protected. A generation later, when my own son was the same age, he took every second calf that was born round the back of the steading, shot it and buried it in a hole. If that is animal welfare, it is not the kind of animal welfare that I want to support. The reinstatement of the export of live calves is something that everyone who understands its importance will be keen to support.

The debate has been difficult and, in some respects, dark. The situation that Scottish farming faces is dangerous. We desperately need market reality. I urge the minister to take the earliest opportunity to encourage the OFT to conduct a serious examination of how our markets are working.

16:41

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Members should note my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a member of the Scottish Crofting Foundation.

It is hard to disagree with the aims of the strategy that has been presented to us today, but it is not, as some members have suggested, a policy support document; it is a set of aspirations. Policy support documents contain solutions to

problems, not just aspirations. As far as I can see, the country's hopes and wishes can be met if we travel in the direction in which the minister wants us to go, but if we are to make any progress, the Executive's approach to agriculture must have a higher profile that is reflected in ministerial activity. It should be the role of the Minister for Environment and Rural Development not to congratulate farmers and crofters on keeping going, but to put in place the supports that the farming industry needs so that it can make advances.

I am concerned that the strategy contains little discussion of how we can increase the amount of co-operation. At present, the Government gives about £300,000 to support the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society; in contrast, the Scottish Agricultural College gets around £17 million of support. There are lessons that we can learn from abroad. Farmers in Denmark, France and New Zealand cope with modern market conditions better than our farmers do because they get major Government support to create co-operatives. In the United States of America, farmers are given significant assistance to become more market oriented and are educated in how co-operatives work and can help them. There is no sign of the provision of such help in the strategy and I do not think that the detail will come along.

I am worried about the fact that a consultation will soon be held on separation distances between genetically modified crops and conventional or organic crops. The danger is that the commercial or commodity end of agriculture is being favoured over the needs and wishes of consumers.

It seems that Sarah Boyack did not pick up on some of the important points that Richard Lochhead made at the beginning of his speech about the benefits to the consumer that a stronger farming sector would bring. If she had listened, she would have realised that the Scottish National Party's interest is to ensure that a farming strategy serves local consumers—for example, by strengthening local markets. We expect the minister to take cognisance of the barriers to stronger local markets for food. Public policy should provide far more specific signals, help and incentives to meet local demand than it does at present. We need to aim produce at local markets to a greater extent. There is a need for more local processing facilities—local abattoirs were mentioned in another debate. Economies of scale hamper small producers. The expense of entering the supply chain for supermarkets does not benefit small producers, yet such producers are an essential part of what we are trying to achieve in Scotland.

A sustainable food and drink strategy for Scotland would be one that allows producers on

family farms and small farms to take part in the process and not to be cut out. It is smaller farms that are threatened by commercial farming. Talking of small farms, Alasdair Morrison mentioned the Crofting Reform etc Bill. Let us remember that the bill will deal with how crofts are organised. It will not deal with the problems that crofters face with transport, with getting winter feed at reasonable prices or with exporting their crops. It will not deal with planning issues and many other matters that crofters, like farmers, require to help them to diversify. Alasdair Morrison may criticise the bill for the danger that it might create a free market in croft tenancies, but it is high time that those who voice such criticism came up with an amendment to prevent that. Instead, we get rhetoric from some sections of the Labour Party in the Highlands against the ministers on the front bench. That division in the Labour Party is extremely marked.

There has been quite a bit of discussion about biodiesel and biomass. I reiterate the SNP's view that there is a lot of set-aside land—and a lot of agricultural land—in the north-east of Scotland, where we could be growing a lot more. As Richard Lochhead pointed out, if we covered all the set-aside in Scotland with oil-seed rape, we could produce enough biodiesel to fuel about 2 million cars. Nobody wants that to happen, but the industry is hindered at the base by the fact that there is no crusher plant in Scotland for oil-seed rape. That is the kind of support that the minister could give.

There should be much more advocacy from the UK Government, which could try to show how Brazilian beef, for example, gets to Scotland without any scrutiny of its origins. The Amazon rainforest is being cut down to create cattle farms in Brazil, but none of that is taken into account in the way in which the World Trade Organisation considers free trade in agriculture. One of the SNP's major concerns is that standards in agriculture should favour Scottish local producers and not the free market, which allows people to have lower standards. It is up to our Government to ensure that that happens.

Getting young entrants into farming has been discussed by one or two members. If we are going to bring down the average age of farmers and follow the lines of a loan subsidy, we should perhaps consider an all-age subsidy for farming. We have to think about how retirement fits in and about training. We have to get support from the Government to encourage farmers to come into the industry. The SNP's criticisms are an attempt to firm up the policy; indeed our amendment says so. I commend our amendment to the chamber. I hope that members will support it and that the minister has some answers for us on the points that we have made.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As the acoustics are rather good in this building, a lot of the background noise carries somewhat. I would be grateful if members would allow the minister to close the debate uninterrupted.

16:49

Ross Finnie: This has, not surprisingly, been a wide-ranging debate on a very important topic: agriculture and its role in the wider rural community. It was interesting that Richard Lochhead and Ted Brocklebank, who made the opening Opposition speeches, spent a lot of time on the supermarket issue. I understand that. There will be no argument from me with the proposition that the supermarkets have considerable powers, which there are examples of them abusing. However, as I said earlier, we must be careful not to believe that simply beating the supermarkets with a big stick will solve all the problems of Scottish agriculture.

I was somewhat disappointed that, although Richard Lochhead appeared to welcome some of the content of the strategy, his conclusion was that it was largely motherhood and apple pie. That is interesting. I hope that he will tell all those who work for the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, the Moredun Research Institute, the National Farmers Union, the Scottish Agricultural College, the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Scottish Crofting Association and who helped to write the document that that is his considered view of the fruit of their deliberations on the future of Scottish agriculture.

Mr Swinney: The minister has cited many of the people who have participated in the agriculture strategy group, one of whom is a representative of Asda. Would the minister enlighten Parliament as to the sort of robust discussions that the ministers had with the representative of Asda or any other supermarket about the contribution that supermarkets could make to improving the competitive position of Scottish agriculture?

Ross Finnie: That is why those representatives are there. It would have been stupid and foolish not to have had them on that group. There is no point in taking part in megaphone diplomacy with those with whom we have to engage if we are to improve the whole process.

Ted Brocklebank, who almost raises doom and gloom to an art form, managed to surpass himself this afternoon. He talked a lot about whom he talks to but, clearly, he did not attend the NFUS's annual general meeting or the event that it held last weekend. Although there are undoubtedly huge problems facing the industry, it is simply not true to say that the doom and gloom that he portrays is typical in the NFUS.

Mr Brocklebank: Will the minister give way?

Ross Finnie: No. Mr Brocklebank has made his point in that regard. He can intervene on a more substantive matter.

Richard Lochhead and Ted Brocklebank talked about the important role that energy crops can play in the future of Scottish agriculture. Ted Brocklebank raised the question of incentives. As we know, the UK Government has recently adopted the European standard that requires that, within a few years, 5 per cent of all our fuels should include a biofuels content. Therefore, there is a market incentive for us to proceed in that regard.

As I am sure that Richard Lochhead knows, although he did not mention it, those who use set-aside for energy crops can also receive additional European subsidy for that purpose.

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Ross Finnie: I want to finish this point.

Therefore, energy crops are in the strategy and are part of the future of how we deal with this issue. The issue of biomass and biofuels creates that situation. Someone in the SNP suggested that the Government should be building a crusher. The time to do that would be after our consultation on what the minimum levels are. Although rapeseed is efficient, it is also expensive. That has market implications.

Richard Lochhead: The minister will appreciate that there is a danger that we might encourage a greater use of biofuels and then have to import them from other countries if we do not make them in this country with our crops.

Ross Finnie: Indeed. That is why the Scottish Executive gave support to the construction of the one biofuels project that we have in Scotland. We gave financial support for the construction of that plant. We now have to make use not only of tallow and by-product but rapeseed oil.

Maureen Macmillan made constructive points, particularly about land management contracts and flood plains. I assure her that the wider environmental dimension and the integration of the rural stewardship scheme and the agri-environment schemes into practical and pragmatic issues are at the forefront of our thinking.

Undoubtedly, John Swinney's approach, which took a long-term view, was constructive. I thought that his deep concerns about burdens, particularly those that the water framework directive places on people, were interesting. I assure him that ministers are concerned that the regulations should be introduced in a proportionate way and also believe that we should do more to explain to farmers—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Ross Finnie:—why we are implementing the framework and what benefits will accrue to the agriculture industry as a result.

I assure Mr Swinney that we have been in extensive discussions with SEPA, both on reducing its original proposals on cost and also on getting it to explain better to the farming community what the whole project is about.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I wonder whether I could persuade you to take a breath, minister. I remind members, particularly those who have entered the chamber recently and who therefore did not hear what I said a little earlier, that the acoustics of the chamber do not permit 100 people to sit and have a conversation during the minister's closing speech. Some members have sat through the entire debate and are anxious to hear what the minister has to say in response to their contributions and to the debate. It would be a courtesy to the minister if the conduct of those members who have arrived only recently permitted him to proceed from this point entirely uninterrupted.

Ross Finnie: I am grateful, Presiding Officer, particularly for your remark that some members in the chamber are anxious to hear my response. That remark is a welcome commentary on the state of members present.

Sarah Boyack: Will the minister give way?

Ross Finnie: No.

John Swinney concluded his speech with an important point about persons residing overseas who remain capable of receiving single farm payments. I make it clear, as I did earlier—I think in response to a question—that the payments are governed by European regulations. However, we are concerned about the clear anomalies that have arisen, although I think that they may have existed in relation to previous agricultural subsidies too, which may be why we did not immediately pick up on the issue. I see that John Swinney is shaking his head, but I say to him that it was possible for someone to rent out their land and go abroad.

I agree with John Swinney that we have to address the issue. However, we should not get the matter out of perspective. At the moment, around £200,000 of subsidy has been paid to such persons, but that is in the context of overall subsidy payments of some £400 million. We must keep the matter in perspective, but that is not to diminish the importance of the point that John Swinney raised.

Mr Swinney: I am grateful to the minister for giving way a second time. I accept that we may be talking about a sum of money that is in the order of

£200,000—I have no reason to dispute the figure. However, surely some discretion should be introduced into the design of the single farm payment regime to allow the circumstances of those who are trying to create strong agricultural businesses in Scotland to be addressed. Farmers are suffering because the single farm payment is being paid to others who are living outwith the country.

Ross Finnie: I accept the proposition. John Swinney referred to one of his constituents whose case I am familiar with. I am grateful to John Swinney not only for raising the matter with me but for progressing it. In effect, a new entrant to farming is not getting into the national reserve. I accept that there are problems with that.

Alex Fergusson properly drew attention to the planning to succeed initiative, which is being promoted in Dumfries and Galloway. I am grateful for his proposals for the expansion of the initiative. I assure him that, along with the enterprise network, the Executive intends to roll out that strategy across Scotland. The planning to succeed initiative is a very important development.

Alasdair Morrison opened his speech with some constructive comments on the strategy. However, I was disappointed at the tone and tenor of his criticisms of the Crofting Reform etc Bill. Ministers had very many meetings with back benchers who have particular concerns about crofting. We have introduced a bill to reform the definition of crofting and the definitions of occupier and owner-occupier, and to place requirements on those who own crofts to use them as a croft. Serious encumbrances have been put on the use of a croft and that will have to be reflected in the valuations. I hoped—indeed, I would have thought—that those measures would have met with a more positive response.

Eleanor Scott made it clear again that she is not unhappy for pillar 1 funding to be wound down. What on earth would we be left with? We would have no agricultural industry. I do not see how she is going to achieve her aims and objectives.

Sarah Boyack made important points about procurement, which we support, and about the integration of the rural development strategy.

I turn to the way in which we approach the whole subject of our rural economy. Many members have suggested that we should direct and govern our farmers. That has not been the approach of the Executive. During the past seven years our clear aim has been to work with the industry to create a better relationship between Government and the agricultural community and to promote the co-operation that now exists among the many players in the industry who can come together and produce a forward strategy for agriculture. Of

course that does not solve every problem or take away from the need for Government to ensure that, as we have a role in the disbursement of some £450 million to the industry, we provide the industry with a framework that will help it to be more cohesive and to sustain the pressures that it faces in the context of globalisation of the food industry. Local produce and local solutions are a strength. We must play to our strengths: we have a strong and highly skilled agricultural community, we have first-class research institutions that can support that community and we have a reputation for high-quality food produce. I ask members to support the motion.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are possibly 11 questions to be put as a result of today's business. In relation to this morning's debate on future energy policy, if the amendment in the name of Allan Wilson is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Richard Lochhead and Shiona Baird will fall. In relation to this morning's debate on drug abuse, if the amendment in the name of Hugh Henry is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Stewart Stevenson and Tommy Sheridan will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-4074.3, in the name of Allan Wilson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4074, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on future energy policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)

Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 41, Abstentions 7.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Therefore, amendments S2M-4074.2, in the name of Richard Lochhead, and S2M-4074.1, in the name of Shiona Baird, fall.

The second question is, that motion S2M-4074, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on future energy policy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 41, Abstentions 7.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes the progress made at Longannet to secure future base load energy supplies; supports the Scottish Executive's commitment to the development of a wide range of renewable energy

technologies in Scotland as a key element of a balanced energy supply mix; supports the Executive's target that 40% of electricity generated in Scotland by 2020 should come from renewable sources; looks forward to publication of the revised Scottish Climate Change Programme and the consideration given to the contribution of energy efficiency and renewables to reduce carbon dioxide emissions; endorses the Executive's commitment to tackling fuel poverty; acknowledges the Executive's commitment to not support further development of nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved; welcomes the release of the first two volumes of the Scottish Energy Study; recognises the importance of the UK Energy Review, and supports the Executive's engagement with the UK Government, Ofgem and the energy industry to ensure that the future energy supply needs of Scotland are met.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-4073.3, in the name of Hugh Henry, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4073, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on drug abuse, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)

Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 17, Abstentions 30.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, the amendments in the name of Stewart Stevenson and Tommy Sheridan fall. Therefore, the next question is, that motion S2M-4073, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on drug abuse, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)

McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 90, Against 17, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises that drug abuse destroys lives and tears families apart; recognises that more needs to be done, particularly to support and protect children in drug misusing households; believes that there should be an early intervention strategy; believes that there is a need to

help addicts to move towards a drug-free lifestyle by offering a range of interventions; believes that for those on methadone there should be a care plan which includes an exit strategy from methadone use; believes that there should be an education programme which continues to reinforce the dangers of taking drugs; believes that employability issues should be addressed as part of re-establishing a drug-free stable lifestyle, and welcomes the enhancements to the Scottish Drugs Misuse Database which should lead to an improvement in the collection of data to help shape and target investment and services.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-4081.4, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4081, in the name of Ross Finnie, on an agriculture strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 60, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-4081.1, in the name of Ted Brocklebank, which seeks to amend motion S2M-

4081, in the name of Ross Finnie, on an agriculture strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 46, Against 61, Abstentions 3.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S2M-4081, in the name of Ross Finnie, on an agriculture strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 0, Abstentions 42.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment as set out in *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps* to secure a prosperous and sustainable farming industry in Scotland, focussed on producing food and other products for the market, contributing to sustainable rural development, protecting and enhancing the environment and contributing to improvements in animal health and welfare and human health and well-being, and approves the actions outlined in the strategy for achieving these objectives in partnership with other stakeholders.

Ship-to-ship Oil Transfer

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-4017, in the name of Robin Harper, on ship-to-ship oil transfer. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern the application by Forth Ports plc and Melbourne Marine Services to introduce ship-to-ship (STS) transfer of Russian heavy crude oil at swinging anchorage in the Firth of Forth; recognises the unprecedented scale and nature of such operations and the pollution risks posed by their routine operation and possible accidental spillage; notes the very recent identification by the UK Government of marine environment high risk areas around the Scottish coastline, and notably the Forth estuary, as being most sensitive and highly vulnerable to accidents involving merchant shipping and in need of protection; further notes that the Firth of Forth is a Special Protection Area containing numerous conservation sites of national and European importance, and a Ramsar site of international designation; acknowledges the devastating impact on the economy and ecology of areas, such as the Forth, that could occur in the event of a heavy crude oil spill; recognises the opposition to the Forth proposal by Fife Council, the City of Edinburgh Council, East Lothian Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, major environmental groups and agencies and local communities; expresses concern that any such proposal should be considered in the absence of either a UK or EU statutory regulatory framework for the control or monitoring of STS oil transfer operations along the Scottish coastline; notes that the current consultation by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is not a full public consultation about the context or strategic merit of the Forth proposal, but is restricted to a discussion of Forth Ports' oil spill contingency plan, and considers that the Scottish Executive should use its powers, particularly under the EU Habitats Directive, to oppose the application for heavy oil transfer from ship to ship.

17:11

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): We have a full public gallery. I welcome to Parliament all those from around the Forth who are concerned about the possibility of ship-to-ship transfer of heavy crude oil in the Firth of Forth. That enterprise would involve up to 8 million tonnes a year of the heaviest grade of crude oil being superheated and pumped under high pressure between tankers lying 4 miles out from the Fife coast, and is completely without precedent in the Firth of Forth. No routine shipping activity in those waters has ever reached such a scale, for a very good reason: the risks inherent in such an operation are simply enormous.

Following the Braer disaster in 1993, the late Lord Donaldson identified only three sites in the United Kingdom where ship-to-ship transfer of oil could even be contemplated. None is in deep water; two have been abandoned because of

safety issues; and only one—at Scapa Flow—is fully operational. It should be noted that Scapa Flow is under the strict control of the local authority—Orkney Islands Council—and revenue from the STS activity goes into the local economy. In the case of the Firth of Forth bid, all revenue would go to Forth Ports plc; there would be no direct benefit to the local region and no local authority control.

It is the responsibility of the UK Government's Department for Transport to promote commercial shipping activity in the UK. Environmental protection seems to be of secondary importance; nevertheless, the UK still has great responsibilities and legal duties with regard to the marine environment. Incredibly, however, there is no policy framework to guide and regulate STS activity. We note with growing incredulity that the Government's lawyers have reached no view on the implications for the plan of the UK's recent breach of the habitats regulations. Furthermore, it has come to our attention that, following the original Forth bid, legal opinion switched. In the latest opinion, ship-to-ship transfer of oil at sea is excluded from devolved competence. It therefore follows that such activity cannot be regulated even by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

I am sure that members will not need to be reminded that the Firth of Forth is a special protection area that contains numerous conservation sites of national and European importance and a Ramsar wetland site of international designation. Only three weeks ago, the UK Government issued a report that identified marine environment high-risk areas around the Scottish coastline as being most sensitive, highly vulnerable to accidents involving merchant shipping and in need of protection. The highest concentration of the most sensitive sites across the whole of the UK is in the Firth of Forth. They include sites that are world famous for their wildlife: the Bass Rock, the Isle of May and St Abb's Head.

Scotland is part of the UK. We are collectively and completely responsible for upholding the European Union habitats directive, and the Scottish Executive is the licensing authority for any operation that may affect European designated species. Those facts are not open to interpretation—they are part of international law. Even Gordon Brown acknowledged that in a letter to a constituent, of which I have a copy. In it, he wrote that ship-to-ship transfer is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

The Firth of Forth supports a thriving economy that is dependent on its environmental integrity. Its coastline and islands are extremely sensitive. They are vulnerable to pollution, and any oil spill in the wrong place at the wrong time would have a

devastating impact on the economy and ecology of the area. We are talking about livelihoods and about the long-term needs of both nature and people.

There is total opposition to the Forth proposal from Fife Council, the City of Edinburgh Council, East Lothian Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, SEPA, RSPB Scotland, other environmental groups and agencies and local communities. Those voices represent expert opinion. They know the Forth estuary, its environment and economy in exquisite detail. They know about the tragic consequences that would follow a major accident and the bankrupting magnitude of resourcing a response. They know how insecure the insurance and funds are for clear-up costs. They know that those pressures are being controlled by outside agencies and that the motive behind the proposal is driven by simple corporate greed and geographical expediency. Using the firth is a quick and dirty solution to the perceived need to transship oil through the North sea at maximum profit to the shipping companies.

The proposal is being considered legitimate in the absence of any UK or EU statutory regulatory framework for the control or monitoring of STS oil transfer operations along the Scottish coastline. The Forth Ports plan requires an oil spill contingency licence from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, but it is not subject to further ordinary planning law. Why not? As a port authority, Forth Ports has statutory duties, but the public interest is clearly not being served. Given the high level of concern, we are now being offered a so-called public consultation by the MCA. Will the consultation address the context or the strategic merit of the Forth proposal? It is restricted to a discussion of Forth Ports' oil spill contingency plan and nothing more. Furthermore, the consultation has no statutory role in the ultimate decision, and it has failed to meet the Government's own criteria for public consultations.

Let me read to members the five principles of sustainable development, which underpin the Executive's new marine and coastal strategy. They are:

"to secure a vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse marine and coastal environments, managed to meet the long term needs of nature and people."

In the light of all those issues, I ask the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development to ensure that the Scottish Executive uses its powers, particularly those under the EU habitats directive, to oppose the application for heavy oil transfer from ship to ship. I ask her to give reassurance tonight to communities around the Forth that the Executive will stand up and protect the environment, on which so much depends. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members of the public that it is not appropriate to applaud.

17:19

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I welcome this opportunity to discuss a matter that is of considerable importance for my constituency, and I am grateful to Robin Harper for securing the debate.

The proposal by Melbourne Marine Services and Forth Ports has caused huge concern on both sides of the Forth. I know that all my Labour colleagues, and indeed my other constituency and list colleagues, share that concern for the places where their constituencies and regions border the Forth. A number of those members are here tonight, and a number of them who could not be here have expressed that concern to me.

Labour constituency members in Fife raised concerns about the proposal as soon as Fife Council made us aware of it. Notification of the proposal was given extremely late in the day to those of us who, I would argue, had a legitimate interest in it on behalf of our communities. Fife Council was consulted at almost the last moment. The impression was that the proposal was a fait accompli on which people almost did not need to be consulted.

The proposed anchorages are situated off Methil in my constituency. As Robin Harper pointed out, any income from the activity would accrue to Forth Ports, which is the port authority. I have no wish to see one of Scotland's major companies lose income, but it is unacceptable that a fortune should be made by risking the Fife and Lothians environment and perhaps the livelihoods of my constituents and of many others who live around the Forth.

My Westminster colleague John MacDougall MP, who was previously member for Central Fife but is now member for Glenrothes, and I marshalled our arguments and concerns in a meeting that we secured with Stephen Ladyman MP, who is Minister of State for Transport. We were grateful to Dr Ladyman for at least buying us extra time by providing an additional 12 weeks of consultation as a result of that meeting.

Both my Westminster colleague and I share the concerns about the potential dangers involved, especially given the amount of money that has been spent on improving the environment of the Forth. We also have concerns about changing the social and economic uses of the land around the Forth and the clean-up that would be required in the event of a spill, which is almost unthinkable.

Let me quote from the extremely good RSPB Scotland briefing:

"The DfT position is that ship-to-ship transfers are legal and that the UK government has no authority to prevent them on principle. This is at odds with the requirements of the EU 'Habitats' Directive".

That means that we are, in effect, caught between two competing pieces of legislation. The briefing continues:

"There is currently no national mechanism to reject ship-to-ship proposals outright".

Therefore, it seems that the only argument available is the very strong environmental argument.

I ask the minister to agree to an urgent meeting with those of us whose constituencies include the Forth so that we can discuss the environmental arguments that we might use both in our response to the consultation and with the Department for Transport. I believe that the Department for Transport shares our concerns about the complete inadequacy of the current marine legislation that is in force and is implemented by the department. I will look for that assurance from the minister at the end of the debate.

I apologise to members that, as I have a previously arranged meeting, I will not be able to stay for the whole debate. I hope that members will forgive me any discourtesy if I need to leave early.

17:23

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I thank Robin Harper for proposing this debate. Having first become involved in the issue during Fife Council's debate on it, I should correct Christine May by clarifying that the council's view was unanimous across the political spectrum. Among Liberal Democrat, Conservative, independent, Scottish National Party and Labour members, there was universal opposition to the proposal.

About 3,000 oil or gas ships already come into the Forth estuary each year, but the proposal would mean, as Robin Harper said, a massive increase in the tonnage of oil that is handled within the Forth. The proposed system would involve transfers of oil from one moving vessel to another moving vessel operating alongside it, with the rate of movement being dependent on the weather and the tides.

Anyone who wants to be really scared about the proposal should look at Aquatera's environmental assessment of the proposal. The potential dangers include spillage due to hoses breaking and valves staying open. The report refers time and again to the potential for small spills and large spills, and defines a small spill as one that involves less than 10 tonnes. We know that 1 tonne of crude oil can pollute 1 km² of water, so there is potential for

enormous damage even if there is a small spill. It is easy to say, "Oops—we've had an accident," but the resulting damage could be massive. The report also shows that, if there is a spill, we will have only a few hours to react before the pollution hits the shoreline. As Robin Harper said, the Forth is one of our most sensitive environments and its unique topography and geology will magnify any accidental damage.

Last summer, with friends, I walked a large chunk of the Fife coastal path on the north shore of the Forth. As we marched or trudged—depending on the time of day and the level of hospitality—we saw the wide variety of the shoreline. It was painful, but not difficult, to imagine the rocks, the sandy bays and the much-painted east neuk harbours covered in a gooey, oily slime, or bedraggled seabirds coated in oil.

Who will benefit from the proposal? As has been said, there will be only one beneficiary. Why should we have to put up with ship-to-ship oil transfers when they have so much more potential to be dangerous to the environment than other options? I do not want oil companies to take advantage of the lack of legislation and to be given permission by bodies that are not responsible for the direct consequences of those companies' actions. I do not want ship-to-ship transfers in the Forth.

17:27

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity that Robin Harper's motion presents to debate ship-to-ship transfers of oil in the Forth, which is a matter that has been raised many times in the Parliament by me and the other Fife MSPs.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's consultation is bogus. The MCA is not consulting on the principle of ship-to-ship transfers in the Forth but only on whether the contingency plans will be adequate if there is a spill of oil. Local MSPs, local authorities, community councils and individuals who live around the Forth are all clear that we oppose ship-to-ship oil transfer in principle because of the risk to our marine and natural habitats. The only way to ensure that there are no oil spills is to refuse to allow ship-to-ship transfers of oil in the Forth. We believe that no contingency plan will be sufficient to protect our environment and special places in the Firth of Forth.

The proposal from Melbourne Marine Services and Forth Ports must be rejected. Both organisations stand to make a lot of money if the proposal goes ahead, but the oil clean-up costs will have to be met by the public authorities and the cost to our marine and natural heritage will be incalculable. I understand that ship-to-ship transfer

is a matter that is reserved to Westminster, but Scottish ministers have a duty to have regard to the European Union habitats directive. That directive empowers Scottish ministers to make it clear to the MCA that, in the words of Scottish Natural Heritage, the effect of the proposal on the designated areas is "likely to be significant" and to rule it out on that ground.

Now is the time for the Executive to stand with the communities of the Forth. It is time for the Executive to take responsibility and to make it clear to the MCA that ship-to-ship transfers should not be approved. Members have been asking ministers to do that for months. I hope that the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development will take the opportunity that is afforded to her this evening to do so.

17:29

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I take the opportunity to congratulate Robin Harper on securing tonight's debate. I do not represent Fife or the Lothians but I have spoken to Conservative members from both areas at some length and they have made their views on the proposal clear.

I qualify my remarks by saying that I know how important the oil and gas industry is to Scotland. In addition to our domestic production, Scotland is now involved in the oil industry throughout the world. As a consequence, we sometimes have to make difficult decisions about what we should do in particular areas. Sometimes, those decisions are based on the balance of probabilities as much as on environmental priorities.

However, the proposal to undertake ship-to-ship transfer of oil in the Forth appears to offer no benefit to our oil industry. The Forth is one of the busiest shipping areas in Scotland for heavy tankers. Anyone who travels by rail between Edinburgh and Aberdeen will frequently see large ships passing close by each other in the Forth. As Robin Harper said, some of Scotland's most environmentally sensitive and important areas are in the Forth and the islands there. Consequently, we must balance all the considerations before we take a view. Arguments might justify ship-to-ship transfer of oil within our oil industry at other times and in other places, but there is no justification for proceeding with that activity in so sensitive an area as the Forth. Consequently, the Conservatives support the position that every other member has taken.

17:31

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank my colleague Robin Harper for providing the opportunity to talk about ship-to-ship

oil transfer and to support the many councils, agencies and communities that have opposed the proposal from the outset. I gather that this is only Robin's second members' business debate since 1999, so I am grateful to him for allowing us to use the opportunity to talk about the issues.

The proposal affects three parliamentary regions and numerous constituencies that border the Forth. As a Fife MSP, I have spent much time in the past couple of months travelling along the east neuk of Fife and going into west Fife to talk to communities and businesses that rely on a clean environment in the Forth for their livelihoods. I have spoken to people who run bed and breakfasts, people who use the Fife coastal path for their business, people who are involved in the fishing industry and people who are involved in other tourism-related industries, and I have not found a single person who is in favour of the proposal.

It is clear that nobody in Fife will benefit from the proposal; the only bodies that will benefit are Melbourne Marine Services and Forth Ports. To be frank, the attitude of Forth Ports is incredible. The organisation is pretty much unaccountable, undemocratic and riddled with potential conflicts of interest. It is a private company that will benefit from up to £9 million per annum from the ship-to-ship process, but it has a statutory duty to protect the environment and maintain an oil-spill contingency plan and—remarkably—it has a role in deciding whether ship-to-ship transfer should proceed. I cannot see how a conflict of interest cannot exist.

The situation is incredible and presents a story that we would expect to see on the pages of *Private Eye* magazine. Interestingly enough, such a story was published in *Private Eye* in autumn last year. In that series of articles, if the references to Cornwall are changed to Scotland and the references to Falmouth harbour authority are changed to Forth Ports, we find that we are dealing with pretty much the same issue all over again.

To be frank, the law is an ass. We have transport regulations that permit only consultation on an oil-spill contingency plan. We need to have a way to say no to the proposal and we need to ensure that the minister stays within the law and can fulfil her responsibility to protect the environment. That means that we need to stop the process progressing until new regulations are in place that comply with the habitats directive and to which options are attached that allow ministers to say no to such proposals. Westminster is on the brink of consulting on such regulations. We should put such a process in place and use it to sink this flawed proposal once and for all.

17:34

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): Robin Harper is to be congratulated on lodging a motion that has, understandably, generated a considerable amount of passion. It is evident that I have no geographical constituency interest in the Firth of Forth, but I do not take issue with the points that members who have such an interest have made. As Robin Harper said, my constituency interest is in the ship-to-ship oil transfers in Scapa Flow in Orkney, which Lord Donaldson identified as one of the very few places where such an activity could be countenanced.

There have been ship-to-ship transfers of oil and hydrocarbons in Scapa Flow since around 1980. However, it is important to emphasise that people have recognised that the highest pilotage, towage and risk-assessment standards must be observed, and that there must be regard to sea conditions, the need for good holding grounds for vessels and the highest equipment standards, as specified by the Oil Companies International Marine Forum. Scapa Flow has good holding grounds, which, in itself, helps to reduce risks. However, we cannot overemphasise the importance of minimising risks and ensuring that robust and regular testing and inspection regimes are in place.

Robin Harper identified a crucial difference between ship-to-ship oil transfer in the Forth and operations in Scapa Flow. As I see it, Forth Ports will receive all the revenue, but the responsibilities relating to oil spillages, contingencies and clean-ups will rest with the local authorities whose areas border the Forth. By contrast, Orkney Islands Council is the one supervising port authority at Scapa Flow. The council provides pilotage, tugs and vessel traffic systems and has important environmental responsibilities. Orkney, like the Forth estuary area, depends on a clean environment, and responsibility for, and benefits from, ship-to-ship transfer of oil rest with its council. I would like an assurance that that situation will not be undercut perhaps by Forth Ports being able to offer a cheaper service as a result of its not having responsibilities that Orkney Islands Council has.

Business may not be lost to Scotland, if the Forth does not want it, provided that there are stringent standards. Another part of Scotland—where there were ship-to-ship transfers of 1.7 million tonnes of oil last year and 2.6 million tonnes in 2004—has a record, but such work should be undertaken only if the highest safety and risk-assessment standards are met.

17:37

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I, too, congratulate Robin Harper on securing this debate, which is on an important issue. I represent

the South of Scotland, which includes two council areas—East Lothian Council and Scottish Borders Council—that are affected by the proposals.

The Firth of Forth hosts more than 300,000 pairs of breeding birds each year. Most of East Lothian's coast is classified as a site of special scientific interest and the coast around Dunbar has been designated a marine environment high-risk area.

Scottish Natural Heritage has estimated that a 700-tonne oil spillage could result in tens of thousands of birds being covered in oil. Seven hundred tonnes of oil—which is the amount that flows in a ship-to-ship transfer every 15 minutes—is a lot of oil. In a worst-case scenario, a fully laden oil tanker that is transferring oil would be carrying 350,000 tonnes of crude oil.

The proposal represents a real threat to the East Lothian and Berwickshire coastlines and economies. There are nine designated bathing waters in East Lothian. The coast attracts 2.5 million visitors each year. It has been estimated that around £130 million is generated to the local economy as a result of those visitors. Tourism employs around 3,500 people in the region, which is 14 per cent of the region's workforce. That is a considerably higher figure than the average for regions elsewhere in Scotland. The East Lothian tourism industry depends heavily on the East Lothian coast and its beautiful beaches.

There are European Community-designated shellfish harvesting areas around the coastline, from Dunbar to North Berwick. Oil pollution could destroy that industry and seriously damage the local fishing industry. I am therefore delighted that East Lothian Council has supported the Greens' campaign against the oil transfer proposals. On the other hand, I am disappointed that Scottish Borders Council has not even considered the proposals or formulated a response. The region's council tax payers will have to pay for any clean-ups. Jim Wallace made strong points about that.

Clearing up after the Sea Empress oil spill cost £28 million. The Russian crude oil that would be transferred would be much heavier and more persistent than the light oil that the Sea Empress spilled.

Scottish Natural Heritage has deemed the risk analysis both inadequate and misleading. The environmental impact assessment is not independent. As the RSPB pointed out, the consultation does not meet the requirements of the EU habitats directive, as it is not a consultation on the project. The Scottish Government is responsible for implementing the habitats directive, which gives us the power to act in this matter. I call on the minister to listen to the cross-party appeal that has come from so many

members in the chamber today. Members from all parties except the Scottish Socialist Party have come here to express their horror at the proposals, which are also opposed by local councils. I ask the minister to use the responsibility that she has as strongly and as wisely as possible.

17:41

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate on a very important subject. We can always depend on Chris Ballance to cite the worst-case scenario, because he trades in that sort of thing. He was taking a bit of a liberty in suggesting that East Lothian Council supports the Green Party on this issue.

However, let us try to be consensual on the matter, about which all of us are genuinely concerned. That is the spirit in which we should move forward. I endorse the comments of my colleague Christine May and others from the north side of the Firth of Forth. As various members have said, the coastline of East Lothian is a precious environmental and economic asset for the people of my constituency and for the tourism industry. Reference has been made to the Bass Rock. Members have spoken about the Scottish Seabird Centre, which nowadays is one of the most important tourist attractions in the whole of Scotland. Anything that could put at risk or jeopardise that attraction should be resisted.

I agree with Alex Johnstone that there are circumstances in which ship-to-ship transfer is necessary. In those cases, it should be managed and subjected to the most rigorous controls possible. I understand that that happens in Scapa Flow and that, mercifully, there have been no problems there. However, there is no rational or reasonable case for such business to be transacted in the Firth of Forth. Geographically, it does not make sense, and it makes economic sense only for one company. For that reason, there is a case for resisting the proposal.

I agree with East Lothian Council and others that there is no case for permitting such activity in these circumstances. I am glad that I had an opportunity to make representations to Alistair Darling, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Transport, who will, I imagine, have the final say on the issue. I am sure that, as a Lothian MP, he does not need to be told by anyone about the importance of the Firth of Forth. I am confident that he will take full account of all relevant considerations and will do what he can to safeguard our coastline. I hope that he will take that line and that the minister will respond positively to the debate.

17:43

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): This has been a valuable debate, for several reasons. It has given members the opportunity to place on record their understandable anxieties about the proposed transfer operation in the Forth. Nobody, least of all me, would seek to play down in any way the strength of those concerns. I welcome to the Hub those who have taken the trouble to travel from different areas around the Firth of Forth to register their concern.

I do not have only a ministerial interest in the matter, because I live alongside the Forth, as do all the members of my family. I am aware of the scale of the concerns that many members, local authorities and individuals have expressed. I am also acutely aware of the importance of the Firth of Forth in both environmental and economic terms. Several members have referred to that.

The debate has given the Parliament the opportunity to respond collectively to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's consultation. I welcome that and will ensure that the *Official Report* of the debate is drawn to the attention of the agency and of UK transport ministers. I am sure that others will reply to the consultation as individuals.

The debate has given me the opportunity to tease out a difficult matter that goes to the heart of the tough issues that we all have a responsibility to consider in the context of sustainable development. As many members have pointed out, the matter straddles a complicated devolved-reserved boundary.

As one of the Scottish ministers with responsibility for the environment, I recognise the concern about the protection of the environment that lies behind Robin Harper's motion and members' speeches. I will meet members; I will ask my office to take that forward as a matter of urgency.

Tricia Marwick: I have no doubt that the minister recognises her environmental responsibilities, but does she also accept that she has a duty, under the EU directive, to ensure that account is taken of the environment?

Rhona Brankin: I will cover that issue in some detail later in my speech; I thank the member for raising it.

Of course, there are sensitive and potentially vulnerable environmental sites along the Firth of Forth and it is right for us all to be concerned about potential oil spills and the pollution risks associated with them. We should recognise the concerns that have been raised by local authorities and others and we should, of course,

provide a framework to guard against pollution risks, from whatever source.

That is precisely why some areas attract special status; why three of the recently announced marine environmental high-risk areas are in the Forth—that signals clearly the environmental sensitivities in the area; why a range of shipping legislation and other legislation sets the framework for the proposed transfer; and why the MCA has embarked upon a public consultation.

My responsibility, as a minister with responsibility for the environment, is to understand whether the proposed operation poses a significant threat to the environment, to understand the nature and scale of any such threat and to ensure that appropriate action is taken to deal with it. I know that members understand that all that requires due processes to be followed.

As they form the backdrop to some of the issues that have been raised in the debate, it might be helpful if I briefly set out the respective responsibilities of the Executive, the UK Government and the relevant port authority in respect of the proposed transfer. First and foremost is the fact that shipping-related activity, and activity that is covered primarily by merchant shipping legislation, is fully reserved. The specific regulatory regime that surrounds the proposed oil spill contingency plan is therefore a matter for the UK Government.

It is for the relevant port authority to regulate any specific oil transfer operation in its area. In order for it to do that, an appropriate oil spill contingency plan, approved by the MCA, must first be in place. There is no direct provision for the agency or the Department for Transport to approve or reject a specific oil transfer operation. However, the relevant port authority cannot allow specific operations to go ahead until the contingency plan has been drafted in a way that satisfies the relevant authorities that it fully addresses potential environmental consequences.

Mr Ruskell: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: May I finish this point? I need to set out the position on the matter.

That is why the MCA's wider public consultation, which is now under way, focuses on the implications of the proposed contingency plan rather than on the specific transfer operation. Enforcement of the contingency plan and any mitigation measures that it might contain is similarly a matter for the MCA under the Merchant Shipping (Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation Convention) Regulations 1998.

Whether that regulatory regime should be amended specifically to cover ship-to-ship oil

transfer operations—this touches on the point that Mark Ruskell made—is a matter for the Secretary of State for Transport. I have no doubt that he will be interested in this debate and I will ensure that he is made aware of it and of the points that have been made about the regulations.

Mr Ruskell: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: I am struggling to make my speech in the time that I have been given; I am happy to meet Mark Ruskell to discuss the issue.

The Scottish Executive's interest in ship-to-ship oil transfer therefore relates to our responsibilities for environmental protection within Scotland, particularly in respect of fisheries management and our responsibility for the application of the directives on birds and habitats. As part of those responsibilities, the Executive is one of the named consultees in the normal UK-led statutory process of approving oil spill contingency plans. SNH and SEPA are separately named consultees in their own right. Each of us responded to the initial consultation on the contingency plan for the transfer operation in question. At that stage, SNH rightly drew to the Executive's attention its concerns about environmental sensitivities.

The Executive consequently opened up a new dialogue with the Department for Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Partly in response to the issues that were raised in that dialogue on the earlier draft of the relevant contingency plan and its supporting documentation, the MCA launched the wider public consultation, which includes consultation on an environmental impact assessment and which extends beyond the normal list of named consultees. I am sure that all parties welcome that.

The Executive will make a further response to that wider consultation exercise. We will take into account the potential impacts on Scottish fishing activity and on the sites that we have designated in Scotland for special protection under the birds and habitats directives. We will also take into account our responsibilities under those directives to ensure the protection of identified European protected species. We are taking further advice on that matter from SNH.

Forth Ports plc and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency are regarded as competent authorities under the terms of the birds and habitats directives. The former organisation will therefore have to have regard to those directives in its consideration of any oil transfer operation that might ultimately be permitted if the relevant contingency plan is approved; the latter organisation must do likewise for consideration of the contingency plan.

Under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994, the Scottish Executive may

grant licences in respect of activities that are likely to disturb a European protected species, or damage or destroy its breeding sites or resting places, whether or not the species is present at the time. We take advice on such matters from SNH and will do so in respect of the current public consultation exercise to determine whether any such licence might be necessary in respect of the proposed oil transfer operation. I do not wish to prejudge the outcome of that further consideration, but I assure members that I will take my responsibilities for licensing very seriously.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

Several interrelated layers and roles are involved here—from approval of the contingency plan to approval of the operation and compliance with the habitats and birds directives—and it is important that due process is followed for each of them. At each level, environmental considerations will have to be at the forefront of the minds of all the relevant regulatory authorities. It is absolutely right that they should also be an important consideration for this Parliament and the debate has reinforced that point. Members' contributions will, I know, be taken fully into account in the consultation exercise. I assure members that I take my role in that process very seriously indeed.

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