

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 29 June 2006

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 June 2006

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

Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-4612, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the general principles of the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill.

09:15

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): Good morning, Presiding Officer.

Just over two years ago, the promotion and development of Scottish tourism was carried out by 15 organisations: the Scottish Tourist Board and 14 area tourist boards. In March 2004, following a period of widespread consultation, the then Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport announced that that structure was no longer working well for Scotland and that we needed an integrated tourism network that would work across the whole country. Just over a year later, on 1 April 2005, those 15 organisations—including their staff, resources, systems, commitments and liabilities—were merged into one integrated organisation. Today, a further year on, VisitScotland's integrated tourism network is going from strength to strength. The purpose of the bill is to put the new organisational structure on a proper legal footing.

The Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 requires that there must be area tourist boards. Therefore, in 2004, secondary legislation was used as an interim measure to create two area tourist boards—known as network tourist boards—into which the 14 area tourist boards could be merged. The network tourist boards are under the control of VisitScotland. The Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill will repeal the 1994 act's requirement for area tourist boards and dissolve the two network tourist boards. It will mean that VisitScotland can become fully integrated and operate as a single legal entity. The bill also provides for the transfer of staff from the network tourist boards to VisitScotland.

As VisitScotland now has a broader role, the bill also provides for a larger VisitScotland board. The board's maximum size, which is set out in the Development of Tourism Act 1969, is currently set

at seven. The bill will amend the 1969 act to allow the board to be increased to a maximum of 12.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): One of the few areas of what might, at a stretch, be called controversy is the nature of the board and the increase in its size. Having read the evidence, I am not 100 per cent clear why the requests from local authorities for designated places cannot be granted. Was the refusal to set aside places for local authority representatives based on a point of principle or on some other reason?

Patricia Ferguson: Actually, the reason is that we want to observe the guidance on the public appointments process. It dictates that board members should, in most circumstances, be appointed on the basis of their skills, talents and expertise rather than because they represent a particular set of people or a particular organisation. Exceptions can be made, but only in very extreme circumstances. For example, if being an advocate is a requirement for a particular role, it might make sense to reserve a seat for a member of the Faculty of Advocates. However, in this circumstance, it is not necessary to do that.

If it is recognised, as it currently is, that VisitScotland needs local authority expertise, the appointments round will recognise that and ensure that someone with that expertise is appointed to the board. The existing board already has a representative of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities who is a local authority councillor. I believe that the current mechanism has served us well and will continue to do so, while allowing us to observe the recommendations on the public appointments process.

In the short term, it is likely that we will increase the board's size by two members, to a total of nine. However, allowing for a maximum of 12 members provides the flexibility to increase the board at a later stage, if that seems appropriate, without reverting to primary legislation.

The bill will change the organisation's legal name from "the Scottish Tourist Board" to "VisitScotland". Although the organisation has been known as VisitScotland for some time now and it could continue to use that as its trading name while continuing legally to be called the Scottish Tourist Board, the Scottish Tourist Board name belongs in the past and the bill provides a good opportunity to change it. The VisitScotland name emphasises the way forward for tourism in Scotland. The brand is already established and it is easily recognised and trusted by visitors and businesses alike.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister suggested that the term STB is something from the past. As tourism in Scotland has grown

over the years, surely not all was bad about STB and its name.

Patricia Ferguson: I was not implying that there was anything intrinsically bad about the Scottish Tourist Board or its name; I was simply reflecting on the fact that changes happen and that styles and current usages change too. The change of name very much reflects that. However, it is important to recognise that VisitScotland is in the process of obtaining the trademark "Scottish Tourist Board" to ensure that the name cannot be used by anyone else.

The bill consolidates the integration process that has already taken place and puts the integrated network on a proper legal footing. It does not change how the integrated tourism network works. The integrated network is working well and I am confident that it will continue to bring benefits to Scottish tourism.

The tourism industry did not feel the need to give evidence on the bill to the Enterprise and Culture Committee. That is testament to the success of the integrated network so far and to the relationships that VisitScotland has built up with tourism businesses and other partners and stakeholders. Indeed, VisitScotland's recent stakeholder survey shows that 95 per cent of stakeholders agree that the work of VisitScotland makes a positive impact on Scotland's economic development. The majority of stakeholders associated VisitScotland with being excellent, efficient, inspiring and innovative. The proportion of stakeholders who now see VisitScotland as dynamic and highly reputable has increased since 2005.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): In paying tribute to the work that was done in the past, will the minister agree that much of the confidence that now exists is due to the hard work of those who worked in the tourist boards and to the networks that they built up among local providers?

Patricia Ferguson: That is absolutely fair. One of the good things about the way in which the integration has been taken forward is that VisitScotland has not thrown the baby out with the bath water; it has learned from the experiences of the Scottish Tourist Board and the area tourist boards and taken the very best of what they had to offer. A lot of good had been happening, but VisitScotland has taken it forward into a new century and, frankly, into a new and much more competitive tourism world.

Although VisitScotland is no longer a membership organisation, businesses continue to have access to the full range of services that were previously available through the area tourist boards, but more flexibility is now offered in the products that businesses can select. As a result,

many businesses have seen cost reductions for equivalent service. Local areas are also now able to benefit more than ever before from VisitScotland's world class marketing campaigns, which promote Scotland as a national dish with local flavours.

Seventeen area tourism partnerships have been set up across Scotland to involve tourism businesses, VisitScotland, all 32 local authorities and other public sector interests. The excellent relationship between VisitScotland and local authorities has been strengthened by the creation of the VisitScotland chairs committee. Its membership is drawn from the local authority community. The annual national tourism convention also brings VisitScotland and COSLA together to discuss joint strategy. In addition, as I mentioned in response to Mr Adam's question, the COSLA spokesperson for economic development and planning is on the VisitScotland board.

I believe that the VisitScotland integrated tourism network is going from strength to strength and bringing benefits across the whole of Scotland. This is the right time to put that new network on a proper legal footing.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I will return to this point in my speech. The minister refers to co-ordination with the chairs and with COSLA. Does she see that as a mechanism for further integrating the provision of tourism information, perhaps via local authority service points and council offices?

Patricia Ferguson: VisitScotland has been conducting a review of tourist information centres. One of the review's recommendations is likely to be that there should be co-ordination. It is not necessary for the information centres to be stand-alone entities. They could be part of their local community in a much more meaningful way, perhaps by being associated with a local town hall or another civic amenity. In that way, they might attract even more people to use their services.

The Enterprise and Culture Committee has asked me for reassurance on a number of issues. The committee refers to the apparently differing views that have been expressed by the Executive and VisitScotland on a number of issues and asks for reassurance that those views have been reconciled. I am pleased to say that the Executive and VisitScotland have been co-operating closely on the issues. In relation to VAT and pensions, the figures that were provided by VisitScotland were very much worst-case scenarios. My officials are working with VisitScotland on a number of different options, and we are all confident that far less costly solutions will be found in both cases.

We agree with VisitScotland that local authorities continued to fund VisitScotland last

year at the same level as in the previous year. Any confusion around the figures was due to a change in the way in which funding was allocated for business tourism in Edinburgh and Glasgow and to project funding coming to an end. The committee also asked for reassurance that the reserves that were held by the former area tourist boards will be ring fenced for use in the areas in which they were accrued. I am happy to give that reassurance, as I have done in the chamber before.

I confirm that the final figure for the transitional costs associated with the planning and development of the VisitScotland network stands at £7.4 million, which has been paid to VisitScotland. No more funding will be provided for that purpose. Should any further costs emerge, they will be minimal and will be absorbed by VisitScotland's budget.

I am pleased also to confirm that VisitScotland's business plan shows a balanced budget this year, one year ahead of schedule. Members will recall that the integrated network took on a large operating deficit from the area tourist boards, but efficiency savings mean that the deficit has now been cleared. Efficiency savings have been made already, in VisitScotland's first year of operation, demonstrating its commitment to making the best use of public funds. I believe that it is time to put the organisation on a proper legal footing.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill.

09:28

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The bill is very much a tidying-up measure. A wider debate about tourism may be needed, but that is not necessarily for today. In particular, the evidence from COSLA made the important point that expenditure on tourism generally in Scotland is fairly modest and that, out of a £35 million tourism budget in Edinburgh, only £620,000 goes to VisitScotland. That highlights one of the weaknesses in our approach to tourism in Scotland today—we have separated the marketing function from the rest of tourism.

I imagine that the bulk of the £35 million that Edinburgh spends on tourism is spent on the provision and maintenance of visitor attractions, such as the free museums service. It may also be spent on other services, but we need to consider whether the tourism business should be separated from its marketing in the longer term and whether that marketing should be in only one place. It would be interesting to hear whether one member on the Labour back benches who must have

considerable experience of the matter in Glasgow shares that view.

Presumably the figure for Glasgow will be much the same as that for Edinburgh. Glasgow is spending a lot on tourism and has transformed itself into a visitor destination. Scottish Enterprise is responsible, as part of a wider remit, for supporting the development of attractions. In light of its current difficulties, perhaps we should consider whether that function sits comfortably with Scottish Enterprise and whether VisitScotland and general support for tourism from the public purse should be in a single entity, rather than spread across Scottish Enterprise, local authorities and VisitScotland. However, that is not a matter for today.

Christine May: Does Brian Adam accept that much of what is done in economic development through infrastructure support and in local authorities could be described as supporting tourism, and that to seek to wrap that all together in one entity might mean artificially creating barriers rather than making agencies work together?

Brian Adam: I accept that the issue that Christine May raises should be considered. I am trying to encourage a debate about precisely that point. Currently there is a debate about whether Scottish Enterprise's economic development function is being delivered successfully. Many people in local authorities would like that function, which was taken from them a number of years ago, to be returned to them. We should debate that point. I know that today's debate is about the marketing function and some very specific issues that relate to it, but when we look at tourism in general we should consider how we can best deliver tourism support and create partnerships that will produce not stresses and strains but co-operation in delivering a vibrant and successful tourism industry for our country.

Today, we are dealing with a number of fairly minor matters. We have primary legislation to deliver a name change. I should not have thought that that was the highest of priorities, although I accept that it is not the only reason the bill has been introduced. I was glad that, in their evidence, department officials indicated that primary legislation would not be required if a name change were made in the future. When she winds up on behalf of the Government, the minister could identify the provision in today's primary legislation that will allow a name change to be made in the future. That point is not spelled out in the Enterprise and Culture Committee's report.

Phil Gallie: If, as the officials said, the name can be changed at almost any time, why do we need to legislate at this point to change it? We can

call the organisation VisitScotland and be quite happy about that.

Brian Adam: That is the point to which I am alluding. However, to be generous to the Government—which is not my normal position—it took the opportunity that was afforded by the change from three legal entities to one to change the name legally. I want to ensure that if there is another rebranding exercise—there will undoubtedly be one, because that is what happens in life—we do not have to go through the process again and that we all know exactly which provisions in primary legislation will make that unnecessary.

I intervened on the minister to comment on designated places for COSLA on the VisitScotland board. In its submission to the inquiry, COSLA gave examples of seats being reserved on the boards of local bodies, such as national park authorities, for local authority representatives. I do not think that board members are required to be advocates or anything like that. The benefits of local authority representation can be seen on the boards of organisations such as the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Communities Scotland, on which elected members sit.

I am happy that the Government should make a decision not to designate places on the VisitScotland board. I tried in my intervention to get the minister to clarify whether that was on a point of principle or whether the Government was hiding behind the public appointments legislation. However, I have to accept what she said.

One of the great things about the bill is that, after a long period of uncertainty, staff will know precisely where they stand because they will now be employed by VisitScotland. Removing that uncertainty is undoubtedly a good thing.

I was intrigued by schedule 2 to the bill. It amends a series of acts of the Westminster Parliament. Perhaps the minister will tell us what progress she is making in discussions with her Westminster colleagues about whether they are willing to accept the schedule 2 amendments. I was particularly intrigued by the fact that the schedule appears to give us powers to promote ourselves overseas—I presume that that will be almost independently. Perhaps the minister will say a few words about that in her summing-up speech.

09:37

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It is something of an irony that we have before us today a bill entitled the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill the central purpose of which is to abolish area tourist boards and wholly absorb what remains into VisitScotland. As we ponder

that outcome today, it is only right that we take a moment to acknowledge the outstanding contribution that area tourist boards have made to the success of the Scottish tourism industry since their establishment in 1995.

Many members have enjoyed close relations with their local boards and will want to join me in paying tribute to the work that they did. The Executive might also wish to reflect for a moment on the frankly shabby treatment that was dished out to the ATBs during the early days of the restructuring. There is no need for me to repeat the strongly felt concerns that were raised by the ATBs during the Enterprise and Culture Committee's inquiry because they are adequately dealt with in that committee's report from last year, but it is only right that as the Executive fires home the final nail in the ATB coffin in the form of the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill, it does so with some humility and perhaps a little repentance.

Notwithstanding the undoubted strengths of the ATB model of the past decade, I fully accept that the time had come for some changes to be made—indeed, I have sympathy with much of what the minister said in that regard. Although I agree that fragmentation was a problem, I disagree that the new structure is the right one. There were weaknesses in the ATB model and it is right that we address them, but there were also strengths that are being unnecessarily forfeited under the new plans.

My chief concern about the hubs model relates to a loss of local knowledge and, more precisely, a loss of local industry leadership. That point was made strongly by the committee, which said in its report:

“the current local area tourist boards are a repository of a significant amount of skills and knowledge. It will be important that in any new structure for tourism in Scotland, VisitScotland does not lose this local expertise in its drive for increasing professionalism in the sector.”

I know that VisitScotland plans to retain its offices in the former ATB areas, but I detect a fear in the industry that those offices will be mere satellites of the mother ship rather than genuine local bodies.

Patricia Ferguson: Does Mr McGrigor accept that VisitScotland has not just local offices, but local partnerships with businesses, local authorities and other interested stakeholders in the area to develop that very expertise and allow things to be done in a new way?

Mr McGrigor: For example, I quote Douglas Logan, the managing director of Speciality Scotland Travel in Edinburgh, who said in *The Scotsman* in August last year:

“Since the demise of the area tourist boards, there has been nobody to speak up for small businesses ... To my

mind VisitScotland's local offices are just clones of the central organisation, representing a central big brother at a local level."

His views are not unique. Again and again I have received negative comments about the overcentralisation of the new model and the fear that local knowledge is being lost.

Indeed, I have carried out an extensive survey on the new structures among tourism businesses in my region, as have a number of my colleagues. We found a high level of discontent with the new model. I will quote from a number of responses to those surveys from throughout Scotland:

"The previous situation was far from perfect, but it's been taken away, with nothing to replace it."

"We were not very happy with our previous ATB, but the current arrangement is worse, and it is not getting better."

"We need local people 'selling' the local product. These hubs are too big and impersonal."

"As a former director of Aberdeen & Grampian Tourist Board, I have to say a change was needed. My view, however, is that the new structure is too centralised ... I don't want a return to the former ATB, but can report a strong and growing feeling of being 'left out' by businesses. This may lead to breaking away and fragmentation—which is the worst model of all."

The Executive must heed that last point about the worst of all worlds. Although I agree with the minister that under the old model there was perhaps too much of a gulf between the ATBs and VisitScotland, there is a danger now that by pursuing a policy of total centralisation, more and more communities and businesses will feel isolated and disengaged from VisitScotland and will instead set up their own marketing bodies. That has already happened to an extent in areas such as Dumfries and Galloway. It would be ironic if the Executive's attempt to unify the industry served to perpetuate division.

I accept that, as far as they go, the new area tourism partnerships that the minister mentioned are doing an excellent job, but their influence has been overhyped by VisitScotland. They have no statutory or decision-making powers and they are a poor substitute for the former boards when it comes to genuine local control.

I will touch briefly on the other provisions in the bill. I am not convinced of the necessity to change the name from the functional and descriptive Scottish Tourist Board to the hip and trendy VisitScotland.

Christine May: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McGrigor: I am sorry, but I cannot. I am reminded by photographs from my youth that, like hairstyles, trends pass and the VisitScotland name could look outdated rapidly. I have no objection to using the name VisitScotland in the meantime, but

if the trading name can be changed at any time, it seems ridiculous to abolish the tried and tested Scottish Tourist Board as the legal title. That plea for common sense to prevail has been made not only by the Scottish Conservative Party but by COSLA. I draw the minister's attention to its submission to the Enterprise and Culture Committee, in which it makes those arguments forcefully.

I have no concerns about the proposed increase in size of the VisitScotland board from seven to 12 members, although its effectiveness will depend entirely on the ability of the appointees, who I hope will be brilliant.

Presiding Officer, I hope that you will permit me in my closing minutes to touch briefly on two concerns that are not directly affected by the bill, but which are nonetheless of major concern to the tourism industry.

The Presiding Officer: You will have to be very fast because you are already 19 seconds over your limit.

Mr McGrigor: The first concern is about visitscotland.com. People have written to us with the following comments about the site:

"Long-winded and complicated, difficult to find named property"

"It is appalling"

"A national disgrace"

"Please highlight the website, it does more damage than all other aspects for self-catering".

The final comment is that

"It works very badly ... it has provided no business."

I have to stop now, unfortunately, but I hope that the minister will take on board those comments about VisitScotland.

09:44

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): As Brian Adam pointed out correctly, the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill is something of a tidying-up bill. I will make several points that arise from it.

The first flows from what Jamie McGrigor just said. I submit to colleagues that tourism providers at the sharp end—the bed and breakfast owners, for example—are not hugely bothered about the structure, make-up or size of VisitScotland's board, because such organisations come and go, but they are concerned about delivery at local level. My point arises from my intervention on the minister and is not so much about the provision of area offices, which we are not so fussed about, as about the provision of tourist information on the

street corner to the tourist on behalf of the tourism product provider. That is crucial.

Unfortunately, everything has not been quite as rosy in the Highlands as Jamie McGrigor made out. Under HOST—the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board—we saw the gradual closure of outlying tourist information centres, such as those in Helmsdale in Sutherland and in Wick. That was important because, at the end of the day, the general public, visitors and tourism providers want a real human face behind the desk—someone local who knows what they are talking about. One example that was well publicised in the local newspapers in my constituency was the fact that with the centralised call-centre approach to selling the tourist product, two years after the Caithness Glass factory in the area closed, tourists were still being told that they could visit it.

Local delivery is absolutely essential. If tourism providers are to feel that they are involved and being listened to, we need local delivery via tourist information centres. My appeal to the minister and the tourism industry in general is that, rather than close information centres, we must try to open them and work in that way. I welcome the minister's comments, in response to my intervention, about the idea of co-ordinating with the local authorities, which could lead to savings all round. Duplication is absolutely pointless.

Mr McGrigor: I agree totally with Mr Stone's points about local control and the importance of tourist information centres. He mentioned a human face. Does he agree that visitscotland.com is somewhat less than a human face and more of a robot-like call centre?

Mr Stone: I appreciate that the member has problems with visitscotland.com but, in my constituency postbag, I have not received letters about any such problems. I will highlight one problem. Members will not be surprised to hear me mention the publicity this week about the map at Edinburgh airport that had John o'Groats, one of the most famous tourism destinations in the British isles, 30 miles away from where it actually is. That was disgraceful, although VisitScotland has held up its hands and apologised. In this day and age, with Google and maps on the internet, how could a mistake of that nature be made? Such mistakes distress the tourism industry, so we must watch out for them.

Patricia Ferguson: I agree entirely with Mr Stone that that incident was not only regrettable, but reprehensible and should not have happened. I was pleased with VisitScotland's reaction and correction of the mistake. To make a point that is pertinent to the line of debate that Mr Stone is following, one of the saddest aspects of the incident with the map is that it overshadowed and detracted from VisitScotland's opening of an

information centre at Edinburgh airport, which is an excellent centre that will give visitors an opportunity to find out as much as they can about the country.

Mr Stone: I concur with the minister's remarks. The mistake was terribly unfortunate—such simple errors can be incredibly corrosive and damaging to tourism providers.

I have two final points. First, Scotland has a unique tourism product, the standard of which is recognised worldwide but, in marketing tourism, it is crucial that all departments of Government co-ordinate. We have had the introduction of subsidised air fares in the Highlands. We need to co-ordinate the marketing of the tourism product with our work on roads, air travel, transport and many other aspects of government. My second point is a plea. I always think of Scotland as being like a diamond—it is not one homogenised product, but a place with many facets, each of which is different. It is *vive la différence*. We need to sell the differences in Scotland to make it attractive in the world market. Caithness is completely different from Ross-shire, which is completely different from Ayrshire. We have ever-more intelligent and discerning tourists who appreciate the differences and who look for the different aspects of Scotland. I support the bill but, however we approach the matter, we must remind ourselves and VisitScotland that we need to sell Scotland's glorious differences, which we can bank for a long time to come.

09:49

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I do not intend to take too long, because the Enterprise and Culture Committee and its predecessor have already produced three reports on tourism in the past four years. The first was in our guise as the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and the other two were by the Enterprise and Culture Committee, on the reorganisation that had taken place and on the bill. I recommend all three reports as good recess reading for members. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for her response to the points that the committee raised on the bill. If I may say so, she dealt with all of them satisfactorily in her response this morning.

Two fundamental structural changes are taking place. The first is the integration of what were the area tourist boards into the national organisation, VisitScotland, and the second is a reorganisation of VisitScotland's board. The committee supports the proposal to expand the board membership, because we see a need for more involvement not only of local authorities—which has proved difficult until now because of the restricted numbers—but of all the other sectors that need to be represented. On the appointment of the expanded

board, I draw the minister's attention to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's report, particularly the information from California, which Gordon Jackson and I had the pleasure of visiting to examine the structure of the California Travel and Tourism Commission.

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): Somebody had to do it.

Alex Neil: I do not believe all the stories about the member not doing his work in the Parliament.

The California Travel and Tourism Commission has an interesting structure that involves the private sector in a way that we have not been able to do. In a sense, there the private sector is responsible for appointing its members of the commission from four different sectors—accommodation, visitor attractions, transport and entertainment. I draw the minister's attention to the Californian example as a way of introducing a new and innovative way of working in creating the structure of VisitScotland's board to ensure wide representation from the key players in the industry. That would be well within the proposed legislative framework that we are discussing.

One point that has not been mentioned so far but which is raised in the Enterprise and Culture Committee's report on the review of area tourist boards is the strategic focus that is provided by VisitScotland's ambition to achieve a 50 per cent increase in visitor numbers by 2014. My belief—and, I think, the committee's belief—is that that target has helped to focus strategically the work of the board and the wider industry. The feedback that I have had from the Scottish Tourism Forum and others is that that central strategic objective has helped to focus everyone's minds on the job in hand.

We should compliment the current management of VisitScotland, in particular the chairman, Peter Lederer. The management inherited a difficult situation but has done a sterling job in promoting Scottish tourism. I hope that Peter Lederer will continue in his job, because he has set an example. It is not every day that I compliment public sector management, but I compliment VisitScotland's strongly. The organisation was in a precarious position when the current management took over, but it has stabilised the organisation and made it ready to progress and, I hope, achieve the 50 per cent target to which I referred.

I want to make a point about integration. The area tourist board network had some fantastic advantages, particularly the engagement with the private sector at local level. In the new structure, we must ensure that we do not lose the contribution and involvement of the local private sector and we must maintain the ethos that the industry should lead and dictate which needs the

public sector agencies must meet. However, as the committee acknowledged, the downside of the previous system was the membership structure, which was undoubtedly a barrier to success in some areas. The key point is that the local partnerships that have now been established should be allowed to feed into the national network new ideas and thinking and to give feedback on what needs to be done to satisfy their requirements. Local input is extremely important, and the new integrated structure should be as much about building from the bottom up as about building from the top down. If the proper balance is maintained, we can get the benefits of both worlds.

There is no doubt that tourism is our number 1 industry, that it is extremely important for employment in Scotland and that VisitScotland, the local authorities and the private sector have an absolutely vital role to play. The committee's view is that we must ensure that the new structure works. Indeed, we said in our previous report that we will monitor from time to time success at the local level as well as at the national level and how well integration has progressed.

We recommend the bill to the Parliament and agree with its general principles. We hope that it will allow us to take the Scottish tourism industry forward so that it achieves what it can achieve and is the best small tourism industry in the world.

09:56

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): As members would expect, I have nothing against the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill; indeed, it is hard to see how someone could have something against it. It is probably a good thing, and most people think that it is okay—as far as I can see, Jamie McGrigor is the exception.

I understand that the bill will simply put the existing reality on a statutory footing. As a result, there is not much to say about it, so I wondered what there was to discuss. There is probably nothing to say about its details, but the debate gives us a wee opportunity to think a little about our tourism industry.

Like most public or semi-public bodies, VisitScotland has worthy aims; I suspect that it has a mission statement somewhere. The importance of the tourism industry to Scotland and the need to do things properly can certainly not be overstated. Therefore, it is important—I am stating the obvious—that when we consider changes, we consider not only structural changes or simply rearranging the proverbial deckchairs. With structures, there is always the danger that all we will do is move everything around. Alex Neil said that the Enterprise and Culture Committee will

continue to monitor the new structure. I know that it will do so and wish it well because it has a duty to ensure that the promised improvements are delivered and that structural change is not the only thing that happens. In that context, I will give a few random thoughts.

I read in a briefing paper the other day—I receive piles of such things—that the changes will make the tourism structure similar to the enterprise network model. I drew in my breath when I read that and thought that it was a bit worrying, bearing in mind what has happened recently. I am not trying to be facetious; I know what was meant. We are talking about an integrated network and a similar model, but I thought that it was a bad week in which to use such an analogy. Some of us in Glasgow have not been enamoured with that structure in the past week or so—my colleague Charlie Gordon would agree with me. The reality is that the structure has not been at all helpful in Glasgow. There has been a real move towards centralisation and stopping things working locally that have worked perfectly well locally until now. I appreciate the general structural analogy, but I hope that the tourism model will not work like the enterprise network model.

Brian Adam: A business whose marketing is totally divorced from its general business is unusual. What does the member think about the idea that we should consider better integration of the marketing function of the tourism industry and the rest of the tourism industry? Having a marketing function on its own is unique.

Gordon Jackson: I am not being in the least bit sarcastic when I say that what the member said is way over my head. I know nothing whatever about marketing, but I suspect that he has made a good point, which the minister will probably want to deal with.

It is important that the structure engages better locally—perhaps that answers the question a wee bit. I have listened to Mr McGrigor's strictures on the matter and do not want members to think that I agree with him, but I have heard the complaints that people in the industry—publicans and hoteliers, for example—have made. People often think that they are not well connected with the organisation. Knowing some of them, I get the feeling that it is sometimes their fault that they do not get involved, but there is sometimes a failure properly to bring local providers on board. That is what Jamie McGrigor said. Perhaps that is not right, but I sometimes hear that wee complaint.

The link with businesses and the private sector is important, and Alex Neil mentioned that we went to America to consider that matter. I will be serious. I hope that Alex Neil will not mind my saying that he is hardly known as being the

greatest fan of the private sector in general and that he is critical of the private sector when it should be criticised, but we were equally struck by the way in which the main industry players had bought into—literally, as that is the American way—the whole structure in California and by the fact that there was absolutely no question of there being them and us. The effect of the genuine partnership that existed was obvious to us. I am not attributing blame to anyone, but I wonder whether we need a little bit more of that attitude in our tourism sector.

How local authority involvement is being tackled is encouraging. I like the emphasis on the link between local authorities and local service delivery, and the partnership agreement should make things accountable. I noticed somewhere that there was a fear that local authorities might miss out the new structure by deciding to fund local business tourism initiatives directly. I have no idea whether that was simply scaremongering or whether it is likely to happen, but the likelihood will only increase if the partners think that the structure is not working properly. It would be bad if that happened. I welcome the continued emphasis on working at a local level. It has been pointed out that more than 80 per cent of involvement with business is at that level.

Sometimes our tourism industry does daft things. In that context, I cannot resist mentioning the proposed glass ban in Glasgow, which struck me as daft, although, thankfully, it did not happen. Many able people work in the industry and lead the Scottish effort. All of us wish the industry well and hope that the changes will help it to progress.

10:02

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I, too, wondered whether there was something slightly contradictory about the title of the bill and whether a bill that will abolish the Scottish Tourist Board might have been better named the "VisitScotland Bill" or even the "VisitScotland (Scotland) Bill" rather than the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill. My colleague Mark Ballard and Murdo Fraser dissented from the majority view in the Enterprise and Culture Committee on the proposed name changes, but neither felt strongly enough to produce a minority report on the subject. Likewise, the Greens support the general principles of the bill, despite our reservations.

I opposed the handling of the merger, which appeared at the time to be far more of a centralised takeover than an agreed merger and which left staff feeling for a considerable time excluded from the process and anxious about the future of their jobs. We have heard that the process led to the formation of the Association of Dumfries and Galloway Accommodation

Providers—ADGAP—which was set up to compete with VisitScotland to a certain degree. However, things have moved on and VisitScotland and ADGAP have started to work together. That there are alternative comings-together of accommodation providers is excellent and a great development, but I hope that VisitScotland and ADGAP move closer together and complement each other's work. It is important that local gatherings of tourism service providers work together to complement the work of VisitScotland.

In oral evidence to the committee, the minister said:

"We think that the Scottish Tourist Board name belongs in the past. The VisitScotland name emphasises the way forward for tourism in Scotland and the brand is already established as an easily recognisable and trusted brand by visitors and businesses alike."—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 16 May 2006; c 3081.]

Now that we have the name and it is established, we should certainly stick with it, but I hope that today's debate is not repeated in a few years' time as we are called on to approve another name change. I appreciate the logic of wanting the legal name to be the same as the marketing name, for the avoidance of confusion, but it is a concern that the bill, on the one hand, attempts to future proof by allowing for an increase in the size of the board without the need for primary legislation and, on the other hand, ties the organisation legally to a marketing brand that may change in five or 10 years' time.

The financial memorandum to the bill notes that the merger was supposed to cost £5 million but will now cost £7.4 million—an increase of 50 per cent. That is noteworthy as a sign that the merger did not go as planned. I hope that the minister will confirm that that is absolutely the final cost increase, particularly considering the question marks that still hang over the position of VAT and staff pensions in VisitScotland. At worst, the liability for pensions could see an extra £7 million added to that cost. I hope that, in summing up, the minister will provide us with a more concrete assurance than the Executive's previously stated position of being reasonably optimistic that there will be no further liability. I hope that she will also be able to give a copper-bottomed guarantee to VisitScotland's staff that their pensions will not be harmed and that payments will be made in full.

10:07

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Much of the debate has been technical in nature. With your leave, Presiding Officer, I wish to make a more tangential speech about the significance of the tourism industry to the economy—especially the economy of the Scottish Borders. I note that VisitScotland's target is to

grow tourism revenues by 50 per cent by 2015. If that can flow down to the Borders, it will be extremely important, given the significance of tourism over the past decade and the continuing decrease in the number of jobs in textiles and electronics.

Tourism brings £100 million into the Scottish Borders economy and employs more than 4,000 people—8 per cent of the population. More than 900 tourism businesses work together to form that tourism industry. Members have talked about local contributions. Scottish Borders Council provides £270,000 per annum to the VisitScotland Borders network office.

The topography of the Borders, which made the area ideal for wool production, is what makes it ideal for holidays. I am not going to do a big trailer for the Borders, but I mention the possibilities for walking, cycling and riding. Of special significance are the common ridings, such as the one that I attended recently at Selkirk, which offer the most moving experience. They are attended mainly by people who live in the Borders or who return to see them. The casting of the colours to commemorate the battle of Flodden—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Will you relate this eulogy for the Borders to the motion, Ms Grahame?

Christine Grahame: I said that my speech would be slightly tangential. I will get back to the subject, but all of that is important in drawing people to the Borders.

I draw the minister's attention to the flaws in VisitScotland's website, which have been referred to. When I was researching for the debate, the latest figures that I could get for tourism in the Scottish Borders from the website were for 2002. A name change is one thing, but it is not much good if there is a flawed website behind it. According to those figures, the majority of visitors to the Borders are from the United Kingdom, mostly from England. That adds significance to the Waverley line that is now being developed—we hope. It is essential that, at some point, that line is continued all the way to Carlisle to draw tourists from England in greater numbers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I really think that you should get on to the subject of the debate, Ms Grahame.

Christine Grahame: I was talking about the Scottish Borders Tourist Board.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, but the Waverley line is not a central feature of the bill that we are discussing.

Brian Adam: I am sure that the member listened to my interventions on both Gordon Jackson and the minister. How does she relate the

separate marketing function—which is what VisitScotland is—to the overall tourism business? How does she think that we might best link those? Does she think that the current structure satisfies the needs of the tourism industry in the Borders or elsewhere?

Christine Grahame: In response to Brian Adam's earlier intervention I was going to say that, notwithstanding the centralisation of VisitScotland, which has been referred to, there is still a significant role for local structures. That exists in the Borders in the Scottish Borders tourism business forum, which links into VisitScotland. It is more functional than the old area tourist board and comprises organisations such as Careers Scotland, Historic Scotland, Scottish Borders Council and others who feed into the system. That is extremely important.

As the debate is about a short bill that deals with a technical matter of tidying up what already exists, I have nothing further to add. I repeat my point to the minister that a name change is not sufficient; VisitScotland's website needs to be greatly improved or people will be deterred from using it.

10:12

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): It will come as no surprise to members that I will focus on the impact that the bill will have locally in my part of Scotland.

I am not going to pretend that all was well with the old area tourist board system, although I acknowledge the contribution that many tourist board staff made, which other members have mentioned. All was not well, but if we are going to change something, we ought to change it for the better.

I remember months of frustration as we eagerly awaited the pronouncement of Lord Watson, who was then the minister, on the outcome of the Executive's lengthy deliberations on its consultation on the future of area tourist boards. At the end of that lengthy period, there was a sense of dismay at the announcement of the new structure that Parliament will, no doubt, legitimise today. However, it will not do so with the help of Conservative members, as we do not believe that this will be a change for the better locally. Nor do we believe that it will benefit local tourist businesses or, indeed, tourists in remote rural constituencies such as mine.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): When I hosted in the Parliament the last meeting of the Scottish Borders Tourist Board under the old structure, many members were excited about the prospect of a local team, such as the one in Selkirk, doing

excellent work not just for the Borders but in taking on national roles. Does the member have sympathy with the view that local officers in rural areas will be able to play a much greater role in promoting tourism throughout the country?

Alex Fergusson: I would have more sympathy with that if I had experienced it working in my part of Scotland. I am delighted that the structure is working well in the Borders; I am not convinced that it is working on my patch. I will come back to that point.

In areas such as Galloway, tourism-related businesses need to have a tangible sense of ownership of and involvement in the structure of their industry. One of the problems with the area tourist boards was that they were perceived to be too autocratic and to be dictating to local businesses rather than working in partnership with them. The situation was improving towards the end of their lives but, with the benefit of a year's experience of the hubs, we see that any sense of ownership and involvement seems to have disappeared off the radar screen. The principal reason for that seems to be that the local forums or partnerships—or whatever they are called—lack any real teeth, as Jamie McGrigor said. They have no decision-making power, therefore they are reduced largely to the role of a talking shop that gives the Executive the opportunity to tick the necessary boxes and say that local involvement is the watchword of the new structure, when that does not seem to be the case. As far as I can ascertain, the forums have no agreed structure, laid-down remit, term of office or constitution. Saddest of all, they seem to have little accountability.

Patricia Ferguson: I know that the member has returned to this theme on a number of occasions. Mr Purvis and Christine Grahame made a valid point about the role that can be played locally. Perhaps Mr Fergusson could provide some leadership locally and encourage things to happen in his area. He would do VisitScotland and local businesses a great service if he did.

Alex Fergusson: I will come back to that as well. My effort to provide such leadership, through the initiative that I tried to put forward, was rather thwarted.

In previous debates on the subject, I recall warning that the changes would encourage the formation of breakaway bodies of dissatisfied tourism operators, which is exactly what has happened in many areas. In my part of Scotland—Chris Ballance referred to this—the Association of Dumfries and Galloway Accommodation Providers was formed and now represents a substantial percentage of accommodation providers in the region. I am afraid that I do not recognise the picture that Chris Ballance painted. The

association certainly did not make life easy for the area tourist board, nor is it making life particularly easy for its replacement. However, it wants to engage constructively with the forum as it has the best interests of local tourism at heart.

When the bed and breakfast representative on the forum resigned, ADGAP requested a place on the forum as the representative of a substantial local interest. I played an active role in trying to promote that engagement. It presented a golden opportunity to bring together the critic and the criticised under one roof, so that differences of opinion could be aired around the table rather than largely through the columns of local newspapers. However, ADGAP's request was rejected unanimously, which was a great pity, because it simply reinforced the perception that the new local structure is a puppet of the centre, that local ownership is a myth and that there is even less accountability with this structure than there was with the one it replaced.

Tourism is desperately important to the economy of my part of Scotland, which has to fight its own corner in the tourism world, given that tourists tend to come up the M6 and carry on up the M74 to the central belt and onwards to the Highlands and Islands. I am happy that the decision to keep Dumfries and Galloway as a hub on its own acknowledges the struggle that we face. We fight a constant battle to get some of the tourist traffic to turn left at Carlisle and savour the real beauty of the south-west of Scotland in general and Galloway in particular. To achieve that, we need local leadership, under local control, that is capable of disseminating local knowledge to those who come to the area.

Under the bill, it seems that we will have an ever more centralised structure that operates through a somewhat anonymous call centre that often displays such a lack of local knowledge that it is almost insulting to the inquirer. That is the exact opposite of the direction in which we should be going. I am afraid that, in all conscience, I cannot support the bill.

10:17

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Tourism is about more than civic pride or cultural education, important though those are; it is a key industry, which employs 9 per cent of Scotland's workforce and generates £4.5 billion annually for the Scottish economy. Tourism development is an integral part of our drive for economic growth.

Scotland is a strong brand that needs a better distribution network. The key ways to improve the distribution of Scotland as a brand are through transport links such as air route development, good surface links, such as rail links to airports,

and understandable local transport for visitors who, with the best will in the world, do not have local knowledge. The other key component is marketing information about Scotland more effectively to potential customers—by and large to people who have never been to Scotland.

Today's bill formalises the abolition of the past structure for marketing Scotland. I acknowledge that, in many respects, those past structures served Scotland well. I will focus on how new, tailored partnership structures are already delivering improvements in differentiated markets within the overall Scottish strategy.

Glasgow City Marketing Bureau was established in April 2005 with ministerial consent. The sole member of the company is Glasgow City Council, which is the company's main funder, to the tune of more than £2 million per annum. The main objectives of the bureau are the delivery throughout key national and international markets of a brand strategy for Glasgow that positions the city competitively; the development of initiatives that increase the contribution of discretionary business tourism and event tourism to Glasgow's economy; and the delivery of the excellent city destination website for the Glasgow metropolitan area, which is called seeglasgow.com.

VisitScotland's local network office in Glasgow leads on leisure tourism and has observer status on the board of the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau. The new partnership approach has already delivered impressive results in its first year. In the year to 31 March, the bureau attracted an additional 230,000 tourists to the city, generating additional revenue of £26.5 million. City hotel occupancy has increased year on year by 2 per cent from 70.7 per cent in 2004-05 to 72.7 per cent in 2005-06, despite an increase in the bed supply of more than 1,000 beds in the same year.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with civic pride in our local landscapes, architecture or visitor attractions, but we must move away from preaching mainly to the converted and focus on people who have not yet made the decision to come here.

Phil Gallie: The member referred to international and national marketing. As I understand it, the purpose of VisitScotland is to ensure international marketing of Scotland as a whole. What Charlie Gordon is referring to is, in effect, a degree of fragmentation, which is one of the major issues of concern to us in relation to the bill.

Mr Gordon: I am sorry, but I was reporting not fragmentation but effective partnership in differentiated markets. As I explained, leisure tourism and marketing is led by the local network of VisitScotland and the bureau concentrates on

the three remits that it was given with ministerial consent. The whole adds up to more than the sum of the parts, as far as the Glasgow metropolitan area is concerned. If the rest of the country starts to look forward rather than mainly backward, it will learn from the good practice in Glasgow and the west of Scotland.

The bill formally tidies up the past processes. As I have said, many have already got down to the business of embracing and improving Scotland's tourism future. For Glasgow, opting out of that is not an option. In the Glasgow region, 50,000 jobs are reliant on tourism, which is more than there were in the Clyde shipyards in their heyday. We must all embrace that future to maximise Scotland's success.

10:23

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): A number of members have said that the bill is very much a tidying-up bill that takes forward the strategy that Frank McAveety announced in March 2004. I declare an interest in that I represent a constituency where tourism makes a vital contribution to the local economy. It is estimated that Orkney receives 127,000 visitors per annum, which delivers £27 million a year to the economy. The Lonely Planet guide describes Orkney as:

"A glittering centrepiece in Scotland's treasure chest of attractions."

I could not put it better than that.

When the minister gave evidence to the Enterprise and Culture Committee, which dealt with the bill, she drew attention to the fact that VisitShetland and VisitOrkney had teamed up to take advantage of this year's national spring marketing campaign to promote the northern isles as an ideal place to visit. I am delighted to say that the minister practises what she preaches, as she was a visitor to Orkney earlier this month during the St Magnus festival. I hope that that experience will encourage her to come back.

The important point when trying to measure this bill is the question whether it helps to strengthen and support what is, in many parts of Scotland, an important and dynamic industry. I declare a further interest, because I was the chairman of the ministerial working group that looked at the tourism strategy for Scotland and led, ultimately, to the statement that Frank McAveety, who was then the minister with responsibility for tourism, made in 2004. It was not just a group of ministers sitting around a table. We took evidence from people in the industry. It would be wrong to say that there was unanimity, but a strong theme came through that, in a highly competitive global marketplace, considerable benefits flow from an integrated Scotland-wide network. That led to the bill that we have before us today.

We understood that the network would consist of local tourism hubs. I am told that the word "hub" is not the most popular word, but it is as good a word as any. Charlie Gordon said that it is important that we have an effective partnership at local level as well as ensure that the hubs contribute to a national strategy. That is a recognition that there is diversity and that there has to be an ability to respond to local circumstances. When the structure was announced, the then chair of the ATB network said:

"It is vital that the new structure builds on, rather than erodes, the successful relationships which ATBs have nurtured at local level with our public agency partners and tourism businesses."

As Jamie McGrigor said, there is a huge reservoir of expertise, knowledge and ability at a local level, which we ignore at our peril. Therefore, it is important when we are dealing with this bill, which sets up a national structure, that we remember that the thrust was to have a national structure and an integrated network that built on local expertise. It would be welcome if the minister reaffirmed that.

It is important that we recognise that balance between a national network and the local dimension. That balance was buttressed by the service agreements that were built in with the local authorities. I understand from a recent meeting of the board of VisitScotland that it hopes to approach the Executive for additional grant in aid, which will allow for what it fears is a phasing out of local authority core funding, although it recognises that local authority funding has an important role to play in delivering specific local service agreements. The problem is to do with how we define core funding. We might say that staffing is a core matter but, in many parts of Scotland, a particular member of staff—say, one who deals with marketing—might be important to local delivery.

We have to ensure that the bill that we are promoting today does not have a centralising tendency. VisitScotland has good corporate communications, but that is not a substitute for good, local and effective marketing. We do not need to emphasise the issue about uniforms for tourist information centre staff if that is at the expense of a more locally focused approach. Diversity in tourism ought to be valued. We have to get the right balance between national and local.

One of the advantages that has flowed from the new structures is that there has been greater private sector involvement. Before, it was too easy for private sector businesses such as bed and breakfasts to pay their subscription to the ATB and think that they had done their bit. However, in Orkney, for instance, the Orkney tourism group is

extremely lively. In February, it organised an important seminar on tourism. It recognises that the obvious tourism-related industries, such as hotels, restaurants, bed and breakfasts and the main visitor attractions are important and that the food and drink industry and the craft industry are important. The new structures give an incentive for the private sector to engage more actively than it has done in the past.

Another important part of the package that was announced relates to training and skills. Charlie Gordon mentioned the fact that around 9 per cent of Scotland's workforce is engaged in tourism. We are all aware that a large part of the tourism industry is made up of people who are seasonally employed, such as students—in that regard, I declare an interest, as my daughter has been working as a waitress in an Orkney hotel for the past four or five weeks. It is important that people identify tourism as an industry that can offer career opportunities. Certainly, the ministerial group that I chaired identified the importance of addressing the skills gap. There is a need to ensure that skills are promoted in the tourism industry. When the minister replies, it would be useful if she could say what is being done to address that important issue.

The bill delivers a formal structure. However, as we are all aware as a result of the many pieces of legislation that we have passed, formal structures take us only so far. What happens on the ground is vital. There are benefits from national marketing, but we will ensure that value is added to an important industry by being sensitive to the importance of local delivery.

10:31

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I came into the chamber this morning recognising that, while there are differences between us on the bill, we would have a relatively balanced debate. Many good points have been made by many members. However, I suffered some consternation when Jamie Stone said that this was a tidying-up bill. The last time that something was so described was when Peter Hain and Peter Mandelson suggested that the European constitution was merely a tidying-up exercise. On that basis, I had another quick look at the bill to see where the bugs are. Happily, however, I do not see too many, and my opinions have not changed too much during the debate.

Tourism is a major earner for Scotland. The figures that Charlie Gordon gave with regard to Glasgow were particularly interesting. The fact that more people in Glasgow work in tourism than worked in shipbuilding in the old days says it all about the importance of tourism to Scotland. On that basis, we must ensure that, whatever

Government does with regard to the tourism industry, we support rather than harm and ensure that the industry can go forward with minimum regulation by and involvement of the Government.

I congratulate the minister on the way in which the Executive has promoted Scotland in a number of ways. Scotland has a lot going for it, not least in the field of sport. In music and in food, we have a distinct brand. Our agriculture and food industries work well to provide considerable material for whatever body markets Scotland. As Christine Grahame said, we have a wonderful natural environment—we have the water, the hills and the landscape. We have to protect those things so that the marketing bodies can market them. In that regard, I will make one quick point on a familiar theme: let us not spoil our landscape by covering it with too many wind turbines. We must use a modicum of sense in developing wind power.

I recognise that VisitScotland's central role relates to global marketing, but I am concerned about the effect that that has at a local level. I note what the minister said about the desire to encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors but, as Alex Fergusson said, such partnerships lack teeth. I am concerned about the fact that there will be a feeling of isolation in some localities. Alex Fergusson highlighted the situation in Dumfries and Galloway. It is unfortunate that a dissenting voice was not welcomed on to the forum. There should be a balance. We can all stand a bit of dissention in whichever forum we work. It is unfortunate that the ADGAP representative was not backed in that situation.

I get the feeling that the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill is a bill for big players such as the larger companies and the global enterprises that have moved into tourism. I want to ensure that the local voice is heard and recognised as an important feature of tourism throughout Scotland. If we consider Charlie Gordon's figures and the impact on employment in Scotland, we find that small businesses provide the bulk of the opportunities for employment and earning. Whatever happens, we must ensure that their voice is not diminished.

Patricia Ferguson: Does Mr Gallie recognise that local businesses are assisted not just by our commitment to tourism per se but by our commitment to a number of other strategies? For example, our international and regional events strategy encourages local events to go into local tourism areas so that the local market can benefit. We have the views, concerns and viability of local businesses at heart.

Phil Gallie: I hear what the minister says and I hope that that turns out to be the case. I take the opportunity to say that EventScotland has been highly successful. I give credit to the Scottish

Executive for that, and I also gave it credit when I spoke about its input to sport. However, we need more than just the Government giving opportunities. We need to ensure that local voices are heard. Local areas have their own perceptions and reasons for putting forward their views. It is not enough for them simply to express those views; they have to be heard and, somewhere along the line, acted upon. Concern has been voiced about that, not only by Conservative members but by others in the debate.

Finally, I refer to the Scottish Tourist Board's change of name. The minister said that she has reserved the name to ensure that it cannot be used elsewhere. I think that the change of name is irrelevant, to be honest. VisitScotland is an appropriate name but, as one of the officials told the Enterprise and Culture Committee, it could be changed at any time in the future. That being the case, why not just leave the name as it is and retain the name Scottish Tourist Board, given that it can rebrand itself in any way it wishes?

10:38

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): This has been a wide-ranging debate. It is on a narrow issue, but one that is part of a wider generic topic. Many members gave credit to the industry and put that on the record. As we approach the recess and people, including me, prepare to depart on their travels, we sometimes forget what we have in Scotland. We have the unparalleled beauty and the amenities that many members mentioned, but we also have remarkably good service.

As many members said, the Scottish tourism industry has improved remarkably. There is a self-deprecating aspect to the Scottish character that can be charming and endearing, but sometimes it can go too far. We often hear apocryphal tales about bad service, such as somebody being refused tea at 7.30 pm in Aviemore or wherever. In fact, whether in a chip shop in Gourrock or a five-star establishment in Edinburgh or Glasgow, remarkably good service is the norm. There are instances of poor service, but they happen worldwide. We should praise the industry, not just for what it contributes to the Scottish economy, but for the fact that it has improved remarkably and is still improving.

Jim Wallace's comments were appropriate. There are career opportunities and career paths in tourism. There has to be a change of attitude in Scotland that service is not servility. Whether that is being changed by the attitudes of those in the industry or by Aussie backpackers working in bars here, who have created a sense of glamour and a sense that such careers are things that people can go into and enjoy, things have changed remarkably and we should pay tribute to that.

It could be argued that today's debate is almost a debate on subordinate legislation, but we understand why primary legislation is required. The changes that are made by the bill might be part of a tidying-up process, as my colleague Brian Adam said, but they have to be made. Not all debates in the chamber can be on strategic matters; some have to deal with the minutiae and address structural matters. We are happy to support the bill.

There was considerable delay with the ATBs going through. We sometimes look back at the halcyon days, but let us not delude ourselves. Many ATBs worked remarkably well—we in Edinburgh and the Lothians were well served—but other ATBs had difficulties that were not simply financial and they did not manage to achieve everything that they needed to. There were difficulties with getting people to sign up for what they perceived to be a state responsibility, and I had a great deal of sympathy with that. There were also difficulties when we expected people—whether they were electricians or hoteliers—to join together. There was not necessarily a configuration of interests. It is important that we tidy things up.

To some extent, the question of the name is a tautological matter. I have never been particularly sold on the name "VisitScotland", but it is the name that we have and I see no point in seeking to rebrand the body. I have debated that point with others in my party. Whether the body is called "VisitScotland", "Welcome to Scotland" or "Come to Scotland", what matters is what it does.

Christine May: Does Mr MacAskill agree that the customer is important? We have perhaps not focused on that in this morning's debate. Without increasing numbers of customers, wherever they come from, we will not get the growth in tourism that we seek.

Mr MacAskill: Absolutely. The tourism industry in Scotland needs to be supported and assisted in how it trains staff and provides services, but it is doing a remarkably good job itself and the private sector is delivering those things, aided and abetted by colleges, the Executive and the civil service at both national and local level. Fundamentally, we have to make Scotland affordable and accessible. To give credit where it is due, the work on opening up new air links has been appropriate. We have a problem with the exchange rate, which makes this country outrageously expensive for most tourists from other countries. Until that can be addressed, we will have a problem, although concentrating on niche markets is important.

We must remember that it is not VisitScotland's role to compete within Scotland. It is up to individual areas to sell their wares as they can,

whether it is Christine Grahame promoting the outdoor facilities that are available in the Borders or Charlie Gordon orating the benefits of the city of Glasgow, with its marvellous architecture. At the end of the day, VisitScotland's job is to get people to come to Scotland. Where they go thereafter depends on the attempts to persuade them of the benefits of each area and on what type of holiday they want. We live in a globalised world, so we have to tailor things to suit people. We cannot simply say, "Come to Edinburgh because of its wonderful castle." People can pick and choose from a variety of castles throughout the world, including those in the Czech Republic and the Baltic states. We have to give people a specific reason to go to the destination.

Phil Gallie: I do not recognise the member's comment that Scotland is expensive. One of the benefits that we in Ayrshire have gained from the new air routes is that we now attract many visitors from Scandinavia, in particular. That is because Scotland offers good value, rather than the high costs that Kenny MacAskill mentioned.

Mr MacAskill: Scotland offers good value for many of the golfers who come here and I welcome the fact that they come in on the Ryanair flights and other new flights. However, we remain a remarkably high-cost destination, whether that is due to the high pound, high VAT or high fuel costs. The cost of a hotel room in the city of Edinburgh—and indeed in Ayrshire—is significantly higher than one would pay in the United States or mainland Europe. That factor is beyond our control, but it impinges on Scottish tourism. Mr Gallie shakes his head, but if he speaks to those in the sector, they will tell him that they have to try to sell a high-cost product. They are selling it well and, correctly, they are going up-market to try to make sure that they get the best value, but the cost is an impediment. People can get the same product in some areas in Ireland at a considerably lower cost. As I say, that is beyond our control but the issue must be addressed.

An element of local accountability is required—other members, including Mr Gallie, have touched on that—but the nature of the beast is that some centralisation is also required if we want VisitScotland to sell Scotland in the international market. However, we must take cognisance of individuals' views and of the relationships and rapport that existed with many local tourist boards. VisitScotland must do better at that; in the areas in which I am involved, the rapport that existed with the then Edinburgh and Lothians Tourist Board has not been created with VisitScotland's regional office in the city of Edinburgh. That may be down to personalities, but it must be addressed.

As for niche markets, it might not have been best for some tourist boards to take responsibility

for cruise liners and others to take responsibility for teaching English as a foreign language, which is important in Edinburgh, but we must ensure that those markets are picked up, although it is accepted that they are non-core. VisitScotland has a responsibility to promote Scotland as a cruise-liner destination and as a place in which to learn the English language, because those features add value to simply targeting the core market in the low countries, France, Germany and North America. That must be addressed. Perhaps that is being done, although I am not aware that it is and elements of the sector have complained to me about that. The issue can be overcome.

As I and others have said, we in this country too often see the glass as half empty rather than half full. We have a fantastic product and our industry is doing well and can do better, despite the difficulties with matters that are beyond its control. However, as I said, this debate is about tidying up that must be done. Wider-ranging debates are for the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Patricia Ferguson to wind up the debate. Officially, you are due 10 minutes, but a couple of minutes are in hand if you require them.

10:47

Patricia Ferguson: I listened with great interest to the debate and I genuinely thank my parliamentary colleagues for their speeches. I am particularly heartened that, like me, they believe that tourism is everybody's business.

It is good to hear that, on the whole, Parliament agrees that Scotland and VisitScotland are making good progress. I thank the Enterprise and Culture Committee for its consideration of the bill and I am pleased that it supported the general principles. However, it is clear that the committee and members who are present require reassurance on several issues. I will attempt to answer as many queries as I can; if I do not manage them all, I will write to the members concerned after the debate.

In opening for the Scottish National Party, Brian Adam made several points to which I should respond. Through interventions, too, he pursued a theme about marketing having been separated out. We have debated that already; that is how we reached where we are. We have worked hard to develop a single brand for Scotland, which it is important to have, for the reasons that Kenny MacAskill outlined. It is fair to say that the campaigns on the single brand are giving a very strong return on investment. For example, the return on investment for the welcome to our life campaign was £23 for every £1 that was spent. That approach has worked well.

Brian Adam rose—

Patricia Ferguson: I will not give way as I have a lot to get through.

Brian Adam asked whether Westminster was content with our changing legislation. We are discussing with Whitehall an order under section 104 of the Scotland Act 1998, but the United Kingdom Government has agreed in principle that we should proceed in that way.

Brian Adam talked about the power to promote Scotland overseas. VisitScotland promotes Scotland to developed markets. In new and developing markets, it works closely with VisitBritain. Much progress has been made on that.

Jamie McGrigor talked about the shabby treatment of members of the previous area tourist boards. VisitScotland and I have acknowledged the work that was done. If things are as bad as Mr McGrigor thinks, I am surprised that none of the people or organisations to which he referred chose to give evidence on the bill to the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

The name "VisitScotland" is an example of an industry standard of using the word "visit" and the name of a country, so we are bringing our system and our enterprise up to date.

I know that visitscotland.com receives much criticism on many matters, but a significant number of tourists nowadays choose to book online when arranging to visit a country. Through visitscotland.com, £45 million of business has been arranged for accommodation providers, which shows that the website is at least heading in the right direction. I accept that not everything in the visitscotland.com garden is rosy, but it has moved on significantly and will continue to do so.

Mr McGrigor: Tourism people heap praise on the tourist information centres. I have asked the minister in the past whether those centres will be kept. Will she give me a concrete assurance that they will be kept?

Patricia Ferguson: When I make comments in the chamber, I sometimes wonder whether I should repeat them there and then. In response to an intervention by Mr Stone, I spoke about the review of tourist information centres that VisitScotland undertook. I understand that that is complete and that VisitScotland is to produce its plans. I cannot give a cast-iron guarantee—nor should I—that every information centre in the country will be kept open, because some are in the wrong places or operate in the wrong ways. Such matters must be reviewed over time. The centres have an important role to play, on which we can improve. They are a valuable part of the network.

Alex Neil said that the committee's various reports were excellent recess reading and I agree.

He was correct to say that the board and the management of VisitScotland do a good job. However, I take issue a little with him and with Gordon Jackson about the initiatives that they saw in California, because we now have a model that is the envy of many parts of the world, which are considering copying the VisitScotland integrated structure and which are asking VisitScotland how that was achieved. Of course, we are always open to new ideas and we know that we must continue to innovate.

Gordon Jackson was right to say that the debate is not just about the structure, but about the culture of the organisation and of tourism in Scotland and about the value that we—and everyone outside the chamber—collectively place on tourism. He said that it is important for the sector to be involved. The fact that the 50 per cent target that Alex Neil and Christine Grahame mentioned is an industry target that we in the Government support shows the buy-in from the industry.

Chris Ballance and Alex Fergusson spoke about the problems that ADGAP perceives that it has in Dumfries and Galloway. I hope that Chris Ballance is correct that working methods have changed and that there have been positive developments between VisitScotland and ADGAP. However, we need to be clear that ADGAP is not just an association of accommodation providers; it provides a rival website and booking service and is a commercial organisation that competes with visitscotland.com. I understand that ADGAP's application to the area tourism partnership was rejected not by VisitScotland, but by the entire partnership unanimously, as Alex Fergusson said. It is worth putting that on record and into context, but I am perfectly happy to look into that further if that would help.

Christine Grahame made the valid point that many visitors to the Borders come from England. That is why the UK domestic market is important. We know that 45 per cent of English people have never been to Scotland, so we have a big untapped market on our doorstep. If we could get them to deviate into Dumfries and Galloway, that would be all the better. Of course, it would be entirely possible for us to do that. I am sure that other members will put in bids for places those people should visit.

Charlie Gordon was right to emphasise the importance of the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, and I know that the Edinburgh bureau is having a similar benefit. However, we should acknowledge that the City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council not only have worked well in partnership with VisitScotland but have made substantial investment, because they understand the importance of tourism to their areas and want their strategies to be successful.

Several members, particularly Jim Wallace, rightly raised the issue of skills and the importance of making careers in the tourism industry viable and attractive to people. That is an important part of our work and the issue certainly poses a constant challenge, but the influx of people from other parts of the world is helping significantly to push up the standards of the indigenous workforce. For example, three weeks ago, I launched a project at Dunfermline high school to encourage young people in schools to learn online about training opportunities in the hospitality, catering and tourism sectors. Moreover, Sector Skills Alliance Scotland has launched a DVD that highlights the workplace training at the St Andrews Bay hotel as an example of good practice. The hotel has won awards for its training and stands as a good example of how the tourism industry can get things right.

Presiding Officer, I am not sure whether I am running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The debate has to finish by 11 o'clock, so you have almost three minutes left.

Patricia Ferguson: Thank you. I can now wax lyrical about tourism, which, along with sport and culture, is one of my favourite subjects.

In my intervention on Mr Gallie, I mentioned the regional events strategy. The fact that that is an important aspect of the work of EventScotland—which, of course, is an adjunct of VisitScotland—shows the synergy of tourism, culture and sport. We cannot underestimate the value of sporting and cultural tourism to our country.

Mr Stone: Mr Gallie mentioned food in his speech. Will the minister consider further promoting food as a tourism product through food fairs and so on? I should perhaps declare an interest in that respect, Presiding Officer.

Patricia Ferguson: As Mr Stone is sitting next to me and I am aware of his interest in the subject, I was just about to mention the importance of food to tourism. In that respect, I am pleased to support the EatScotland scheme, which I think has a great deal of merit. The wonderful thing about it is that it concentrates not only on five-star restaurants, but on the good practice in small local tearooms and fish and chip shops and recognises the value of and the international interest in good, fresh Scottish produce.

I hope that Parliament has been reassured that the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill is doing the right things. The industry has set itself the ambitious and important target of growing tourism revenues by 50 per cent by 2015. However, I draw the attention of members—particularly those who might be spending some time in Scotland during the summer recess—to our green tourism

business scheme. We have to take care of the country that everyone we know wants to visit and maintain the scenery and wildlife that members have referred to. The green tourism business scheme is a way of meeting that aim and I ask members who are holidaying in Scotland this summer to look out for providers who are members of that scheme. There are many, and their work is of very high quality.

The bill will put the VisitScotland integrated tourism network on a proper legal footing and allow it to continue its world-class work towards achieving our ambition of making Scotland one of the world's foremost tourist destinations by 2015. I urge the chamber, including Mr Fergusson and his colleagues, to support it.

Compensation Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-4634, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on the Compensation Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

11:00

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): I hope that this debate will show the Parliament's commitment to taking swift and decisive action to secure changes in the law when confronted with a pressing human need. In this case, the subject matter could not be more serious.

Mesothelioma is a terrible disease. A rare form of cancer that attacks the inner lining of internal organs, it is almost always caused by exposure to asbestos. It takes an average 20 years to develop and, once it has developed, it kills fast. Victims rarely live longer than 18 months after diagnosis and often die within just a few months. There is no known cure for the disease and victims spend their final months in considerable pain and suffering. Many of those victims develop mesothelioma after being exposed to asbestos at work; indeed, the highest incidence of it is in the construction and shipbuilding industries.

A particular problem for mesothelioma sufferers and their families is that, at the moment, the law prevents relatives from making a claim for compensation for their own grief and suffering if the sufferer has settled his or her own claim before death. As payments can be higher if the executor and relatives claim after the sufferer's death, most sufferers do not claim compensation to ensure that they do not disadvantage their families.

That is completely unacceptable. It means additional worry for families at an exceptionally difficult and distressing time and we intend to take action to address that problem in a bill that will be introduced in the coming year. At this point, I wish to record my appreciation of the actions of a number of MSPs, in particular Des McNulty, who have raised this issue and have given a voice and hope to those affected. I also pay tribute to the support groups and their advisers for their tireless work in bringing the matter to public and political attention. We have listened to their voices, and we will act.

While considering the problem, we were faced with another serious issue when the House of Lords ruled in the case of *Barker v Corus*. Victims must be able to claim compensation from employers who, in the past, wrongfully exposed them to asbestos. However, because of the limits of science, in many cases it is impossible to

establish precisely which employer's wrongful exposure led the victim to develop the disease. Sometimes employers or their insurers have become insolvent or are simply untraceable. However, victims should not have to be concerned about that. Justice demands that they receive full compensation, no matter where they contracted the disease through wrongful exposure.

Unsurprisingly, victims and their families were left extremely concerned about the House of Lords decision in early May in the case of *Barker v Corus*. The Law Lords were called on to decide several cases in which workers had more than one employer, each of which had wrongfully exposed the worker to asbestos. In none of the cases could the scientific evidence prove which exposure had caused the onset of mesothelioma. The Law Lords decided that an employer's liability to pay compensation should be assessed in proportion to the period of time that the employer exposed the victim to the risk of contracting the disease.

The decision dealt with issues that were left unresolved in the *Fairchild* case in 2002, in which the House of Lords decided that a worker who contracted mesothelioma after wrongful exposure to asbestos at different times by more than one employer could sue any of them, even if the worker could not prove which employer had caused the disease. However, the case did not resolve the precise nature of the employers' liability and whether they should be held jointly and severally liable or whether liability should be apportioned among them.

The decision in the *Barker* case, which came down in favour of apportioning liability, can be expected to have two main effects. First, because the process of bringing an action will in many cases be significantly delayed by the need to trace all liable parties, or will lead to multiple claims, legal costs are expected to increase significantly.

Secondly, victims will get less compensation if some of the liable parties are insolvent or untraceable. Victims would therefore, effectively, be expected to bear the risk of employers or their insurers going out of business. That is an unacceptable situation in an area where the primary concern of the law ought to be to provide full compensation to victims who are wrongfully exposed to deadly asbestos.

Although the *Barker* case was English, it has repercussions for Scotland. It is highly likely that the Scottish courts would be persuaded by it in cases brought here, particularly as it is a House of Lords decision and as the development of Scots and English law in this area has been identical to date. On 20 June, the United Kingdom Government announced its intention to legislate to reverse the effect of the *Barker* judgment for England and Wales. The Government has said

that it intends to do that as quickly as possible, by introducing an amendment to the Compensation Bill, which was introduced to the House of Lords, on 2 November 2005 and has just completed its committee stage in the Commons.

I thank our colleagues in the UK Government, who have pulled out all the stops to ensure that we can debate the motion with a draft of the proposed amendment to the Compensation Bill before us. I make it clear to members that the amendment before them is a draft and that, although the UK Government has announced its intention to legislate in that way, there is a possibility that the drafting may change before it is tabled in the House of Commons.

The effect of subsections (1) and (2) of the clause that the draft amendment will insert in the bill is to provide, in mesothelioma cases, that negligent persons are held jointly and severally liable for the damage caused by the disease. That means that the position will be as it was before the Barker ruling, and that claimants can claim for all damages from one liable party. Subsection (3) affirms the current position relating to contributions from other liable parties and to contributory negligence. The defender against whom damages are awarded can claim contributions from other liable parties as determined by the court. In considering the award of damages, the court may take any contributory negligence by the claimant into account. As I said, that provision is a reflection of the current position and does not change the law in those areas.

The extent to which those provisions should have retrospective effect is still under discussion in light of European convention on human rights considerations. If the amendment that is tabled to the Compensation Bill goes further in its purpose or effect than the draft that is before us this morning, the consent that I hope this Parliament will grant will fall. We would then have to address the problem through our own damages bill.

I am sure that members will agree that it is vital to ensure that victims in Scotland are left no worse off than their counterparts in England and Wales when it comes to compensation for mesothelioma. Bearing in mind the speed with which mesothelioma can kill and the urgency of ensuring that sufferers gain full compensation, we need to seek the quickest way of reversing the effect of the Barker judgment. Had it been the case that the damages bill that we propose would have offered a speedier solution and would not have left a gap between sufferers in Scotland and those in the rest of the United Kingdom, we would have used our own legislation. However, introducing a bill to the Scottish Parliament and its receiving royal assent would mean a delay, and we believe that it is appropriate to use the speediest possible

solution to resolve a tragic set of circumstances. I believe that what we are proposing today can achieve that.

Today's motion gives us the chance to legislate without delay, and in agreeing to the motion Parliament will ensure that action is taken on the Barker judgment quickly and compassionately. It is the right thing to do, and we owe it to the victims of mesothelioma to use the procedures available to us to best effect. I was encouraged by the support of members on all sides for the Minister for Parliamentary Business's statement on 22 June, when she announced that we would introduce legislation to reverse the effect of the Barker decision in Scotland.

As I said, we plan to go further than that to support the victims of mesothelioma. Today's debate is only the first step in that direction, but it is a vital one. I hope that members will consider today's motion in the same supportive spirit as was articulated last week.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the UK Parliament should consider those provisions of the Compensation Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 2 November 2005, which will legislate in the devolved area of damages law in respect of joint and several liability, as laid out in LCM(S2) 8.1.

11:10

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I am grateful to the minister for outlining matters fully. He can rest assured that the Scottish National Party will give him full support in seeking to address the manifest injustice that has arisen. We are grateful for the Executive's prompt and speedy actions.

It sometimes baffles members of the public that law is not necessarily justice. In the main, we hope that our law serves justice but, unfortunately, there are instances when the law is simply the interpretation of rules and the implementation of decisions and manifest injustices arise. In those instances, it is necessary for the legislator to change the law to ensure that justice is served. I believe that the decision in *Barker v Corus* was a wrong judgment. The argument over a supreme court is a matter for another day, but I note that the Scottish law lord took a distinctive view. However, the Barker decision was wrong and that has to be addressed by legislating. In these circumstances, we will fully support the Executive in whatever action is easiest, whether it is through Westminster or through a special damages bill. What matters is that we remedy the wrong.

The number of people affected is not substantial, which is something to be thankful for. However, what they are afflicted with is, as the

minister said, a dreadful, life-taking disease. Those who suffer from the disease face an invidious choice. Should they seek to obtain some quick recompense so that they can enjoy the last part of their shortened lives, or should they await death restricted in their ability to work and to earn income, so that their families can obtain greater benefit when they have passed? That is an invidious and dreadful choice and we must ensure that that situation is addressed.

The minister also mentioned the difficulties of pursuing compensation. Although many of the situations that caused the disease arose through ignorance rather than any wilful act on the part of an employer, it is quite clear that some companies were, frankly, at it. Anybody who has been involved in compensation claims, as I was when I practised many years ago, will know how difficult it is to pursue companies for compensation. A company called Cape Contracts, for example, used various nomenclatures, such as Cape Contracts Ltd and Cape Contracts (UK) Ltd. Those companies knew what they were doing. They were deliberately trying to avoid the liabilities that they knew were being garnered. It may be that the instances of asbestosis that arose were not deliberately created, but the companies knew later that liability was going to befall them and, whether on the advice of their lawyers, their accountants or their company secretaries, they took steps to try to ensure that they would not have to meet their lawful obligations.

It is important that we, as the legislature in Scotland, ensure not only that sufferers do not face the invidious choice whether to claim compensation to benefit them in their last days or to wait so that their families will get a greater benefit when they have passed on, but address the issue of companies that are liable and of insurers that were happy to take the premiums when they were being paid but thereafter sought to avoid the consequent liabilities.

SNP members are grateful to the minister and to the UK Government; we recognise its actions and we do not care who sorts it out as long as it is sorted. We are also grateful to those who have pursued the matter with tenacity: Clydeside Action on Asbestos; Frank Maguire and all at Thompsons Solicitors; Des McNulty, who picked up the matter when the difficulty arose; and the minister and his colleagues, who have acted speedily and effectively.

I know that other members who have been involved with the issue will want to speak about local matters, so I will not say anything further, other than that we are grateful that the Executive has dealt with the matter with due alacrity and that the minister can rest assured that he has our full support.

11:14

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I declare a financial interest in respect of my former occupation in the insurance industry. I am a potential beneficiary of the AGF Insurance pension fund.

If the motion is not passed today, it would be a manifest injustice. We cannot possibly have a situation whereby those suffering from mesothelioma in Scotland are disadvantaged as compared with those down south. It is clearly the unanimous wish of the Parliament that the matter be dealt with as fairly and as equitably as possible.

The Barker v Corus judgment, although passed in the rarefied atmosphere of the House of Lords, was not perhaps wrong in itself, because the commonsense view is that those who have contributed towards a liability should be held responsible for it. However, that does not help the mesothelioma sufferers. The gazetteer of insurance companies now bears little or no resemblance to what existed 20 years ago, as some companies have gone bust and others have merged. It is sometimes impossible to find the insurer that held a particular employer's liability policy during the period in the 1970s or even earlier, when the victim contracted mesothelioma.

Hugh Henry was right to point out the position that exists in many of these tragic cases. Mesothelioma sufferers should not have to jump through hoops to try to establish who the insurers were at the relevant time. In the insurance industry, there is a well-known system of contribution in respect of property damage claims: insurers would contribute to the loss in proportion to their own liability. Barker v Corus suggests that that is the case and there is nothing wrong with that. However, where the judgment goes terribly wrong is in the onus that it places on the pursuer in the case to carry out the investigation. That is clearly not acceptable.

Personal injury claims are a difficult issue, but the usual problems that arise do not occur in this instance. We know that asbestos causes asbestosis and, in extreme cases, mesothelioma. The liability is absolute and someone should pay. When the person's life expectancy is so terribly limited, he is not particularly concerned about who pays but he is entitled to receive adequate compensation in respect of his greatly shortened expectation of life. We would be failing in our duty were we not to pass the motion on the legislation today.

I look forward to debating other issues with regard to personal injury claims once the damages bill is introduced. There may not be the same degree of consensus on some of those matters, but today we have an opportunity to put right a

wrong. I do not think that members of the Parliament will fail to recognise what their duty is.

11:17

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I was going to start by saying that it is a little regrettable that we are not debating the issue fully and widely in the Parliament today, but the minister made very welcome comments about the fact that this is the start of a process. His sincerity and that of colleagues in the Parliament about wanting to take the debate forward should be welcomed.

I also support the member who had secured time for a members' business debate on the subject. That would have been a fascinating legal and public policy debate, but it is one that the Parliament will still have, after the recess. It is a matter that is owed careful consideration.

Expediency for the people who are adversely affected requires us to support the fastest legislative route to change the law to allow the people who deserve compensation to receive it; in many cases, those people are the widows of the workers involved. That is why the Liberal Democrats support the legislative consent motion this morning.

The debate has two main aspects. One is how we seek fairly to address the situation of workers who, through no fault of their own, have contracted malignant mesothelioma, primarily because of exposure to asbestos dust. Companies, mainly but not exclusively in the private sector, have breached their duty to protect their workers.

The issue is not an historical one. Last week I was in correspondence with Scottish Borders Council about asbestos in public buildings, especially primary schools, in my constituency. Asbestos exists today in those buildings. I was encouraged by the thorough reply concerning the procedures that are in place if the asbestos becomes exposed. The discussion about reforming the law to allow for compensation is salutary and reminds us that this is not just an historical concern.

The Fairchild v Glenhaven Funeral Services Ltd case in 2002 established what the minister referred to as the Fairchild exception. Its purpose is

"to provide a cause of action against a defendant who has materially increased the risk that the claimant will suffer damage and may have caused that damage, but cannot be proved to have done so because it is impossible to show, on a balance of probability, that some other exposure to the same risk may not have caused it instead. For this purpose, it should be irrelevant whether the other exposure was tortious or non-tortious, by natural causes or human agency or by the claimant himself. These distinctions may be relevant to whether and to whom responsibility can also be

attributed, but from the point of view of satisfying the requirement of a sufficient causal link between the defendant's conduct and the claimant's injury, they should not matter."

In the appeal against the compensation awards to widows, insurers sought to limit an employer's liability to pay damages in cases where a worker may have been employed by several firms, none of which can specifically be blamed for the onset of fatal illness. They argued that an employer's liability should be a proportion of the total compensation that reflects the extent to which it contributed to an employee's exposure to asbestos.

That appeal was upheld by the law lords by four to one. As Kenny MacAskill said, it is interesting to note that the Scottish law lord, Lord Rodger of Earlsferry, disagreed with the majority of their lordships and would have dismissed the appeal on the question of apportionment. He would have held the employers liable on the basis of the Fairchild exception. I hope that if we give further consideration to the matter in Scots law, we will consider closely whether the Parliament intends to uphold the Fairchild exception in our law.

I welcome the fact that the United Kingdom Government signalled its intention to legislate in effect to overturn the Lords' ruling. We have the draft amendment before us, but I seek clarification from the Deputy Minister for Justice on a matter that is not addressed in the amendment but may well be included in other amendments that the UK Government will bring forward. It relates to an application clause. I am concerned that, as the bill stands, this would apply only to English cases concerning Scottish companies and we may have a difficulty without an application clause that states that the clauses apply to devolved law in Scotland.

I welcome the fact that, as the minister said, this is the start of a valid debate that the Parliament will have. I have a constituent who worked in a tyre factory in Ireland who desperately deserves compensation. I am concerned that we do not limit this only to asbestos but look in the round at compensation in Scotland for people who have been failed by their employers and have found it nigh on impossible to seek redress.

11:22

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I thank the 54 signatories to my members' business motion on the House of Lords judgment. The motion was due to be debated this evening but I very much welcome the fact that we are having this debate now, because it will produce a practical effect in changing the law. The 54 members are a majority of those who are eligible to sign members' motions. It was a clear

demonstration of the Parliament's intention that the House of Lords judgment should be reversed.

I thank the portfolio ministers, Cathy Jamieson and Hugh Henry. Hugh Henry's speech was excellent in that it highlighted the facts and indicated the Executive's commitment and his personal commitment to deal with the issue. His responsiveness, both on this issue and on the damages issue, has been outstanding. I also thank Margaret Curran, the Minister for Parliamentary Business, who has been instrumental in getting us to this stage in the face of tight deadlines. It is highly commendable that she has ensured that we can take the matter forward before the recess.

The people whom I would like to thank most are the asbestos campaigners: the people from Clydebank who are in the public gallery; Clydeside Action on Asbestos; the trade unions and, in particular, the Scottish Trades Union Congress; West Dunbartonshire Council, which has done an outstanding job in taking forward the asbestos cases; and all the other organisations throughout Scotland that have identified the injustice and demanded that something be done to overturn it.

The reputation of the Parliament depends on whether we do the right thing. To take the side of the victims of asbestos-related disease and, in particular, of those suffering from mesothelioma is overwhelmingly the right thing to do. Over the years, those people have experienced the insurance companies and those who have liabilities trying every legal trick in the book to dodge their responsibilities and dodge making payments. Those companies have made it difficult and have used every contrivance of legality to avoid making payments and owning up to their responsibilities. That has often been to the severe detriment of the victims and their families.

It is our duty in the legislature to ensure justice for the victims of asbestos, particularly those who are on the verge of death from the terrible terminal disease of mesothelioma. Anyone who has seen somebody who has mesothelioma will know that it is a horrific disease. It is our duty to ensure that those people are given the justice and compensation to which they are entitled and that the insurance companies do not retain the justice and compensation for their own purposes and for those of their shareholders or anybody else.

What is most striking is not so much the victims but their families—people such as Joan Baird and Margaret Lilley, whose husbands died of this dreadful disease. Such people are filled with a burning sense of injustice. It is not a demand for money; it is a sense that they have been deeply wronged by people who knew what they were doing. The employers knew what was going to happen to those women's husbands and loved

ones. The families feel that that wrong deserves to be righted.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Parliament is acting today to right that wrong. It would have given me great pleasure to introduce a member's bill on damages—I suppose that it is one of the peaks of a parliamentary career to introduce a bill—but it is even better that the Executive has taken a damages bill on board, because that will eliminate any uncertainty and ensure that the bill goes through speedily. The people who count in all this are the victims and their families. The Parliament is to be commended for what has been done today and for what will be done before next May.

11:26

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): This debate is about justice. We should pay tribute to the Clydeside workers and their campaign groups and to all workers who have campaigned on the issue. Justice must be fair, timely and swift, and the law should serve justice, so I thank the Executive for lodging the motion. We agree with the vehicle by which we are taking the issue forward.

I want to touch on why the issue is important. There is a cairn in Bathgate that is dedicated to those who lost their lives when working. On the cairn are the words:

"We fight for the living and we mourn the dead."

Today, what we are doing is fighting for the living. We can do it by legislative process and compensation, but the fight on asbestos is not just a past fight; it is a current fight. Those of us from West Lothian are conscious of the work of workers from Golden Wonder's former factory in Broxburn, and of the work of Alex Horne and others in that regard. The fight on asbestos continues and I would like to draw the minister's attention to a particular issue to do with asbestos.

We have planning laws for new build, but we have very weak planning laws for demolition. One of the issues that I am dealing with concerns the Motherwell Bridge Ltd site in Uphall. The situation is that the Health and Safety Executive is responsible for the health and safety of workers during a demolition; the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is responsible after demolition when asbestos-polluted materials are on the ground; there are general competencies for councils; and demolition contractors are responsible for the method statement of how demolition happens. However, the new build on brownfield sites, particularly across the Lothians, raises a real issue with public health because there is currently no law in this country to protect the public from demolitions that involve asbestos pollutants. I hope that the Planning etc (Scotland)

Bill, to which I plan to lodge an amendment, will address that issue.

On the campaign for compensation in relation to asbestos, I say that just because asbestos is out of sight, that does not mean that it is out of mind, and just because the cause of harm was yesterday, that does not mean that we forget it today. Our message to asbestos sufferers is that the Scottish Parliament and all its political parties will stand by them and their families today, because we mourn the dead and fight for the living.

11:29

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Here we go again—we have had a speech from Des McNulty and there are campaigners in the gallery. I think that the Scottish Parliament has a good record of recognising the plight of asbestos workers and their campaign for justice, which has been ably supported by many members in the chamber, but particularly by my colleague Des McNulty.

In November 2000, we had a members' business debate in my name that focused on the actions of the insurance companies on the asbestos issue. There was a long struggle in days gone by during which they made no apology. They delayed and delayed until a person died, in order to avoid paying compensation. Of course, we changed that situation, but the insurance companies then changed their tactics to one of blanket denial—justice delayed became justice denied. They drew out procedures for months and years to deny the paying of compensation. Victims were denied their very existence. For example, they were asked to prove that they had served their time and worked in a shipyard. They were also asked to prove, for example, that the Queen Elizabeth II was built in John Brown's shipyard. That was all done to deny the victims the justice that they deserved. What an insult and what an injury, on top of having a terminal disease and facing death, to be questioned about their very existence.

We have had other crises along the way. We had the collapse of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Ltd, which bankrupted itself to avoid paying compensation, while paying its top bosses million-pound bonuses. Thankfully, some possible consequences of that situation for victims were avoided. Again, however, victims facing death were worried about whether they would receive a penny in compensation. We have also had other recent setbacks, including the most recent legal decision, which brings us here today, by which 90 per cent of the compensation that victims deserve was put under threat.

The insurance companies' tactics have been ruthless and consistent. They have used all methods possible to frustrate and deny justice for the victims. We should remind ourselves of what we are talking about, as others have said during the debate. We are talking about people who are cancer victims. It is a very aggressive cancer that takes their lives away in very difficult circumstances in around 18 months or two years. Given such circumstances, we as a Parliament, both politicians and law officers, have faced up to the situation and focused on the needs of the victims rather than on the will of the insurance companies.

It is great news today for people whom I know in my constituency that we are making these decisions. We have had the intervention in the Chester Street crisis and, thankfully, we have had justice fast tracked for victims in Scotland. Pauline McNeill, who sends apologies for not being present, did a lot of work to make that happen. Of course, we are also having today the reversal of the law lords ruling that would have denied the victims justice, and we can expect a forthcoming bill that will address the issue of the victims' families.

It is sweet justice indeed when a situation has been created whereby the insurance companies and the employers will have to sue one another rather than the victims of asbestos—hear, hear, and well done! *[Applause.]* If the Scottish Parliament means anything, it is about addressing wrongs in our society quickly, as Des McNulty said. We are doing that speedily for the benefit of the asbestos victims and their families. We are showing that the Scottish Parliament can work for the benefit of people in Scotland—this debate is a classic example of that.

11:33

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): The legal ramifications of the Compensation Bill are reasonably obvious. The biggest and most expensive unelected quango in the UK, known as the House of Lords, has pontificated on the asbestos problem that causes mesothelioma. In reaching its conclusions, it has brought increasing misery to those poor souls who are terminally ill due to asbestos, to say nothing of the added distress that that abstract, distant and ill-considered decision has caused the relatives of the sufferers.

Although the bill will rectify the negligent blunder by the House of Lords, it will not redress the sad fact that all too many good people who suffer from asbestosis will have died before their rightful claim for compensation has been met. We should insist that an interim payment is made to all mesothelioma sufferers as soon as possible, with

the balance of their compensation being paid out after the legal people have duly milked the legal process.

In 2006, the word “asbestos” strikes panic among the general public, but for an indentured apprentice 60 years ago that was not the case—I should explain to members that after slavery was done away with in the mid-19th century indentured apprenticeship took its place. I handled asbestos with supreme indifference, because at that time no one knew that mesothelioma had an incubation period of up to 50 years and more. Youthful asbestos ladders who insulated ship engine rooms and refrigerated areas regularly had snowball fights with monkey dung—as they called the raw asbestos—not knowing that many unfortunates might just as well have been throwing hand grenades that had a delayed time action. At the end of the shift, we all carried a liberal dusting of asbestos. Wives and mothers washed overalls and often contracted asbestosis as a result.

The Compensation Bill is great. We should end procrastination and compensate sufferers now. The abolition of the House of Lords can be left for another day.

11:36

Hugh Henry: I am grateful for the cross-party support for action. Des McNulty, who has worked tirelessly to promote the issue, as have a number of members, says that taking action on the matter is about doing the right thing. Today, parliamentarians are doing the right thing and in doing so we are reflecting the efforts of the campaign groups that have been mentioned. We should remember that the members of those groups are not just people who believe passionately in justice on the issue—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Minister, please raise your microphone. It seems to have disappeared.

Hugh Henry: Sorry.

Campaigners are suffering from the effects of asbestos. They have a terrible disease and they are determined to do the right thing, not just for themselves but for other people and for future sufferers, given the time lag in the onset of the disease, which John Swinburne mentioned. It is therefore a privilege for the Parliament to be able to do the right thing.

The trade unions gave phenomenal support to the campaign by providing advice and resources. The campaign’s advisers worked diligently to help to progress Des McNulty’s proposal for a bill on improved compensation for asbestos victims and to provide off-line briefings, which added clarity and were appreciated.

Jeremy Purvis asked whether the Compensation Bill should contain an application clause. I assure him and other members that we will provide any clarification that is needed to ensure that the provisions apply to the law of damages in Scotland, so that there will be no disadvantage to litigants in Scotland.

Duncan McNeil made a passionate speech, in which he reminded us of the history of the issue and the tragedies that have happened. He talked about the prevarication and delays caused by people who considered profit margins rather than human suffering. It is right that members of the Scottish Parliament and colleagues at Westminster have been able to make a small contribution.

Duncan McNeil also mentioned the action that had to be taken in relation to Chester Street Insurance Holdings and rightly reminded us of the Coulsfield procedure for fast tracking claims, which was introduced in Scotland. We will reverse the House of Lords decision and introduce a bill on damages, so our action today represents only a small contribution to a much bigger issue.

Kenny MacAskill was right to point out that although a relatively small number of people have been affected by asbestos, the issue has had profound implications for them and for their families. It is moving to meet people who have suffered from the effects of asbestos and who are determined to secure justice. I cannot begin to understand the efforts and the suffering of those people and their families. As I said, it is a privilege for me and for the Parliament to be able to do the right thing.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Policing (Community Safety)

1. Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how community safety can be enhanced through the deployment of police officers. (S2O-10370)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): One of the key pillars of our justice strategy is to create communities in which people can live together in safety and mutual respect. The Scottish ministers have backed the police, to ensure that record numbers of police officers in Scotland are preventing and detecting crime. Backed by much-needed reforms that allow officers to spend more time on front-line duties, the police, alongside a range of other agencies, play a vital role in delivering safer communities.

Mrs Mulligan: The minister knows that I appreciate schemes such as the community warden scheme and I look forward to the Minister for Justice's meeting next week with wardens in Blackburn and Boghall in my constituency. I hope that the minister also appreciates that four or five officers can be an insufficient number in a police station such as the one in Whitburn in my constituency, which covers not just the town but five villages. Will he build on the Executive's excellent record and recruit more police officers? Will he also ensure that work patterns are such that officers can spend more time in the community?

Hugh Henry: We have demonstrated our commitment by providing a record number of police officers. In a sense, we have gone further, because other initiatives that we have supported, on escorting duties for example, have allowed up to 300 additional police officers to be deployed on front-line duties. We have supported other initiatives that have taken some of the back-room, administrative work away from officers so that more front-line police officers can be deployed.

It is for chief constables to account to police boards for how they use the record number of police officers and the additional resources that have been freed up by our other initiatives. We need to demonstrate to the public not just that we are employing more police officers but that we are employing officers strategically and effectively, so that the public can see the benefits of having a record number of officers.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Community wardens are no substitute for a police presence in detecting, deterring and dealing with violent and other crimes. Will the minister say how much more it costs to recruit a police officer than it costs to employ a community warden?

Hugh Henry: I do not have those figures to hand, but they can easily be supplied if Margaret Mitchell writes to request them. All that I can do is to repeat what I said about there being a record number of police officers. In 1997, when there was a change of Government, we inherited a specific number of police officers from the Conservatives. Since 1999, when we set out our partnership agreement, we have added to that number. Unlike the party of Margaret Mitchell and her colleagues, we have recognised the need for more police officers on the beat in Scotland and we have demonstrated our commitment.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Notwithstanding the operational independence of chief constables, does the minister share the concerns of my constituents in Penicuik that community police officers are often called away on a shift-by-shift basis to other divisions in Lothian and Borders police and sometimes to road traffic accidents? What power does he have to stress to police boards that if community officers are to be effective in communities, they must police those communities?

Hugh Henry: Jeremy Purvis raises issues of operational independence. A number of points must be considered. First, having had discussions with the police in my own area, I know that they are considering shift patterns with the aim of deploying officers at the times when they are needed. They recognise that there are many times when a substantial number of police are on duty but there is very little activity or crime. We would wish to support that trend of applying resources when they are most needed.

Secondly, Jeremy Purvis touches on the key issue of accountability. The councillors who represent their councils on police boards need to engage in dialogue with chief constables about how resources are used. If there is to be proper accountability, if police boards are to continue to have a future, and if people think that the present structure is appropriate and effective and that we should continue with it, we need to ask those who are responsible—those who sit on the police boards—how they are carrying out their functions and duties and how chief constables are accounting to police boards for what is done in each area.

Buses (Public Subsidies)

2. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive how much has been paid in public subsidies to bus companies in the last three years. (S2O-10360)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):

This devolved Government provides substantial resources, directly and indirectly, to support bus services in Scotland. The bus service operator grant is paid directly to bus operators to help to reduce fares. In effect, the grant reimburses operators for about 80 per cent of the excise duty that is paid on the diesel fuel consumed. The total that is paid out is about £55 million per year. In addition, the Executive makes resources available to transport authorities through a number of schemes that support the bus industry. Those include grant-aided expenditure for socially necessary services, the bus route development grant, the public transport fund and the rural transport fund.

Paul Martin: May I helpfully provide the collective figure from information that I have received from the Scottish Parliament information centre? Over the past three years, £530 million has been paid to bus companies from public funds. Does the minister accept what has been constructively amplified in the *Evening Times*, which is that people in Glasgow and throughout Scotland are not receiving best value from that £530 million? Will he join me and others in considering the possibility of some form of regulation to ensure that local people get an effective service? Will he consider the possibility of getting local transport associations to deliver transport locally where bus companies clearly do not give consideration to doing so?

Tavish Scott: I certainly respect the *Evening Times* campaign that Paul Martin brings to the attention of the Parliament today, which has the aim of ensuring that services meet the needs of people in the Glasgow area. As Mr Martin will know, we are currently consulting on the development of the national transport strategy, and specifically on the best mechanisms for the appropriate regulation of the bus industry, so that we achieve the outcomes that I am sure members broadly share in respect of the public money that is used for bus services.

Mr Martin makes an important point with regard to local services. There are many good community transport and bus projects across the country, including in Glasgow. One of the challenges of policy development is to spread the principles of good practice more widely.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): With the greatest respect, I think that the minister has avoided answering the question that Paul Martin

asked him. Five hundred and thirty million pounds has been given in public subsidy over three years to run the buses in Scotland, including in Glasgow. Paul Martin was arguing, as are the people of Glasgow, that that does not represent value for money. Will the minister give us a categorical assurance that he will seek better value for that level of public expenditure? Does he agree that that will be delivered only when there is regulation of bus services throughout Scotland, including Glasgow—and, even better, if they were publicly owned, as they are in the Lothians, in which case we could all get the good value for money that the citizens of the Lothians get?

Tavish Scott: Mr Sheridan can make all the ideological arguments that he likes, but the important point is to ensure that the use of public money is targeted through a number of mechanisms to achieve different solutions for different parts of Scotland, where clear needs are identified and where different models of regulation are appropriate in meeting those needs. In that context, it is extremely important to ensure that we use the national transport strategy to consider the models that are available to us and that we examine carefully our experience of those elements of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 that relate to the bus industry. That is what we have said we will do, and that is what we will do.

Supported Bus Services

3. Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will monitor local authorities to ensure that they continue to resource supported bus services. (S2O-10336)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):

The Executive provides substantial resources through the local government finance settlement to enable transport authorities to support socially necessary bus services. The Executive monitors what authorities spend on supported services as part of its overall monitoring of bus issues. It is of course for local authorities to decide their own priorities and to provide the support that is needed in their areas.

Dr Turner: I thank the minister for his reply on this important subject. What specific action will he take to ensure the protection of socially essential bus routes in places such as Westerton and Twechar, in my constituency, which have become more isolated as a result of the axing of local bus services because of a lack of profit?

Tavish Scott: We have a number of options through the mechanisms that I outlined in reply to Paul Martin and through our continuing work with local authorities—and indeed through the mechanisms that are available for all local authorities to use in providing such services. I

judge that it is for local authorities to make the most appropriate decisions, given their understanding of the services that are needed locally. I suspect that that is the way in which we would wish policy to develop.

Working Arrangements (Scottish Executive Staff)

4. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many of its employees work some or all of the time from home and how many work on flexible arrangements by which they can choose when they travel to their workplace. (S2O-10327)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): All Executive employees can apply to work from home on a formal basis, and they will have their requests properly considered. Many staff take advantage of the Executive's flexible working hours scheme, which allows them to choose their hours of work, and thus their time of travel, between 7 am and 7 pm. We do not currently have an exact number for the staff who take advantage of either of those schemes, as we have only recently moved to a new human resources monitoring system to capture the full range of our flexible working arrangements.

Fergus Ewing: It is disappointing that the Executive does not know how many of its staff work under flexible arrangements. By contrast, we know that BT, with 100,000 employees, has 71,000 staff on flexitime. Should not this devolved institution devolve to people some element of control over how they work? If that happened, would not there be immense benefits, not only for employees but for the environment, through the reduction in congestion that would result from a great many cars being removed from our roads?

Mr McCabe: I should perhaps clarify this for Mr Ewing's benefit. I have said that flexible working is available to all our staff. We currently do not know how many of them actually take advantage of what is available to them.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 5 was not lodged.

Roads (Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route)

6. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on the Aberdeen western peripheral route. (S2O-10322)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott): Following the announcement of the preferred alignment last month, the project design team is now working towards publication of draft orders by the end of the year.

Brian Adam: I understand that the minister has been in discussions with the local councils with regard to funding arrangements. Can he tell us whether he and the councils have reached an agreement about the Executive bearing the additional cost of moving from the Murtle route to the Milltimber Brae route? Will he consider capping the contribution that is made by each council, rather than leaving it at 9.5 per cent of what is an ever escalating figure?

Tavish Scott: As I understand it, and as Mr Adam will be aware, Aberdeen City Council recently agreed to contribute 9.5 per cent towards the cost of the bypass element, to be spread over the 30 years of the capital project. The council is seeking further clarification of some details; we have yet to receive that request, but we will of course respond to it in due course. Those are important issues to get right, and we will take as much time as we need to, working with both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to ensure that we get them right.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Although all MSPs from all parties representing Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire support the Aberdeen western peripheral route, there are concerns, as Brian Adam mentioned, about the higher cost of the scheme. Would the minister consider building a smaller spur road from the A90 to join the bypass, rather than building a 9-mile Stonehaven spur road through north Kincardineshire?

Tavish Scott: As Mr Rumbles knows, we have announced the alignment of the road and the issue is now moving through the processes that I described in answer to Brian Adam some moments ago. We have no plans to revisit the alignment. As Mr Rumbles will also know, the alignment that has been chosen provides 20 per cent higher user benefits and will reduce congestion on the A90 south of Aberdeen and in Stonehaven. Those are solid arguments for the chosen route, on which we hope to continue to make progress through the process that I have outlined.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I am grateful that the minister is beginning to produce some clarity on the road, such as the confirmation that the fast link will be funded separately. Now that he has divided the routes into two distinct packages, will he consider actually meeting the population who will be affected by the fast-link proposals so that he can at least pretend to be involved in consultation with the local people?

Tavish Scott: Yes—I am glad that we are coming to the summer recess.

As Mr Davidson knows all too well, the routes are not separate but are part of the entire AWPR. I do not accept in any way the premise of his question, as I have met a number of residents who will be affected by the process.

Mr Davidson also knows that the consultation on the route has been extensive and lengthy and that the options were consulted on in their entirety. Indeed, the routes chosen include a number of elements that came from the public consultation. The consultation process is important, but it is also important to recognise that the likely local public inquiry on the route will rightly give many people an opportunity robustly to interrogate the process that has been undertaken.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): Will the minister give an assurance that a cap will be set for all spending on the road, or will he have no alternative but to accept cost rises as the project progresses?

Tavish Scott: As with every part of our capital transport programme, we endeavour to ensure that, as I told Parliament in my statement on the entire programme on 16 March, we set out not only the timescales for all our capital projects but the budget that attaches to those projects. The Aberdeen western peripheral route is no different from any other project.

Rural Exclusion (Public Transport)

7. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to tackle rural exclusion in relation to access to public transport. (S2O-10374)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott): We are taking a wide range of measures. The rural transport fund provides grants to local authorities to help them to introduce new and improved public transport services in rural areas. It also supports community transport projects in rural areas where no public transport services are available or where such services are very limited. In addition, the Scotland-wide free bus scheme for older and disabled people, which was introduced on 1 April 2006, provides benefits to residents in rural areas. Also, residents of peripheral and remote communities in the Highlands and Islands have had access to discounted air fares under the Executive's air discount scheme since 18 May.

Karen Whitefield: Does the minister agree that, in assessing the Scottish Executive's transport priorities, consideration should be given to ensuring that any investment that is made maximises public access to the transport network? For that reason, does he agree that the Executive's investment in the reopening of the Airdrie to Bathgate railway line should ensure that

the villages of Plains and Blackridge are given stations so that people there can access the line?

Tavish Scott: The principle that Karen Whitefield has articulated is important in the context of transport policy generally and will certainly be raised during the consultation on the national transport strategy. Indeed, I am sure that she will want to comment on the strategy.

I will be happy to consider the particular issue that she has highlighted and raise it with the promoter, which is Network Rail.

Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (Reform)

8. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans there are to reform the Scottish transport appraisal guidance system, in particular in respect of long-distance rail routes, to meet Government commitments in respect of sustainability and strategic environmental assessment. (S2O-10326)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott): As STAG is an objective-led, multimodal transport appraisal framework, it does not need to be altered specifically to assess long-distance rail routes. Part of the STAG process involves the national policy context that applies to the particular transport issue being considered. That includes an assessment of sustainability. STAG was updated in November 2005 to incorporate strategic environmental assessment requirements. The national transport strategy consultation, which closes on 13 July, was the first Government publication to be accompanied by a strategic environmental assessment.

Rob Gibson: I am looking for the guarantee that is needed to rural-proof rail investment, as there has been a lack of investment for decades on the rural routes into and out of the Highland network. Can the minister guarantee that the response to the inquiry will do that job?

Tavish Scott: Mr Gibson should take some comfort from the fact that, properly, the strategic projects review on which we are embarking as part of the national transport strategy will allow for a corridor-by-corridor assessment throughout the country. That assessment will certainly include the areas in which he is interested. As part of the review, the relationship between road and rail will be carefully considered in the context of STAG, which allows that to happen.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I am sure that all members will want to condemn the disgraceful anti-Scottish abuse that has been directed at Andy Murray by a minority of mindless individuals and to take the opportunity to wish him all the best in his match at Wimbledon later today.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues they will discuss. (S2F-2393)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no immediate plans to meet the Prime Minister.

Nicola Sturgeon: In the past couple of weeks, a steady stream of commentators and politicians have queued up to tell us that Scotland is subsidised—that we get more out of the United Kingdom Treasury than we put into it. Will the First Minister join me today in telling them that they are wrong and that we in Scotland more than pay our way?

The First Minister: Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish National Party may deny this, but we know that every proper independent survey of Scotland's finances and of its relationship with the rest of the UK shows that, quite correctly, Scotland benefits from its membership of the United Kingdom, because of its needs and the way in which they are assessed. For our budget in Scotland, those needs are determined and paid for using a formula that has stood the test of time and which we should defend. I find it incredible that in recent days John Swinney, at least, and perhaps other SNP members, have defended the formula when the SNP's whole purpose as a party and organisation is to end it and to reduce Scotland's financing from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Nicola Sturgeon: I did not ask the First Minister whether he supports the Barnett formula. I also did not ask whether he thinks that public spending levels in Scotland are justified, although it is a bit rich to hear the First Minister talk about needs when he has just salted away in a war chest £800 million that should have been spent on schools and hospitals. I asked the First Minister whether he agrees with those who think that we are subsidised—that we get more out of the Treasury than we put into it and that, in the words of that right-wing Tory Michael Portillo, we exist “on English handouts”—or whether, like me, he thinks that when we count the £1 billion of Scottish oil revenues that flows from the North sea to the Treasury every month, we are not only paying our

way but contributing a very healthy surplus. What side of that fence is the First Minister on?

The First Minister: Perhaps this is the first time that Nicola Sturgeon has heard the slogan, so the “It's Scotland's oil” campaign may be more exciting for her than it is for the rest of us. The rest of us heard it in the 1970s, when it failed for the SNP. It will fail again at the start of the 21st century. We cannot base an economic policy for Scotland for the 21st century on a slogan from the 1970s and a calculation from the 1980s. The reality is that money is properly disbursed across the United Kingdom and that Scotland receives more from the United Kingdom than it currently pays in taxes. However, the economic strategy for Scotland in the 21st century must be to grow Scotland's economy and the amount of tax that is raised in Scotland by growing the number of jobs and successful businesses and turning Scotland into the enterprising economy that it once was and can be again.

Nicola Sturgeon: Now we know that the First Minister thinks that Scotland is subsidised. Let me tell him why that matters. Does he not understand that those who claim that we are subsidised have a clear agenda—to cut the budget that the Parliament has to spend on schools and hospitals? How can anyone trust the First Minister to fight Scotland's corner when he accepts the premise of that argument and has bought into the subsidy lie?

I remind the First Minister that even George Robertson, who is not known for his nationalism, said when he was shadow secretary of state for Scotland that he did not accept for a moment that Scotland was subsidised. Why cannot the First Minister also stand up for Scotland and challenge firmly all those who want to do us down?

The First Minister: Those of us who genuinely believe in and stand up for Scotland do not use the word “subsidy” for the precise reason that it has all sorts of meanings that we do not want to associate with Scotland.

It is absolutely right that Scotland's needs are identified in the United Kingdom financial settlement and that Scotland's geography, our population range, the age of our population and our social needs are recognised by the United Kingdom, and therefore that we receive more per head of population than many other areas do. That is absolutely right and I will defend it inside the United Kingdom. I will not use the Scottish National Party solution, which would mean that we were not even involved in the discussion. Not only would the money not come to Scotland, it would not even be there in the first place because the SNP would have taken Scotland out of the United Kingdom and brought about the end of that route

to ensuring good public services throughout Scotland, and in rural Scotland in particular.

Nicola Sturgeon: The First Minister misses the fact that we more than pay for what we get. I know that the First Minister is a bit of a beginner when it comes to standing up for Scotland, so I offer him some advice: there is a lot more to standing up for Scotland than not supporting England in the world cup; challenging anyone who says that Scotland is subsidised would be a far better place to start.

I suggest to the First Minister that the best way for the subsidy argument to be settled once and for all would be for Scotland to take responsibility for its own finances to prove that if independent, we would be not only the best, but one of the wealthiest small countries in the world. If the First Minister were really interested in standing up for Scotland, he would argue that too.

The First Minister: Even if the case for independence deserved any scrutiny whatsoever, we know that, under the SNP, Scotland would have all kinds of promises of increased spending at the same time as promises of reduced taxation, and therefore a budget that would never balance, a country that would be full of economic insecurity and jobs that would be lost. Scotland would be in a worse position than it is today.

The priorities of this Parliament and devolved Government remain as they should be—to improve Scotland's schools, to deliver improved health, more jobs and a stronger economy, and to ensure that we tackle crime.

Although the SNP would build new embassies in places such as the Seychelles, we build schools in Scotland. Although the SNP would build border patrols, we ensure that we put more police on the beat. Those are the choices in Scotland, and next year, the people of Scotland will make the right choice—this devolved Government, its record and its plans for the future.

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-2394)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of immediate importance to the people of Scotland at that time.

Miss Goldie: Does the First Minister agree with Professor Kerr, who said to the Parliament's Health Committee on 20 September:

"we have said as often and as rationally as possible that we would prefer to treat patients as close to home as possible."—[*Official Report*, Health Committee, 20 September 2005; c 2169.]

The First Minister: Of course.

Miss Goldie: That was an unexpected and encouraging answer. Bearing in mind the sentiment that was expressed by Professor Kerr and the importance that the public place on local access to health care, in particular to accident and emergency services, does the First Minister think that Professor Kerr's view is reflected in Lanarkshire NHS Board's decision to close the A and E department at Monklands hospital?

The First Minister: I cannot comment in detail on the recommendations from Lanarkshire NHS Board, first, because ministers must follow a due process before announcing any decision to allow the proposals to go ahead or otherwise and, secondly, because the Minister for Health and Community Care and I have very direct constituency interests in the proposals. Therefore, rightly, the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care will have sole responsibility for making a decision on the proposals. I hope that members will agree that that is right.

It is essential that we do two things throughout Scotland in relation to the critical treatment in our hospitals. First, we must ensure that people can receive the highest quality specialist care and treatment in locations in each geographical area in Scotland. That is the strategy as outlined by Professor Kerr and the one that has been adopted by the health ministers, the devolved Government and local health boards. Secondly, it is equally important that, in each area of Scotland, we upgrade the other services to ensure that more people can be treated in their local area and that more people can be treated on the spot. One of the most significant changes in our health service in recent years has been in the ability of paramedics and ambulance staff to deal with people on the spot, before they are taken to an accident and emergency unit. Through that process, we will save more lives and treat people more quickly. The investment in front-line services must be seen alongside the need to centralise and specialise the more acute treatment in a way that retains the top-quality surgeons and consultants to work with those who need their skills.

Miss Goldie: Quite simply, the very direct interests to which the First Minister refers are that the accident and emergency facilities in Mr Kerr's constituency and those in the First Minister's constituency are safe. Those are indeed very direct interests.

I remind the First Minister that, regardless of what he said about health boards, ultimately, the buck stops with him and his Labour-Lib Dem Executive, which is responsible for the overall health service. Something just does not add up. Since 1999, annual Health Department spending has increased by a massive £4 billion, which is a

huge cash injection. The spending for this year alone is £9 billion. Will the First Minister therefore explain why, over that same period, we have seen a troubling pattern of numerous hospitals being closed down, downgraded or placed under threat? To name but a few, the hospitals affected have included Stobhill hospital, the Vale of Leven hospital, Perth royal infirmary, St John's hospital, Ayr hospital and the cottage hospitals in Jedburgh and Coldstream. More and more health care is being centralised. The Scottish public have paid the tax and the First Minister claims to have increased spending hugely, so why are many vital local services under threat?

The First Minister: It is important to look forward rather than back, but it is also important to remember that the Conservatives have absolutely no right to talk about the state of the health service in Scotland, given the damage that they did to it during their 18 years in power. Until they apologise for that damage and their appalling performance in government, they will not be listened to in the Parliament. The reality is that we are now seeing improvements in the delivery of services. The reorganisation of health services has led to the delivery of more care and treatment closer to people in their communities and to the delivery of treatment on the spot by paramedics, rather than after paramedics have driven people to hospital in ambulances. That immediate treatment in the community and on the spot, when people are ill or require treatment, is a vital part of our new national health service.

Alongside that, we have the results, such as the lowest waiting times ever. We set targets that both main Opposition parties said would never be met. They had no confidence in the health service staff and they could not even congratulate them when the targets were achieved. The targets ensured that waiting times for out-patients and in-patients first went down to six months and have now reduced even further. There have also been reductions in the waiting lists, not only in the list of those who are waiting for treatment as designated by medical staff, but also in the number of people whom medical staff have asked to wait. Those dramatic improvements in our health service are a result not only of investment, but of reorganisation and reform. We must ensure that Professor Kerr's principles, which all members in the Parliament welcomed, are implemented properly in every part of Scotland.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that NHS Lanarkshire displayed an arrogant and shameful aloofness in failing to respond to any of the concerns that were raised by me or my colleagues, or any of the 45,000 people who signed our petition demanding that we retain accident and emergency services at Monklands

hospital? Does he further agree that the failure seriously to consider and respond to the case for Monklands, which cares for some of the sickest and poorest people in Lanarkshire, proves that the so-called consultation exercise was actually a deceitful sham and that that disastrous decision will be detrimental to my constituents? Finally, and most important, will he respond to my request for an independent review of the decision?

The First Minister: I have made it clear that it would be inappropriate for me to comment in detail on that for two reasons: first, because of the constituency interest; secondly, because of the fact that ministers have to go through a proper process before making a decision on that recommendation from Lanarkshire NHS Board. It is important to note that Lanarkshire NHS Board held its meeting in public on Tuesday and that it debated the issue for four hours; the process is therefore far more transparent and open than it was in the past.

I can confirm that Lewis Macdonald will consider all the representations that are made to him before he makes a decision. This morning, he held a meeting with Cathie Craigie, Elaine Smith and Karen Whitefield. I have no doubt that they made strong representations to him—as they have done throughout the process—and will continue to do so. He will consider those representations before coming to a decision.

Salmonella (Egg Imports)

3. Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind): I shall take a less hard-boiled approach.

To ask the First Minister, in light of recent and on-going concerns over salmonella linked to Spanish egg imports, what action the Scottish Executive will take to ensure that outbreaks traced back to these imports do not undermine the Scottish egg industry. (S2F-2405)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The possibility of salmonella contamination from United Kingdom-produced eggs is very low. Were the Food Standards Agency to receive any evidence that infected eggs were being imported to the UK, we would expect it to consider appropriate action.

Mr Monteith: I thank the First Minister for his assurance, but I fear that it does not go far enough. The British lion quality mark or a similar standard is a guarantee against salmonella. Can the First Minister offer further assurance that no school, hospital or prison in Scotland is using Spanish imported eggs, which would put at risk the most vulnerable in society?

The First Minister: I cannot speak for every egg bought or boiled in Scotland. Our information is that the Spanish eggs to which Mr Monteith refers are not, to the knowledge of the Food Standards

Agency, currently being imported into Scotland or the rest of the UK. If there was a suggestion that those eggs or other such eggs were coming into the UK, clearly the FSA would be the right authority to investigate it. I wish to assure people, particularly those who use the facilities that were mentioned by Mr Monteith, that the vast majority of eggs purchased in Scotland are Scottish. I would strongly encourage public bodies in Scotland, and families in Scotland, to buy Scottish eggs, in particular Scottish free-range eggs. I am certain that those eggs are the best in the business and that people will enjoy eating them.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): You could have another question.

Mr Monteith: I am unscrambled.

The most recent survey showed that there have been 6,000 cases of salmonella—indeed, there have been 16 deaths from salmonella—as a result of infected eggs in Britain, but that the countries that produce such eggs include Spain, which is one of the countries from which we import. Will the First Minister assure us that, even in the Parliament, eggs from Spain are not being used?

The First Minister: I do not know how long Brian Monteith was standing in the sun yesterday, but he is looking a bit fried today. As I said, my information is that there is no knowledge of Spanish imports to the UK, or to Scotland in particular. If there is any concern in the FSA about that matter, I am certain that it will look into it. People can have every confidence that the FSA does its job very well and that it will look into the matter properly.

Energy Prices

4. Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive plans to challenge energy companies whose price rises risk jeopardising the Executive's action to address fuel poverty. (S2F-2398)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Minister for Communities has today written to energy companies seeking an urgent meeting to discuss what more can be done to protect the most vulnerable, especially the elderly, from the impact of energy price rises.

Margaret Jamieson: I have concerns regarding how support can be extended to those who are in receipt of a small occupational pension that puts them beyond the current benefits system. Will the First Minister undertake to ensure that the discussions with energy companies take account of that significant group? Will he further undertake to consider expanding the central heating and insulation programmes to ensure that we remain on target to eradicate fuel poverty?

The First Minister: Devolved government in Scotland has had many considerable achievements, one of which has been the tackling of fuel poverty. The 63,000 central heating systems that have been installed, the 230,000 insulated homes and the nine out of 10 people who got those services and have lifted themselves out of fuel poverty in recent years are testament to the value of devolution and the actions that we have taken.

This year, we are in the process of expanding and extending those programmes. In particular, we are extending the service to replace broken central heating systems to those who have pension credit. That is a positive move. As we review annually the groups in most need, we will look to include other groups in the years to come. In the short term, the Minister for Communities will raise the matters that Margaret Jamieson has mentioned in his meetings with the energy companies.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): What steps will the First Minister take to ensure that all vulnerable senior citizens who are customers of Scottish Power are encouraged to register with Scottish Power, which will then guarantee that their power will not be cut off in the event of non-payment of their bill?

The First Minister: The Parliament has taken measures to deal with the debt that can sometimes give rise to that situation. The new measures and the advice that goes alongside them are helping people in communities the length and breadth of Scotland. I am sure that additional issues will affect the way in which particular companies handle situations in which customers have difficulty in paying their bills. The Minister for Communities will be happy not only to raise the issue with the energy companies, but to discuss the matter with John Swinburne in advance of that.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

5. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what concerns the Scottish Executive has regarding increases in referrals to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration on non-offence grounds and what the reasons are for these increases. (S2F-2401)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We have concerns about vulnerable children. The increase in referrals to the SCRA is potentially evidence of increasing confidence in the system and increased priority being given to the needs of vulnerable children by the agencies that make those referrals. The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People recently established a joint group to consider whether referrals are being used properly and how agencies can work more effectively together.

Christine Grahame: Why has the additional funding that was sought by the SCRA recently to help it to deal with the significant increase in the number of referrals not been granted? Does not the First Minister agree that, given that increase, now is not the time to postpone review of the children's hearings system? Is it not the case that the review has been postponed because only two of the Government's 4,400 civil servants have been working on the review of the children's hearings system, which is now seeing upwards of 54,000 referrals a year?

The First Minister: No, that is completely untrue. The children's hearings system is a significant priority for this devolved Government, and we have been improving it, over recent years, through increased investment, improved procedures and support for the children's panel members—in particular, the recruitment and training of new children's panel members. That work, which has been a significant priority, is delivering results for the SCRA and, more important, for the children and families who are affected by the work of the hearings system.

The children's hearings bill has been replaced in the legislative programme for one reason and one reason alone—the fact that the important recommendations of Bichard on the protection of children and vulnerable adults need to be implemented by the Parliament and we had to find a slot in the legislative timetable to do that. If the SNP is calling for us to drop the Bichard bill and replace it with a children's hearings bill, people in Scotland will be shocked by that announcement.

We in Scotland need to make the legislative changes that will protect vulnerable children and adults, but we also have to have an efficient, properly financed and effective children's hearings system as part of the wider child protection system, which needs reformed. Reforms are taking place to ensure that people consult one another properly and put the children first in our schools, doctors' surgeries and local child protection services. Those reforms are having an impact. Where they do not have an impact, we will take action against those who are responsible.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that one of the concerns is that although the number of referrals to the reporters is rising substantially, most of those who are referred do not need compulsory measures of care and should therefore perhaps not have been referred to the system in the first place? Does he further agree that what is needed is better partnership working between the police, social services and the reporter service to ensure that the services that children in need require are delivered without those children having to be referred to the reporter service in the first place?

The First Minister: That is of course an important point, which was put constructively. The need to analyse the new referrals to the children's hearings administration is part of the responsible work of Government. Yes, we welcome the fact that more agencies are willing to report more cases to the children's hearings system, because they have more confidence in it than they perhaps had a few years ago. At the same time, it is likely that many of the referrals could be dealt with more effectively and more quickly in other ways. That is precisely why the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People has established the joint group to ensure that where children need attention and where their lives need repair, the agencies involved deal with that quickly, rather than pass the buck to anybody else.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Does the First Minister agree—he seems to, given his earlier reply—that early intervention is vital when dealing with vulnerable youngsters, regardless of whether they are referred on offence or non-offence grounds? Does he accept that the Executive's failure to increase the range of disposals that are available to children's hearings, such as drug treatment and testing orders, and the lack of secure places mean that those young people are dealt with according to the resources that are available as opposed to according to their needs?

The First Minister: Of course it is important to have early intervention, particularly in cases that require care and the attention of different services. In order to secure that, it is important to ensure that those services work properly with one another. Far too many of the tragic cases that we have seen in Scotland and elsewhere have happened as a direct result of different agencies at local level—sometimes even at national level—not talking to one another to share information that could have saved a child's life or helped ensure that their life was repaired in advance of their adolescent years, when things can go seriously off the rails. That is an important principle.

Secondly, for those who require to be placed in secure accommodation because of the behaviour in which they have been involved, it is important that we have better and more secure accommodation. That is precisely why we have been investing in new secure accommodation. Some opened recently in Airdrie and there will be more over this next period. That secure accommodation is more effective in turning around those young lives than some of the secure accommodation that we have seen in the past.

The police and the councils need more disposals, too. I noticed that Margaret Mitchell said on Tuesday that we were wrong to introduce antisocial behaviour orders and other measures in

our actions in this Parliament. It is precisely those measures that will help with the early intervention to stop young people committing the offences in the first place. I wish that those who occasionally show an interest in this topic would be consistent from one day to the next and support the measures that are required in all areas of care and protection and tackling youth offences.

Hate Crime

6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the First Minister whether the forthcoming sentencing bill will be used to address the issue of hate crime. (S2F-2406)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): As we set out in last week's legislative statement, measures on hate crime will not be included in the sentencing bill. However, this Government is committed to tackling prejudice in all its forms. We will look at that again once we receive the Sentencing Commission for Scotland report on this issue in August.

Patrick Harvie: Last week's statement generated much confusion about the Executive's intentions on hate crime, given that clear commitments had been made that the proposed sentencing bill would contain new measures. Can the First Minister clear up the confusion now? If aggravated sentences are not the means by which the Executive wants to address the issue of hate crime, does the First Minister intend to abolish aggravated sentences for racist and sectarian crimes? If not—that is, if aggravated sentences are seen to be the correct mechanism in that regard—why has the sentencing bill suddenly become the wrong legislative vehicle?

The First Minister: The working group—whose work was supported by all sides in the chamber—never suggested that the only way in which to deal with hate crimes was to treat them as aggravated offences. As the Minister for Justice confirmed to members of that working group today, the other measures that were contained in the group's report will help to ensure that agencies respond properly to hate crime and that individuals are punished for hate crime in a way that is appropriate. At the same time, there is an issue about the need to ensure that we have a consistent approach to aggravated sentencing and other related matters. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for us to legislate on one issue in the sentencing bill and it would be far more appropriate for us to await the report of the Sentencing Commission, which will appear in August, and to respond thereafter.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Health and Community Care

Golden Jubilee National Hospital

1. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what contribution the Golden Jubilee national hospital in Clydebank is making to addressing waiting times and what plans it has for the hospital. (S2O-10367)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): The Golden Jubilee national hospital is a very important resource to NHS Scotland and, indeed, to our citizens. It provides real benefits to patients by carrying out investigations and operations, thus helping to reduce waiting times, particularly for those who have waited longest.

We set out our plans for the hospital in "Fair to All, Personal to Each", published in December 2004. It has already delivered the annual activity target of 28,000 procedures set out in that document, two years ahead of schedule. Next year, it is planned that the hospital will be expanded to embrace the new west of Scotland regional heart and lung centre, which will increase activity to around 38,000 procedures annually.

Des McNulty: There is no doubt that the Golden Jubilee hospital has been a great success story. Is the minister aware that hundreds of potential patients for the cardio-thoracic centre were at the hospital on Monday to hear a presentation from doctors marking the start of building works associated with the opening of the fourth floor as the cardio-thoracic centre? Those works will involve eight new high-quality theatres and a large number of intensive care beds. That is a real step forward for the health service. Will the minister come to the hospital again in the near future?

Mr Kerr: It is always a pleasure to visit the Golden Jubilee, an asset that is now part of our NHS. Not only do we have those new theatres, we have—as I have seen on all my visits to the hospital—very happy patients as a result of their interventions. We also have extremely happy staff. The hospital has the latest technology, equipment, training and skills and it provides an excellent service. The 2,000 cardiac surgery procedures, the 2,500 thoracic surgery procedures, the 15 heart transplants, the 1,700 angioplasties and the

3,700 angiographies will be a huge change in the way in which we deliver health care in Scotland. The hospital will deliver all of those interventions on behalf of patients and their families.

National Health Service Dentists (Fife)

2. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many dental practices in Fife deregistered patients from NHS lists in the last year for which figures are available. (S2O-10357)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald): In the year to 31 March 2006, one dental practice in Fife ended the NHS registration of more than 2,500 patients and a further four practices deregistered between 100 and 1,000 patients.

Marilyn Livingstone: I take this opportunity to thank the minister for Fife's designated area status, which has helped to address this problem. I also thank him for opening our new dental access centre in Kirkcaldy. However, does the minister agree that those measures are not enough on their own to meet demand? Will he congratulate practices in my constituency—such as Templehall—that have recently increased their number of NHS patients? Does the minister believe that more practices can be encouraged to return to the NHS, thus helping to achieve the Executive's aim of improving oral health for everybody in our communities?

Lewis Macdonald: I am happy to acknowledge practices such as Templehall that have expanded their NHS lists and improved their premises with support from the Scottish dental access initiative. That is good use of public money that enables patients to improve their access to NHS services. If we are to achieve access for as many people as possible, we need independent high street dentists such as Templehall that are prepared to grow their NHS lists, and we need a salaried service such as the one to which Marilyn Livingstone referred, which is being provided at a number of places in her constituency and across Fife.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 3 was not lodged.

National Health Service Boards (Expenditure)

4. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what conclusions have been reached regarding the distribution of NHS board expenditure between different parts of Scotland. (S2O-10320)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): No conclusions have been reached.

Alasdair Morgan: There has been some indication that ministers may wish to realign resources more closely to deprivation and need. I can sympathise with that wish, but in rural areas pockets of deprivation tend to be small, with the result that they are not caught by many of our statistical measurements—but they are very real nonetheless. Will the minister assure me that that factor will be taken into account in any conclusions?

Mr Kerr: The job of the group that was established in March 2005 is to improve and refine the current formula for the distribution of resources. I refer the member to the following quotation from Nicola Sturgeon:

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

The Executive's job is to ensure that we allocate our resources effectively to the communities that most require them. The overall budget for health has risen from £4.7 billion to nigh on £9.5 billion. As we go through our process of aligning resources with need, we will take account of the matters that the member mentioned and he can rest assured that the money will be well spent and well allocated.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Is the minister aware of the concerns that exist in Lanarkshire about the apparent Arbutnott funding shortfall? Given that Lanarkshire NHS Board's recent disgraceful decision to downgrade Monklands hospital was based ultimately on cost and was arrived at through dubious financial considerations, which might even break Treasury guidelines, can the minister tell me whether the board has received fair and appropriate funding since 1999? If not, what can be done about the situation? My constituents and people right across the county cannot be expected to pay the health price of a downgraded accident and emergency service at Monklands simply because of a lack of funding.

Mr Kerr: I am sure that the Parliament is aware of my unwillingness to enter into some of the details of that issue. It is appropriate that those matters have been strictly the responsibility of the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, so I am not prepared to go into the detail of the member's question.

As I have said, the health service's budget has grown from £4.7 billion in 1997 to £9.5 billion. On the Arbutnott formula in general, it would have been irresponsible of any Government to adopt a new formula on day 1 of a new financial year and to redistribute resources immediately. I believe strongly that that would have had radical and

detrimental effects on health elsewhere in the country. We are working to what we call the Arbuthnott floor, to ensure that we gradually close the gap between the allocation from the Arbuthnott formula and the resources that are received by individual health authorities. We are closing that gap.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that although the campaign for the retention of services at Monklands hospital will and indeed should, continue, neither the health board nor the campaigners should suggest that there is any relationship at all between the distribution of services between Monklands and Wishaw and South Lanarkshire's retention of access to an accident and emergency service? Will he assure us that, regardless of what happens to Monklands, the management and staff at Hairmyres hospital can look forward to planning for the future in the confidence that East Kilbride and the surrounding area will have an accident and emergency service that is fit for purpose?

Mr Kerr: I am sure that the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care will take all those matters into account.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I want to return to the original question. I am sure that I am not the only member who represents the north-east who has concerns that Grampian might be in line to be a loser under the new funding formula—the deputy minister might share some of my concerns. Given that the minister has previously acknowledged that there are areas of severe deprivation in Grampian, will he assure me that when the allocation of funding is considered, those areas will receive the same treatment as areas in central and west Scotland so that the health of the north-east does not suffer as a result of the financial redistribution?

Mr Kerr: Under Karen Facey, the resource allocation committee is examining how the distribution formula can be refined and developed; it is not throwing it out or rubbishing it. The principle behind the review is to ensure that we continue to make resources follow the need in our communities.

Additional and separate resources are being put into our health service to tackle deprivation in Scotland. For example, the prevention 2010 initiative will receive £25 million of funding on top of all the other resources that the Labour-led Administration is allocating to health. Those additional resources will make a difference. In my view, that approach fits well with the recommendations of the David Kerr report and "Delivering for Health", which says that we must identify risk in the most challenged communities, prevent and anticipate ill health and deal with it at

the appropriate time. That happens all over Scotland, not just in deprived areas.

Free Personal Care (Highlands and Islands)

5. Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive which local authorities in the Highlands and Islands are fully meeting the Executive's commitment to free personal care for the elderly and which are not. (S2O-10342)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald): All local authorities must provide personal and nursing care without charge where that care is assessed as necessary to meet the needs of people over 65. We are working with councils in the Highlands and across Scotland to secure full implementation of this policy.

Mr McGrigor: I asked the minister which authorities had and which had not fully met the commitment; he did not answer the question. Recent figures show that 382 people in the Highland area and 43 people in the Moray area are waiting to be assessed. I have heard that Lorne and the Isles hospital in Argyll and Bute has record bed blocking, that there are no referrals to residential or nursing care and that there are no direct payments for home care packages other than attendance allowance.

People have been waiting months for an assessment. They are giving up hope. They do not know when funding will be made available. The Executive says that it is not its fault; the council says that it is not its fault. When will someone take responsibility for this crisis? Will the minister give a commitment today that all those who are entitled to free personal care will receive it and that he will reverse the current situation that sees elderly people suffer while national and local politicians squabble over whose fault it is?

Lewis Macdonald: I do not accept the premise of Mr McGrigor's question. I reiterate my first point: we are working with councils in the Highlands and across Scotland to secure full implementation of this policy. Responsibility for delivering detailed implementation on the ground clearly lies with local authorities. In many cases, local authorities deliver services by working in partnership with local health boards. Across the Highlands and Islands, I look to that partnership to continue to work to address the issues.

The figures that Mr McGrigor quoted for the elderly people who are waiting for various services to be provided under the community care budget are snapshot figures. They are from February and relate to different services, some of which take time to put in place and others of which should be delivered promptly. Mr McGrigor simplifies the

issue, but there is a degree of complexity to the way in which services are best delivered. We are working on the ground with councils to address those complicated issues and to ensure full implementation of the policy.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The minister is aware of my continuing anger and frustration with Argyll and Bute Council, which is failing to meet the needs of elderly people in Helensburgh and Lomond. I welcome the council's very recent announcement that it has found extra money for care of the elderly—is it not amazing what can be achieved when one sets one's mind to it? That said, the money is not enough, particularly in view of the council's underspend last year of some £2 million on its funding from the Executive.

The chamber will have to forgive me for being cynical, but the £700,000 that the council is putting in is exactly the sum that it will get from NHS resource transfer. Does the minister agree that this could well be a case of smoke and mirrors on the part of the council? Will he immediately send in a social work inspection team to ensure that older people in my constituency do not have to suffer any further?

Lewis Macdonald: I am, of course, very aware of Jackie Baillie's continuing interest in these matters. Indeed, I met the leader, the chief executive and other senior councillors and officials of Argyll and Bute Council last week to ascertain whether there are any particular reasons for some of the evident difficulties the council has had delivering the services that it is obliged to deliver. I am pleased to say that the council responded to me this week. It has made it clear that it will make additional funding available. I will seek to assure myself that the money is indeed additional and that it will be put to the uses that I discussed at the meeting last week.

I expect to see the joint improvement team's continued involvement in the Argyll area. The members of that team are already working with Argyll and Bute Council and NHS Highland. I also expect new engagement by the Social Work Inspection Agency, to ensure that these services are secured and delivered as they ought to be.

The Presiding Officer: Question 6 was not lodged.

Hospitals (Transport)

7. Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions have taken place with NHS boards regarding transport difficulties of staff, patients, families and visitors in travelling to and from hospitals. (S2O-10338)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): Transport is a significant issue

that NHS boards must take account of in the design and delivery of local health services. We wrote to boards last November reminding them of the requirements that are placed on them by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 and of the need to work closely with the new regional transport partnerships. Boards have also been advised that, when they submit a proposal for a service change for approval, I expect the impact of the proposed change on the travel arrangements for patients, carers, visitors and staff to have been fully assessed.

Roseanna Cunningham: I speak as a veteran of many discussions with NHS Tayside, in which transport difficulties are raised but never resolved.

Given the recent controversies about car parking charges in several health board areas in Scotland and the transport difficulties that arise from the centralisation of services—some of which have been mentioned—does the minister agree that it is time for him to get together with the Minister for Transport to ensure that the lack of adequate transport throughout Scotland, particularly as a result of increasingly centralised hospital services, is accorded the priority it deserves?

Mr Kerr: The member assumes that I have not made representations to or had discussions with the Minister for Transport. About three weeks into my job as Minister for Health and Community Care, I sat down with the then Minister for Transport, Nicol Stephen, to discuss those matters. Just last week, I was at a conference that involved all the transport players in Scotland, including local authorities, health boards, the voluntary sector and other providers, with the aim of ensuring that we begin to get our act together on transport in relation to our hospitals and health service.

I have sent to the member a copy of a lengthy letter that I received from the chair of Tayside NHS Board, which reflects more accurately the intention behind the board's charging regime. The intention is that those who currently pay £1.50 to park at Ninewells hospital will continue to do so but, in car parks 5 and 6, where people have been parking for overly long, a higher fee will be charged. I want that to happen, because the aim is to dissuade from parking there people who should not park there and to allow space for patients and their families and others to visit the hospital. The vast majority of patients who visit Ninewells will pay the £1.50 charge, because they use the car parks appropriately.

Several other transport measures are being taken in Tayside. Local authority transport divisions are considering travel issues, the acute balance of care project is considering the links between Perth royal infirmary and Ninewells hospital and Dundee City Council is doing work

that relates specifically to Ninewells. There is a new terminus at Ninewells and extensive public transport information is provided—we should remember how that can work for patients. In Angus, the Whitehills health and community care centre has a transport group. Many measures are being taken in Tayside and elsewhere in Scotland, but I am not complacent about the issue and I understand the difficulties and challenges. Transport provision for patients and families is important, but it needs to be managed, which sometimes involves charging.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Does the minister agree that NHS Lanarkshire took the decision to downgrade accident and emergency services at Monklands hospital without having a proper and workable transport strategy in place? Does he further agree that the board's failure to guarantee a shuttle service between sites in the Lanarkshire area should not lead us to hold out much hope that it will get that right in the future?

Mr Kerr: I can only refer the member to my previous answer, which was that those matters are for the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, who must take them into consideration in coming to a conclusion on the issue.

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): The minister will be aware that Lothian NHS Board and West Lothian Council jointly subsidise buses from West Lothian to Edinburgh royal infirmary, following the change in services in the area. Will the minister, in his discussions with the Minister for Transport, seek to come to an agreement about elderly and disabled people who have concessionary bus passes being allowed to use those passes on that service?

Mr Kerr: The member makes a fair point and can rest assured that I will raise the matter in the appropriate place.

Bone Marrow Donation

8. Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to raise public awareness of the opportunities for registering as a potential bone marrow donor. (S2O-10358)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald): The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service works in collaboration with the Anthony Nolan Trust to recruit bone marrow donors. Blood donors are encouraged to become bone marrow donors and information is available on the service's website.

Kate Maclean: Is the minister aware that, in England, first-time blood donors are asked whether they would like to go on the register of potential bone marrow donors? Since that started,

the number of potential bone marrow donors has increased and people have not been put off giving blood. Will the minister consider taking such proactive steps in Scotland to raise public awareness of the routes to becoming a bone marrow donor? Will the minister agree to meet me to discuss further what can be done on that important issue?

Lewis Macdonald: I am happy to discuss those matters with Kate Maclean. I assure her that we make every effort, through the SNBTS, to encourage those who arrive at sites to donate blood to consider becoming bone marrow donors. That is appropriate and we will continue to do that. However, if initiatives or innovative ways to attract donors are in place south of the border, we would be happy to learn from that experience.

Cardiac Resynchronisation Therapy Defibrillator Procedure

9. Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the cardiac resynchronisation therapy defibrillator procedure is available to Scottish patients who require it. (S2O-10356)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): That was easy for you to say.

Cardiac resynchronisation therapy, which involves implanting either a pacemaker or a defibrillator, is already available to Scottish patients. NHS Scotland's regional planning groups have now developed a clinical protocol that will provide equitable access to the procedure, regardless of where people live in Scotland.

Margaret Jamieson: The minister's reply will provide comfort to patients in the west of Scotland who are currently being advised by clinicians of the necessity of the procedure, but will he give an assurance that the new west of Scotland heart and lung centre will remove the distress that patients currently experience? I refer to the distress of Jack Mann from Galston, for example, who is a constituent of mine. He was denied the treatment as a result of funding wrangles between Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board, which is his board, and Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, which is the delivery board.

Mr Kerr: The member can rest assured that patient groups, patients and clinicians have made the benefits of the procedure clear to me. As a result, the deputy chief medical officer is proactively involved in the redesign of the service to ensure that the point that the member has made about access is addressed. The member can rest assured that the Golden Jubilee national hospital will play a central role in that.

Environment and Rural Development

Climate Change (Personal Responsibility)

1. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to encourage people to take personal responsibility for climate change. (S2O-10363)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The new climate change programme encourages everyone to accept responsibility for climate change. Tailored summary versions have been produced for the general public and, most recently, for those engaged in Scottish agriculture. We are continuing to develop our strategic approach to climate change communications and education and we will report progress in our first annual report on the programme.

Mr Macintosh: Does the minister agree that one of the most positive steps that the Executive could take would be to pledge its support for my colleague Sarah Boyack's proposed energy efficiency and micro-generation bill? Does he agree that such support would encourage people to make their homes more fuel efficient and would make it easier for all of us to apply for new small-scale renewables technology?

Ross Finnie: The member would not, of course, expect me to anticipate the Cabinet's decision on Sarah Boyack's bill, although he might wish to tempt me to do so, particularly with Sarah Boyack sitting next to him and trying to pull his strings.

I wholly accept that, with or without a bill, micro-generation plays a hugely important role in improving individual citizens' understanding of the role that they can play in a range of fields. We should understand the cumulative effect that would result if every individual, where possible, fitted some form of micro-generation in their house. People should take all the steps that they can to save electricity. From how they are connected to the use of light bulbs and energy in general, the individual can do an enormous amount. Micro-generation improves citizens' understanding of their responsibilities and their contributions to climate change.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I have to say that there are no strings whatsoever between me and Ken Macintosh.

I recognise the positive elements in the minister's response, but legislative change is needed. One thing that has struck me most about the consultation on my bill proposal is the sheer demand for accurate and informative advice on what people can do now about basic things such as energy efficiency, sourcing information and obtaining resources to install micro-renewables.

Even before we hit the legislative process, there is a great thirst for knowledge about how to get started. Will the minister make a commitment seriously to consider that matter, which is raised in the climate change programme? Will he tell us what the Executive might do through local organisations such as Changeworks in Edinburgh, energy advice centres and work with local authorities?

Ross Finnie: Sarah Boyack makes a fair point, as always. We have undoubtedly stimulated a huge amount of public interest as we have developed the climate change programme, and a range of people are providing advice, but I am not clear whether there are slightly disparate approaches to providing that advice. I am happy for us to consider ensuring that when a person goes to a particular body, they receive comprehensive advice on what they should do rather than a single piece of advice.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that the minister recognises that the wasting of natural resources is a major contributor to climate change. As one of his personal contributions to tackling that, will he urge his colleagues to avoid the kind of waste that saw every member of the Parliament today receive a copy of a large document from the Crown Office? It contains 194 pages that are printed on one side only. I am sure that it is a valuable report, but most of us could have made do with an electronic copy.

Members: Hear, hear.

Ross Finnie: Far be it from me to interfere with the somewhat older habits of the Crown Office. However, I take the point that, if we print documents at all, we should print them on both sides of the paper and that, if we have access to them, we should distribute electronic copies. I am happy to pass on Alasdair Morgan's comments to the Crown Office.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): What plans does the minister have to provide further grant aid to promote home energy efficiency and the use of micro-renewables in the domestic environment? Does he intend to produce proposals before the next election?

Ross Finnie: Of course, the member will understand that I am never stimulated by the onset of an election in deciding whether I bring forward sensible proposals; they are brought forward on their merits. We have undertaken to review those issues as part of our review of our climate change programme, and we will report to the chamber on that in due course.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): While I do not ask him to give away any secrets about his approach to Sarah Boyack's proposed bill, will the minister ensure that things actually happen? We

are good at talking about these things, but there are various obstacles in the way of people establishing micro-renewables or undertaking energy conservation. Sometimes, the obstacles are financial; sometimes, they are to do with planning. People sometimes do not even know where to go for information. Will the minister put somebody competent in charge of that to push the issue forward?

Ross Finnie: It is rare that we get a job advert and an application for the job in the same question. Who could possibly doubt Donald Gorrie's competence in leading such an effort? His point is almost identical to that in Kenneth Macintosh's first question, which was pursued by Sarah Boyack. Irrespective of whether the bill proceeds, there are issues to be addressed in delivering micro-generation. There are also issues about public access to comprehensive information, which have to be addressed if individual responsibility for implementing climate change programmes such as micro-generation is to gain momentum.

Climate Change (Peatlands)

2. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what the significance is of Scotland's peatlands in terms of climate change emissions. (S2O-10394)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Scottish soils, including peatlands, are a significant store of carbon. Land management practices can enhance that store of carbon or can lead to emissions of carbon dioxide, which contribute to climate change. However, as the member will be aware, many uncertainties are associated with the behaviour of carbon in Scotland's soils. Jointly with the National Assembly for Wales, the Executive has commissioned research on modelling the behaviour of carbon and nitrogen in organic soils. The findings, which will assist our understanding of the emissions from soils, will be available in the autumn.

Eleanor Scott: Notwithstanding the on-going research, it is accepted that healthy peat bog stores carbon, whereas damaged peat bog emits carbon. In the flow country of Sutherland and Caithness, we have the largest blanket bog in Europe, which is of international importance not only with regard to climate change, but because of its unique habitat, which was recently recognised when it received national nature reserve status. Does the minister agree that its importance should be further recognised internationally by being put forward to become a world heritage site, and will he undertake to take that forward?

Ross Finnie: As always, we are guided in such matters by the advice that we get from Scottish

Natural Heritage. We will look at the case with interest, as it concerns an important area. The member will be aware that the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development recently announced, on behalf of SNH, support for the peatlands in southern Scotland.

Scottish Natural Heritage and the Executive take the issue seriously. The member makes a good point. I very much hope that the information from the study, which will be available shortly, will help us to fashion policy in a targeted way.

The Presiding Officer: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Freshwater Fishing (Legislation)

4. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects to introduce legislation on freshwater fishing. (S2O-10333)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): Legislation on freshwater fisheries is being brought forward as part of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced to the Scottish Parliament today and will be published by the Scottish Parliament tomorrow.

Dennis Canavan: Is the minister aware that many ordinary anglers will be extremely angry and disappointed if the Executive reneges on its commitment to repeal the notorious Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976 and replace it with a democratically constituted Scottish anglers trust? Ross Finnie and Allan Wilson made that commitment repeatedly in the Parliament. If the repeal of the 1976 act is not included in the forthcoming legislation, will the minister at least reiterate the Executive's commitment that a future legislative opportunity will be sought to abolish all so-called protection orders, which were supposed to improve access but have deprived many ordinary anglers of the right to fish Scotland's lochs and rivers?

Rhona Brankin: As Dennis Canavan understands, protection orders have been discussed at length, in both the Scottish freshwater fisheries forum and its steering group. Although, as Dennis Canavan is aware, there are recognised problems with obtaining orders, monitoring their performance and, in some places, obtaining permits, the clear majority opinion was that protection order provisions should not be repealed unless they can be replaced with something better. The danger with simply repealing the protection order provisions at this time is that it could lead to unsustainable fishing and damage freshwater fishery resources. I am conscious of the problems with protection orders. As I said when I met Dennis Canavan recently, the

Executive is committed to revisiting the matter in future.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The minister will be aware of trusts such as the Argyll Fisheries Trust, the Lochaber Fisheries Trust and the Western Isles Fisheries Trust, whose research and groundwork have recently been so valuable to the wild freshwater angling industry and the setting up of area management agreements, which allow the wild salmon and sea trout industry to co-exist with the farmed salmon industry. Will the minister consider extra funding for her countryside agencies to help those trusts with their work, which is so valuable to Scotland's rural economy?

Rhona Brankin: I acknowledge the valuable work that the trusts do by providing information for area management agreements, which are a success story in relation to developing sustainable freshwater fisheries and aquaculture industries. As members know, the Scottish Executive already supports the tripartite working groups and we will continue to support the valuable work that is going on in relation to freshwater fisheries and aquaculture interests.

Finnish European Union Presidency

5. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will contribute to the work of the Finnish presidency of the European Union in moving towards a new generation of environmental policy. (S2O-10388)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Topics that are being taken forward in the Finnish presidency that demonstrate a particularly novel approach include the integration of sustainable development and the thematic strategies, both of which were included in the environmental priorities for Scotland that I described to the Environment and Rural Development Committee on Wednesday 21 June.

The integration of sustainable approaches into policy, as envisaged in the Finnish priorities, is to be found in "Choosing our Future: Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy", which was published in December.

The thematic strategies represent a modern way of decision making that takes into account links with other problems and policy areas and promotes better regulation. The Scottish Executive is participating in preliminary discussions in working groups of the Council of the European Union and in United Kingdom policy development, according to the stage reached with each strategy.

Nora Radcliffe: I refer to a different strand of policy. A lot of work will be done during the Finnish presidency on the draft marine framework directive. What input do the minister and his

officials have to those discussions? How will the work that the Executive is doing on Scotland's coastal marine environment feed into or benefit from discussions at European level?

Ross Finnie: As I indicated when I appeared before the Environment and Rural Development Committee the other day, one of the disappointments in taking forward the marine issue has been the huge logjam that has resulted from the failure to agree even simple definitions at an early stage. However, my officials and I continue to feed in to the working groups that are engaged in the exercise. I assure the member that the work that we are doing in Scotland and in conjunction with the United Kingdom Government in terms of a marine strategy and the proposed UK marine bill is not in any way inhibited by the overarching work that is being conducted at European Union level—indeed, it fits in with it.

Greengairs

6. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making in bringing environmental justice to the people of Greengairs. (S2O-10396)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): There have been a number of initiatives. Forestry Commission grants have supported new forest planting to improve the local environment and provide public access to the countryside. We have supported the citizens environmental defence advocacy scheme, which is run by Friends of the Earth Scotland. Plans for the remediation of land in Greengairs are progressing well, and between £130,000 and £180,000 will be invested from the Executive's vacant and derelict land fund during 2006-08. Further, the Greengairs community has benefited from schemes assisted by the landfill tax credit scheme.

Alex Neil: Although the community benefits from everything that the minister has outlined, there is still a major environmental problem in and around Greengairs.

I remind the minister that the First Minister visited Greengairs just over three years ago and promised that the Executive would set up a dedicated environmental justice fund for Greengairs. Can the minister tell us when that fund will be established?

Ross Finnie: I am well aware that, as the member rightly says, a major problem still exists. I am more than acutely aware of that because of the continuing and consistent interest that Karen Whitefield takes in this matter. She is in constant communication with us on that subject.

The First Minister raised the issue of a dedicated fund, although I am not sure that he specified that

it would be exclusively for Greengairs. We have examined what is available before putting that fund in place, for example the community environmental renewal scheme, the quality of life scheme and external funds such as the landfill tax credit scheme and those provided by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. We are disappointed not by the money that is available, but by the fact that there is considerable confusion on the part of communities that have tried to access money for the specific purpose of remedying the kind of environmental injustice from which Greengairs has suffered.

In addition, having established the principle of the fund, we have asked that all of those funds be reviewed to ensure that we direct resources where they are actually needed. There is money in those funds, but it is not being accessed. Members can check that with North Lanarkshire Council, which is having difficulty accessing money from one of those funds for the purpose of alleviating the problems in Greengairs.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Is the minister aware of the concerns of my constituents in Greengairs about the difficulties that they have encountered in accessing some of the funding that he highlighted in his answer to Mr Neil? Although, in the past, there was considerable mining activity in Greengairs, the area does not qualify for coalfield regeneration money from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. That is of concern to me, as the local member, and to the community.

Is the minister aware of the community's concerns about the difficulties that it has encountered in its attempts to engage in the process of deciding how the vacant and derelict land fund money is to be spent in Lanarkshire? Does the minister agree that there is a need for more dialogue to ensure that that money addresses the targets and objectives that have been outlined by the Scottish Executive?

Ross Finnie: I am better placed to deal with the question about the latter fund. The vacant and derelict land fund was started in 2004. We have been pursuing the issue that the member raises—and which she has raised with us previously—in discussions in the Executive and with North Lanarkshire Council, which has worked hard. I understand that feasibility studies have been assisted by that fund and that it will now agree to the implementation of substantive projects.

In considering further the funds that are available not just to those in Greengairs but to others who suffer similar environmental injustice, the coalfield regeneration fund is one of the funds that we are reviewing in the light of the environmental renewal scheme, the quality of life scheme and the landfill tax credit scheme. I hope

that the result of that work will assist the member and, in particular, help her constituents to receive awards that will alleviate the environmental injustice to which she referred.

Wind Farms (Locational Strategy)

7. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether, in light of the significant environmental impact of onshore wind developments, it accepts the recommendation of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's report, "Inquiry into Energy Issues for Scotland", that a locational strategy for such developments should be drawn up. (S2O-10341)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The Executive will consult shortly on a revised planning policy for renewable energy. The policy will set out clear guidance on the considerations that are to be taken into account when identifying appropriate locations for and taking decisions on proposals for wind farms.

David McLetchie: I am pleased to hear that.

Is the minister aware that the Royal Society of Edinburgh's report estimates that 1,500 turbines will need to be constructed throughout Scotland—covering a land area of about 600km²—if wind farms are to contribute 20 per cent of electricity generation? Is the minister concerned, as I am, about the impact of such large-scale development on landscapes, habitats and wildlife? Does he agree that, if one is set upon the industrialisation of the Scottish countryside, it would make sense to identify areas of lower environmental quality where such developments might appropriately be sited, rather than to rely on the present rather haphazard planning process to achieve such an outcome?

Ross Finnie: In essence, the supplementary question is the precursor to the first question, which was asked and answered by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. I assure the member that my colleague the Minister for Communities has been extremely exercised—as have I, as the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, and my colleague the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning—that we do not have that spatial element to development. I have mentioned that in a number of answers to questions in the chamber. National planning policy guideline 6 was being reviewed even before we received the Royal Society of Edinburgh's report.

The principles that underlie the report, such as taking a much more strategic view of the areas that ought properly to be designated for wind farm development, are encompassed in the new revised planning guidelines. People will be able to respond when they are published for consultation shortly.

International Development and Co-operation with Malawi

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on international development and co-operation with Malawi.

14:58

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): Nearly a year ago, a quarter of a million people from all over the world and from all backgrounds came to Scotland and marched through the streets of Edinburgh. They sent to the world leaders who were gathering for the G8 summit at Gleneagles a clear message that we should make poverty history. It is no longer acceptable that half the world goes hungry while the other half prospers. It was that same generosity of spirit and good will that prompted thousands of Scots to respond so generously to the Asian tsunami and to the terrible tragedies since—the continuing food crises in sub-Saharan Africa and the earthquakes in Kashmir and Indonesia.

It is because we, as Scots, understand our obligations as a prosperous nation that we have an international development policy. Frankly, we cannot afford not to have one. We are not a traditional aid donor. International aid is the responsibility of the Department for International Development at the United Kingdom level, and that is a responsibility that we fully support. However, what Scotland has to offer is unique, and nowhere is that better expressed than in our relationship with Malawi.

In the late 19th century, ordinary Scots—men and women—travelled to that small country, which is nestled in the south-east of Africa. They went out of a sense of obligation to their fellow human beings. They went to spread their gospel, but also to share their expertise in health and education, in running public services and in developing businesses. They went to help to build a better country.

One hundred and fifty years on, the same Scottish values of fairness, equality and mutuality drive our relationship with the people of Malawi. We are two small countries that share a common past and a desire for a better future.

I want to talk about progress in our work with Malawi since the signing of the historic co-operation agreement between our two countries last November, but first I will reflect on the year since the make poverty history march and G8 Scotland, on the achievements of that summit and

on how a national effort in Scotland is contributing to making poverty history.

The decisions that were taken last year at G8 Scotland are already making a difference, with a £28.8 billion increase in global aid by 2010; an increase in aid to Africa by \$25 billion a year by 2010, which will double that aid over six years; full debt cancellation for the world's poorest 18 countries; universal access to anti-HIV drugs in Africa by 2010; and reform of international trade rules.

However, as the Prime Minister has said, that is a long-term agenda. Many of the Gleneagles commitments relate to future years and western Governments must maintain their efforts. That is why we welcome the recently announced Africa progress panel, which will track the promises that were made in Perthshire last year, just as we will keep to our commitments to work with developing countries, as set out in our international development policy.

The primary funding distribution mechanism for our policy is the international development fund. In the first round of awards, almost £5 million was provided over three years to benefit 34 projects. We provided £250,000 last year to projects that fell below the international development fund threshold, because we recognise that although small-scale projects are tightly focused, they can deliver benefits for very little money. We are reviewing the arrangements for this year after consulting key stakeholders and we expect to announce the next round for the fund in August.

We are actively supporting Scottish volunteers and have developed a new small grant scheme for people who work in the health sector, which was launched in November 2005. The humanitarian health fund provides essential travel and subsistence for Scots and will enable more health care professionals to undertake vital humanitarian work in some of the world's poorest countries—in Malawi and more widely. We have completed one round of that fund—allocations were made in May this year—and we look forward to undertaking more rounds in the near future.

In addition, and in line with the aim in our international development policy of capacity building in the Scottish non-governmental organisation sector, we have provided core funding to the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland and the International Development Education Association of Scotland to allow them to provide a stronger voice for their members.

However, developing countries do not want to depend on aid. In the long term, it is trade that will help those Malawians who live on 15 kwacha a day—about 6p—to escape grinding poverty.

However, that must be fair trade. Let us be clear that fair trade is not about charity; it is something for which we in the west have fought: a way to ensure that workers receive fair pay, fair prices and decent working conditions.

Members who visited Malawi in February saw for themselves the benefits that fair trade has brought to the sugar producers in the village of Kasinthula, which now has the best schools and clinics in the area, built using the fair trade premium.

Last March, the First Minister expressed his wish that Scotland should become one of the world's fair trade nations. The group on fair trade, which I chair, has considered the best way to achieve that, and I am pleased to say that we hope to make an announcement very soon.

One thing that has struck me most in the past year is ordinary Scots' desire to make a difference. Through the international development fund process, I have been made aware of the number of Scottish organisations—large and small—that are active in international development in countries throughout our key geographic areas. I welcome and applaud that work.

At this point, I want to turn to our work with Malawi. As members know, I have just returned from my first official visit to the country, and I was struck by the extreme contrasts that I found. Malawi is beautiful; however, amid all the wonderful scenery lies the most extreme poverty. There is a great deal of cheerfulness and optimism, despite the fact that one child in seven dies before his or her fifth birthday; and there is a national desire for good governance and economic progress, even though the country has known multiparty democracy only since 1994.

Since the co-operation agreement between our two countries was signed, good progress has been made. Indeed, I was able to see some of that progress on my visit. For example, I saw for myself the great work that is being done by Scottish International Relief's Mary's meals programme, which, as a result of our funding, is now able to feed 80,000 children a year.

Although many projects that we support are still in the early stages of development, it is clear that progress is already being made on the ground. However, there is much to be done and we are clear about the need to focus our efforts. As a result, we have been working with our Malawian counterparts to develop more detailed action plans to underpin the commitments in the co-operation agreement.

For instance, we are, along with DFID, working closely with the Ministry of Health to support its sector-wide approach, offering practical advice and support and brokering partnerships between

Scottish institutions and their Malawian counterparts. Our approach is focusing support on maternal health and HIV/AIDS, given the grave difficulties in those areas, and within it, we are helping to build capacity and exchange skills.

As far as governance is concerned, we are developing a programme of partnerships between media agencies in both Scotland and Malawi to strengthen the media, recognising its role as a core part of building good governance. For example, the BBC and STV are working with national radio and television stations in Malawi to develop public information programming and training packages and are providing them with essential hardware. Moreover, Napier University is working with the University of Malawi to develop its journalism courses.

Our ombudsmen and ombudswomen are working together on a programme of collaboration and are, for example, considering different approaches to ensuring access to services for people in rural areas. In addition, a lawyer from the Ministry of Justice is working with the office of the Scottish parliamentary counsel to share experiences of developing and drafting legislation.

We also recognise the importance of economic development. After all, like any country, Malawi needs a strong and stable economy if it is to flourish. As a result, we are sharing expertise with our Malawian counterparts on how best to realise the full potential of tourism.

Through the international development fund, we are supporting a number of projects that address the Malawian Ministry of Education's priorities, particularly with regard to gender equality and attainment. We are also working with the increasing number of schools in Scotland that are developing partnerships with schools in Malawi, ensuring that young people in both countries not only grow up with a much deeper awareness and understanding of one another but celebrate that spirit of friendship.

Of course, we can share our common human experience in many other areas, including those in my own portfolio of sports, the arts and culture. Earlier this month, I went to the St Magnus festival in Orkney where I was entranced by the Limbe church choir from Malawi, whose visit we supported. Indeed, I know that MSPs greatly enjoyed the choir's performance in the Parliament.

While I was in Orkney, I also had the great pleasure of meeting the distinguished Malawian poet Jack Mapanje and of hearing his experiences as a prisoner and poet. I hope that others will build on that type of exchange and that Scotland's other festivals will establish links with Malawi to allow us to learn more about each other's cultures.

Last month, on my visit to Malawi, I visited the graves of some of the early Scottish missionaries and their families. They sacrificed their lives for Malawi and their deaths brought home to me, in the starkest possible way, the depth of the friendship and the bond between our two countries. Just as Dr David Livingstone and others made a lifetime commitment to the country, we must be clear that we are in this relationship for the long term.

Our renewed friendship with Malawi is not something that we will commit to for a few years and then abandon. This partnership has already lasted 150 years and will prosper for many more. I believe that, together, we can build a better future.

15:10

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Just as the Scottish National Party welcomed the establishment of this Parliament's international development fund by the Executive, so we welcome today's subject debate. A year on from the G8 summit, this is an appropriate juncture at which to discuss international development and Malawi.

As the minister said, some progress has been made since last year on the commitments that were made at the G8 summit, but it is generally recognised by people of every political persuasion that there is still a sense of disappointment about those grand promises. In some cases, debt relief being offset against aid has not fulfilled the promises that were made.

People recognise that what we can do in the Parliament and in the Scottish Executive is fairly small, but it is right that we should focus on Malawi, because of the historical links between our countries. It is also right that we should look at the bigger picture to see how everything fits in. Because this is a debate with no motion, I think that a lot of personal views will be expressed in members' speeches this afternoon. My personal view is that there can be so many good, worthy initiatives going on at all levels that we sometimes forget about the major issues.

One of the major issues for Africa is public health. There are a lot of initiatives around HIV/AIDS at the moment, for example. Then there are malaria and tuberculosis campaigns, and that is great, because it all needs to be done. However, when we look at how public health developed in our own societies, we see that it was about infrastructure for potable water and sewage. Although there are small initiatives across Africa—I believe that the Executive is funding such a project run by Mercy Corps in Zimbabwe—until we can guarantee people across that continent good infrastructure for potable water and sewage, we

cannot really say that we are tackling the public health problems. That is what I am trying to get at when I talk about the lack of a strategic overview across the nations that are able to help.

Another big issue is trade. However we look at it, western trade policies are hard to defend. I hope that the new G8 round and the next World Health Organisation round will have everyone, including Governments that profess to care, lobbying for real change in trade rules. I am also aware that there are trade barriers even within the continent of Africa. That is another discussion that has to go on—internally within the continent as well as externally.

It is not just countries that consider themselves western democracies that are participating in Africa. I understand that China has become Africa's fastest growing business partner, with trade up 37 per cent last year. Commentator Hamish McRae has said:

"You could almost say that western relations with Africa are dominated by aid, while Chinese relations are dominated by trade."

The view of some people on the ground is that China is taking in its own workers, carrying out the work and then leaving, so its policies on trade with Africa do not really have a legacy of self-sufficiency. Perhaps, in the new spirit of co-operation that the west has with China, such an approach could be encouraged.

I have spoken about fragmentation and about the fact that lots of little initiatives are going on. One of the things that stuns me about Malawi and which harks back to that 150-year history of our relationship with the country is the number of folk in this country who have been carrying out such initiatives for years and years. I recently met people from the Kwenderana group, run jointly by churches around the Busby area. For years, that group has been funding a small school in northern Malawi and has been sending out goods and equipment. The minister referred to ordinary Scots making a difference, and that has been happening in Malawi over the piece.

I am pleased that one of the projects that has been funded—I think that the University of Edinburgh will carry out the work—is a Scotland-Africa directory, so there will be a database that shows exactly what is happening. I hope that the minister can confirm that smaller voluntary groups that are not attached to non-governmental organisations can have their work added to that database, so that we have an overall picture of what is happening.

Another big issue in Africa and in Malawi in particular is the lack of a democratic structure. That cannot be denied when we talk about Malawi. I would like to praise the work of a Westminster-

based organisation, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which believes that properly functioning political parties are the key to an effective pluralist democracy. The WFD funds, to varying degrees, political parties that have representation at Westminster—the SNP is a beneficiary of those funds.

I recently went out to Malawi with the WFD along with my colleague Pete Wishart to see whether there were political parties with which the SNP could logically join up. It was a very interesting trip and we met a lot of people, but one thing that stuck out was that there are no grass-roots organisations that lead into politics. Political parties are formed from the top down. For example, as soon as the current president was elected, he left his political party and started another party because he fell out with the first one. I say as an aside that it is interesting that the Liberal Democrats are linked to both parties—that is a very Liberal Democrat thing to do.

The SNP has agreed that we will link with two of the smaller parties: the People's Progressive Movement and the People's Transformation Party. We will head back out to Malawi fairly soon to carry out training for women and youths—that work is very important for the future of any democracy. People say that it is ridiculous to fund political parties, but they can be the bedrock of a society that will grow and become a functioning democracy.

I am getting hard looks from the Presiding Officer because my time is up. I would love to say much more as there is so much to be said on the subject, but I will stop now. I have the privilege of closing the debate for the SNP group, so I can say everything else then.

15:18

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I apologise, as I will have to leave the debate before the closing speeches. I tend not to do that if I can avoid it, but I will speak later this afternoon at the school prize giving at Webster's high school in Kirriemuir. The school has asked me to talk about developing links with schools in Malawi.

I was part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association group that went to Malawi in February. The number of schools, church groups and other community groups that have been in contact and asked me to give them more information about building links with similar groups in Malawi has been enlightening. There is clearly a great deal of interest among the public in restoring the historic relationship. I commend the work that the Scottish Executive is doing to encourage development links with Malawi. I do not always commend what the

Scottish Executive does, but I make an exception on this occasion.

When I visited Malawi I was struck by the affection that there is for Scotland among the people there. I have been to Africa on several occasions in the past. I had expected that when we engaged with people in public life in Africa there would be a degree of resentment towards us westerners because of the period of colonisation, but the reverse is true. It is striking that the Malawi that the early Scottish missionaries such as David Livingstone visited was not a land of happiness and peace; it was a land ravaged by the tyranny of the Arab slave trade. The early Scots pioneers who came to Malawi were seen as liberators because they were coming to protect the people of Malawi from the slave traders. That was David Livingstone's great vocation.

In addition, of course, David Livingstone and others brought Christianity with them. Malawi is now one of the most Christian countries in Africa, if not the world, and its people value their religion. While I was there I had the privilege of attending two services of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, which has close links with our Church of Scotland. The style of service and worship would be familiar to anyone who has been at a Church of Scotland service. Clearly, there are historic links that are much to be valued.

Malawi's problems are significant. There is hunger; although there is not at the moment famine in Malawi, many people do not get basic meals every day. There is a lack of clean water for drinking and washing, and a lack of water to support crops. A drought can cause serious problems for the maize harvest.

Education is basic. There is universal free primary education and the teachers we met were excellent and dedicated. However, they work in school structures that have leaking roofs and mud floors and there are no desks, so the children must sit on the floor. The children have very few or no schoolbooks, and there is little in the way of equipment, other than a blackboard and chalk. The standards are basic and teachers struggle to do their best. However, the children put a great value on education, which is refreshing for those who have encountered youngsters in this country.

Finally, and perhaps most serious of all, there is a huge problem with a lack of basic health services. That is epitomised in the heartbreaking problem of HIV/AIDS that affects one in seven of the adult population of Malawi—according to official figures—although I suspect that the actual figure is higher than that. We see households headed by children as young as seven, who are bringing up younger siblings because the parents, and sometimes also the grandparents, have died

and there is simply nobody else to look after them. Frankly, the scale of the problem is immense.

What can we do to help? Well, as the minister said, we can support fair trade. As the minister mentioned, when we were in Malawi, Mark Ruskell and I visited the Kasinthula sugar producers, who are part of a fair trade project. The difference that the fair trade premium made to that project and the work that it was able to do in the community was obvious to us on the ground. However, we cannot just stop at supporting fair trade. That is growing and there is greater consumer demand, but we must consider tariff reform. I think that that will raise serious issues for many of us here in the west, particularly for the way in which we protect some of our industries from imports from the third world. Those are difficult questions for us to address.

Of course, we can help Malawi directly. A huge amount of work is taking place on the ground in Malawi through charities and non-governmental organisations. It is clear that there is a great desire there to get volunteers from Scotland and other parts of the UK to go and help, particularly if they have a background or experience in medicine and education. I very much welcome what the Executive has been doing to encourage people with experience in those fields to go out to Malawi. I know that that scheme has been a great success and I hope to see it expanded. There are many in Scotland who may have had a career in teaching, teacher training or medicine, and who have taken early retirement, who could, in fact, make a huge contribution towards life in Malawi. Perhaps, with a little bit of assistance, they could be encouraged to go out there and help the society along.

We need to encourage school links, too. A great many schools in Scotland want to link with schools in Malawi. It is clear that what to us are worthless items, such as old schoolbooks and old pieces of equipment, would make a huge difference to schools in Malawi—as would, indeed, very small sums of money—and would be gratefully received.

In addition, we must help develop a political culture in Malawi—the minister referred to that in her speech—that underpins and stimulates everything else that we are trying to do. It is sometimes easy to forget that Malawi has been a multiparty democracy only since 1994. We in this country have had a multiparty democracy for hundreds of years and we can sometimes feel impatient and say, “Why haven’t they improved their system? Why are they not enforcing the rule of law more rigorously?” However, we can help Malawi develop institutions. We are developing parliamentary links; as the minister said, we have collaboration between the ombudsmen of our different countries.

We must help Malawi to build strong institutions because people want to invest in it. There are huge opportunities to invest in economic development and tourism, but Malawi will get foreign investors only if there is a secure system in which the rule of law is enforced and the investors know that their investment will be safe; government institutions must be in place to make that work. As a Parliament, we can provide practical help to achieve that.

The scale of the problem in Malawi can sometimes daunt us, so great is the need in that country. However, the fact that we cannot do everything does not mean that we should not try to do something. I think that the Scottish Executive would accept that it provides a tiny sum of money in comparison with the DFID budget for Malawi, but it is still worth providing that money.

The Presiding Officer is scowling at me, so I will make my final point. I remember listening to a radio interview a few years ago with the late Jackie Ross. He was a Highland minister who set up Blythswood Care, a charity that assists people in eastern Europe and throughout the third world. The interviewer said, “All that you do is just a drop in the bucket. What is the point?” Jackie Ross replied, “Yes, it is a drop in the bucket, but by doing a little we can make a real difference to people’s lives. Are you telling me that that isn’t worth doing?”

We are making a difference to people’s lives in Malawi and I encourage the Scottish Executive to carry on with its work.

15:26

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): I was fortunate to be able to visit Malawi twice with the Scottish delegation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The money that the Scottish Executive is putting into Malawi is beginning to make a real difference. International development aid enhances global welfare and enables people in poverty to become productive and active and to contribute to their community’s economic and social development.

Urgent action is required to achieve the United Nations millennium development goals by 2015, which include tackling global poverty, providing universal primary education and combating HIV and AIDS. A small amount of money can make a huge difference. For example, the money that was raised at last year’s journalists’ dinner went to schools in Dedza, a part of Malawi that we visited the first time we were in the country. The money has helped to build a school and housing for teachers in an area that did not have a school. It was good to learn last night that a similar amount was raised this year. It is a small amount of

money, but we hope that it will go towards an equally worthwhile project.

Additional resources are vital, but there is also a need for reform in the delivery of aid, to ensure that it is efficient and effective and reaches people who are in need. Aid should seek to promote good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

If there is to be long-term sustainable development, developing countries must be given the opportunity to trade fairly, as the minister said. We all have the opportunity to buy fair trade products. Student efforts at the University of Edinburgh have led to the university becoming a fair trade university and I congratulate the Co-op on becoming one of the first supermarkets to display a substantial number of fair trade products on its shelves. A number of churches and voluntary organisations in my constituency, Edinburgh South, promote fair trade produce.

When we were in Malawi, several delegates visited a successful fair trade sugar producer, as we heard. Mark Ruskell and I visited a coffee producer, who was not yet involved in fair trade but was heading in that direction. A number of members are working hard on fair trade. For example, Sarah Boyack does a lot on fair trade in Edinburgh Central. We must encourage such work.

The UN set an aid target for the G8 countries and European donors of 0.5 per cent of gross national income by 2009 and 0.7 per cent by 2013. We are on the way to reaching that target, but much needs to be done before we can meet it. At the G8 summit last year, £28.8 billion was pledged for Africa over the next five years. That is an ambitious target, which we must all do our bit to achieve. Last night I heard Gordon Brown talking on the radio about his commitment to Africa and I congratulate him on the efforts that he has been making over a considerable time to ensure that the targets for Africa are achieved. The biggest news on that front was the pledge to cancel 100 per cent of the debt that many African countries owe to multinational institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, and to other countries. We heard last week that good progress is being made in that regard.

The Liberal Democrats have pledged to tackle a number of issues. We want to establish better donor co-ordination mechanisms and increase the effectiveness of aid delivery by avoiding unnecessary duplication and improving co-ordination with regional and sub-regional organisations. We need to ensure that there is greater transparency and accountability in how funds are distributed in recipient countries. We have all heard stories about how aid disappears

and it is sad that that remains a problem in some countries.

We need to improve the predictability of aid, to allow poor countries to plan effectively and to take control of their budgets in their fight against poverty. Basic services that are funded by development assistance must be provided in ways that guarantee access for the poorest and most marginalised in the recipient countries. There must be a concerted effort to ensure gender equality and to tackle gender-related poverty. The Parliament has been active in doing that.

The Scottish Executive is to be congratulated on committing £4.3 million to be spent in sub-Saharan Africa. Much of that, as we have heard, is being spent in Malawi, which has twice been visited by a Scottish delegation of the CPA. The co-operation agreement with Malawi will involve Scotland offering serious, practical help in the main areas of health, education and economic development. The involvement of the University of Strathclyde, the University of Stirling and other institutions is to be welcomed. They are working very hard on a number of projects in Malawi.

The Scottish Executive money is now funding a considerable number of projects. I apologise for arriving too late to hear the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, but I think that she said that there are 36 projects in Malawi now. For example, there is a project based in Limbe in the south, known as Mary's meals, which runs school feeding projects. There is the Mamie Martin fund, which supports the education of girls in northern Malawi. We have heard about the links between the St Magnus festival and Orkney and Malawi. We saw people involved in that in the garden lobby recently—they were fantastic.

A number of projects address HIV/AIDS in Malawi, but I would like to focus on just two. First, we visited an extremely good project at Likhubula House. The project uses Scotland's pre-eminence in outdoor education to help create a world-class outdoor education facility for all the youth of Malawi. The project supports orphans and their carers by providing them with holiday breaks and different types of learning. Expertise from sportscotland is helping to add value to the running of Likhubula House. The Scottish Executive has funded the project to the tune of £195,000 over three years. When we were there, we saw just what a difference that money was making. Each week, 50 young people enjoy Mulanje mountain, which is a wonderful place—anyone going to Malawi has to go to Mulanje mountain—and the resources and facilities of Likhubula.

Secondly, I will mention the project that I got closely involved with, at Bottom hospital. The first time we went, it was a depressing place. It was

much better the second time, however, as some money had been spent there. Graeme Walker and a group of midwives from across Scotland are bidding to deliver the ALSO programme—Advanced Life Support in Obstetrics—to help in maternity care. The team has now been in Malawi four times to deliver that new course, through which nurses are being trained to become trainers. In the long term, the project will substantially improve the level of maternal health in Malawi, which is currently among the worst in the world. I met Graeme Walker and the midwives recently. Graeme said that he has never seen a maternal death at the Simpson maternity centre in Edinburgh but, when he is in Malawi, he sees more than one a week. In the longer term, the ALSO programme will help greatly reduce the incidence of maternal death in Malawi.

A substantial amount is being done, and a lot is being achieved by many people, but the efforts of them all to improve the lives of people in Malawi and elsewhere in Africa and the rest of the world have really only just begun and we all have to do much more.

15:33

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, to reflect on the year that has passed and to look forward to the future, particularly in developing our partnership with our friends in Malawi. I welcome the contribution of the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport to the debate and the detailed work that has gone into developing the agreements involving the various strands, both here in Scotland and in Malawi.

I particularly commend to members the health development plan, which has pulled together a range of activities in a planned, co-ordinated way. The plan deals with the value that we in Scotland can bring to training Malawians and enhancing their activities, as well as with what Scots can gain from their involvement in Malawi. There must be a two-way process—it should not be seen as us imposing ourselves on another country.

There is undoubtedly a real challenge in delivering health services in Malawi. Anybody who has been there will testify to that. Last year, we saw that only one of the doctors who was trained in Malawi remains working in the Ministry of Health there. That gives an idea of the scale of the challenge facing the health service in Malawi. In Chikwawa district, I visited a district general hospital which is operating without a qualified doctor. That district has a whole range of illnesses and challenges.

I want to focus on how we can develop the education plan. Work is being done on that plan,

but I would like to offer some ideas gained from my experience and that of others. I hope that they will be beneficial.

As Murdo Fraser said, primary education in Malawi is free but, without doubt, it is underresourced. In developing the education plan, key challenges must be addressed with our partners in Malawi. The first and the most important will be to build the capacity of the teaching staff. There are far too few teachers. Of those there are, many do not have formal teaching qualifications. Many have gone into teaching because it was the only job they could get, not because it was a vocation. Those teachers have had little if any professional development since they began teaching in the classroom.

There are Scots working in Malawi. My constituent Tina Deans, who is in the public gallery today, is working in the Zomba district to provide some continuous professional development to teachers in 14 district centres. Her work covers more than 100 schools, so members can understand the scale of the challenge. It is formidable, and Malawi is a country where teachers are undervalued in many ways.

In Malawi, 85 per cent of the people live in rural areas—such as the Zomba district where Tina works. In the worst-case scenario in the Zomba district, 485 children will be taught by one teacher. In a normal situation, the figure is 130. Building the country's capacity to train more teachers is key. The minister may wish to reflect on what we can do here in Scotland to support teacher training in Malawi and to increase the number of teachers who can be trained. In any one year in Malawi, more teachers die or leave the profession than can be trained. The challenge is immense.

I urge the Executive to consider—and to discuss with our Malawian partners and with DFID—how we can incentivise teaching in rural Malawi. People are faced with a choice: they can take a class of 60 and live in a house in the city with access to shops and clean water, intermittent access to an electricity supply, and access to transport; or they can take a class of 130 in a rural area, with no accommodation, with water a walk of miles away, and with no electricity, no shops and no access to transport. Members can see why most people choose to teach in urban Malawi, where only 15 per cent of the population live, while the rural areas become further disadvantaged.

The minister may wish to consider teachers' housing, to consider whether pay incentives can be used to encourage people to teach in rural areas, and to consider how we can encourage children in remote communities to get the education that we all acknowledge will be the key that allows them to get out of poverty.

Numbers of pupil books and teaching guides are limited; some subjects cannot be taught because of a lack of teaching guides. Teachers are told to improvise, but if they have not been trained and if they do not have any resources, with what can they improvise? That is a real challenge.

Yes, there is a need for buildings—the physical infrastructure is important—but I am convinced that qualified teaching staff, with the resources to provide an education programme, will be far more important. We can help with that.

I have mentioned a link with my constituency. Carnwath primary school, where Tina Deans was a teacher, recently held a Malawi day. The whole community was involved in learning about and celebrating Malawi. Schools such as Glengowan primary school in Larkhall and others in the Biggar area are linking with schools in the Zomba district. However, it needs to be a genuine partnership. This is not about us giving things to Malawi; we can gain from the partnership too. Our children can gain knowledge as global citizens. They can learn about life in Malawi and can share experiences with their counterparts in the developing world; and the children and young people in Malawi—who are so enthused about Scotland and who love Scotland so much—can learn from their relationship with young people here in Scotland.

I look forward to the lesson plans that Tina Deans has prepared for primaries 1 to 7 being rolled out across my constituency so that children in our primary schools, from the youngest to the oldest, can begin to get an idea of what life is like, to understand the challenges that young people elsewhere in the world face and to appreciate that there is far more to life than whether they have the best game for their PlayStation 2.

We can take action to change the world through fair trade and sharing resources more equitably. The four words on the Parliament's mace—justice, compassion, wisdom and integrity—are on it for no small reason. They sum up the reasons for our partnership with Malawi and I hope that they will provide the focus for our work in the years to come.

15:40

Ms Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): As the minister said, it is fitting that we should have such a debate as the first anniversary of the Gleneagles G8 summit approaches and stock is taken of whether any improvements have taken place in the plight of the citizens of African countries such as Malawi. The prognosis is not good. If we are to believe reports on this morning's "Today" programme on Radio 4, the gap between rich and poor countries is widening rather than

contracting. That is a familiar tale under Labour, both internationally and nationally.

The situation in Malawi has been well documented to the Parliament, not least by my late friend and Scottish National Party colleague, Margaret Ewing, who led a delegation to Malawi in February last year. It was a measure of her stature and influence in the Parliament that the First Minister, to his credit, took on board virtually all the recommendations of Margaret and her group.

As other members have mentioned, given our history, it is fitting that the Parliament should focus on Malawi. It would be great if every developed country twinned with an African country to assist with lifting it out of poverty.

Mike Pringle: I hope that the member accepts that the group that went to Malawi a year ago was a cross-party delegation and that the recommendations were not just Margaret's, but were the entire group's.

Ms Watt: The member should have listened to what I said; I said, "the recommendations of Margaret and her group." I recognise that it was a cross-party delegation.

The G8 summit and the make poverty history campaign raised awareness and heightened expectations, but the task is huge. It was stated that the United Nations target of halving the number of people who live in poverty should be reached by 2015, but on present trends it will be 150 years before that target is reached.

Is it not the case that there is still a mindset difficulty? At governmental level, there is still a patronising and paternalistic attitude to international aid. Conditions are often attached to aid money. For example, countries are told that they must buy our goods and services in return. In addition, the World Bank dictates too much to developing countries, some of which are told that they must implement water privatisation. Debates about the ownership of the water industry must seem a distant prospect to people who do not even have water.

The minister said that she was impressed by the number of ordinary Scots who want to help and that help is coming from all our communities. In my area of Deeside, over the past 18 months, Drumoak and Durris church has raised £10,000 to help rebuild and refurbish the kitchen at Likhubula House, which is the outdoor centre at the foot of Mount Mulanje to which Mike Pringle referred. Ros, Liz, Claire and three sixth-year school leavers—Lyn, Amanda and Ellie—went out last summer to help with the work. While they were there, they did teaching, helped with after-school clubs and cleaned and painted school rooms. They took out a load of equipment, including medical supplies from Aberdeen hospital.

As Mike Pringle mentioned, Likhubula House is the only outdoor centre in Malawi. My friends and their church thought that supporting it would be a worthwhile, practical and long-term investment. It is hoped that tourism will enable the centre to become self-financing in a few years and, if possible, it will be managed solely by folk in Malawi. In the next few years, the church hopes to send out smaller amounts of money to pay for orphans' carers. The youngsters in the group were struck by how difficult it was for people to rise out of poverty because many families had to look after youngsters from extended families, whose parents had died of HIV/AIDS or hunger.

The visit was a life-changing experience for the group, as it was for the many groups from Scotland that have gone to Likhubula, including people from Dunblane and Paisley, some of whom we met the other week when the Malawi choir was at the Parliament. One of the church group, whose name is Amanda, e-mailed me when she found that I would be speaking in today's debate. She said:

"Something we in Scotland could do is not necessarily help more just help in a more informed way. Sending 20 school bags out to school children in Malawi helps those children in the short-term, yes. Greater support would come from sending money into the country so a bag producer in the country can get the work from it hence helping the children and the economy. Also needless to say for the amount of the school bags and P+P you would spend you could get double the amount of bags (if not more) by just supporting local business in Malawi."

Group members were struck by the corruption that they found at all levels and throughout the country. When they donated money, they found that they had to do it in a very public way so that the money could not be siphoned off. They told me that the immense hardship in the country means that when builders are asked to build a house and are given the necessary funds, some of them siphon off the money that should have been used for the foundations. People find that their house has shaky foundations or that it was not constructed properly. There is still a get-rich-quick attitude in Malawi, although perhaps that cannot be helped if life expectancy in the country is 40. The only way of dealing with corruption is through education and by working effectively to stamp it out.

I say to the minister that the task is huge, but we must not give up. People in Malawi are so happy with so little; their optimism must be realised. We must do more, not less. Since 1970, SNP policy has been for 0.7 per cent of gross national product to be given as development aid. As yet, the United Kingdom Government has not reached that target; indeed, it does not expect to reach it until 2013. We believe that the target should now be 1 per cent and that it should be met by 2009. Again, I say to the minister: let us raise our level of

commitment. In that way, we will meet the desire of Scots to assist and of those in Malawi to help themselves.

15:47

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): In the developing world, pregnancy and childbirth kill a woman every minute. Since the debate began we have lost 50 women, many of whom died with no trained midwife or doctor to help them.

Each year, 4 million children die in the first month of their short life. Half of all child deaths are the result of malnutrition; dirty water and inadequate sanitation kill 6,000 children each and every day, while each year malaria kills 1 million people, tuberculosis 2 million and AIDS 3 million. Those are real statistics for real people whose lives are blighted by a global economic system that is inequitable and unfair, and which condemns people to an absence of education, poor health, continuing poverty and an early death.

In many parts of the world, individuals suffer from acute physical instability. People hide because they are frightened of going out and there is a fear of violence because they are threatened by guns and wars. That is particularly the case for children, who can either be swept up into wars or sent away from their homes to protect them from wars. I am thinking of parts of Africa such as Darfur. That situation is fundamentally and morally unacceptable. The world has a responsibility—Scotland has a responsibility—to ensure that something is done.

The something that should be done is not something that should be done by somebody else—in the end, each of us is responsible. We have a responsibility to ensure that our view of the way in which the world works is not only understood but taken forward by politicians—our politicians and other people's politicians. Scotland, or the UK, cannot solve the issue on its own; the whole world must be involved. The developed nations need to acknowledge that the way in which we appropriate and use the best part of the world's resources to build our wealth and prosperity is the cause of the poverty in the third world. We need a fundamental change to take place. That will not be painless for us, because it will involve a change in our aspirations, lifestyles and standards of living—those will have to alter to give other people in the world a fair opportunity.

Many people talk about the issues as though they are somebody else's fault; they think that they can carry on doing what they are doing and with the political views that they have. To them, it does not matter that there is a compartment between that aspect of their thinking and what needs to

happen in the third world. Such compartments are dishonest. We can take account of the plight of people in the third world only if we accept that we have to make a contribution. I am proud that the Scottish Executive has decided to make a contribution through the international development strategy and that the UK Government has increased significantly the amount of money that it is providing in aid, is removing debt and is providing other support for third-world countries. Despite what people say about that not being enough, we are making a start and are trailblazing for other European countries and the United States.

We must encourage our politicians, not denounce them. When Gordon Brown or Tony Blair make announcements on the matter, or when Hilary Benn talks about what he is doing on good governance and other issues, or when Patricia Ferguson talks about what the Executive is doing in Malawi, we must say that that is good. Our criticism might be that we would like them to do a wee bit more and to involve more people. However, it is not fair for people in politics to say that it does not matter what they think and simply to denounce others and blame them for what is wrong. We must get involved in the issues.

One encouraging aspect of Scotland's approach is that many individuals and groups in our society are realising that they must make a contribution, whether that is a personal contribution of giving money or volunteering—which increasing numbers of people are doing—or getting involved in civic society and church organisations to agitate on behalf of the third world. We want to build a healthy democracy in our country and a healthy democracy is one way of making progress to help the cause of people in the third world. The issue has a resonance out there. As I am sure happens to other members, people come to my surgeries and ask me to do something about the issue. My answer is that we all need to do something—I need to do it, they need to do it, everyone needs to do it—and that is the way in which we will secure change. However, we should not think that that will be painless and that we can just put the onus on somebody else to act on our behalf. We must all become engaged.

One issue that arises from the Malawi initiative is that the idea of pairing with other people to offer expertise and to contribute directly in a sustained partnership over a period of time offers a new and promising way forward. That process of sustained engagement with people to help them develop as they want to—not by saying that they must do it our way, but by offering to provide skills and resources and to work with them to improve health, education and governance—is the way in which we can support people in places such as Malawi. Scotland is trying an experiment in

Malawi. We are at the early stages of the experiment and we are not sure whether we are getting everything right at this stage, but we are doing something unique by working with a country of a similar size to ours and with people who want to work with us to try to achieve something through a sustained process. That process deserves an opportunity. We should support the Executive for taking the chance and running with the experiment.

15:54

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

If saving a country such as Malawi from the grinding poverty that it obviously suffers from was easy, perhaps it would have been achieved already. The idea that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive should have a policy that is designed to assist countries such as Malawi seems strange to some people, yet those who know the true history of Scotland's involvement with and support for Africa, through the churches and other means of assistance, know that Scotland has a long-term commitment, which is entirely worthy of Scotland's devolved Government. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, not only that we should have a policy, but that we should have the opportunity today to discuss seriously the problems of that small country and our experiences of it. I am one of the few who have spoken so far who have not had the opportunity or the privilege to visit Malawi, therefore my understanding of the facts about Malawi may not be entirely the same as those who have had more experience. However, the concerns that I noted down prior to my speech seem to have been reflected in much of what has been said.

I wanted to raise one issue for which I was trying to find the appropriate word. As the word that I wrote down has been used already in the debate, I will use it too. That word is corruption. If we are to assist Malawi or any other nation that has similar problems, there is always the problem of what happens with the resources that are given to it by whatever means. I do not like the word "corruption", particularly in relation to what goes on in Africa. We have different standards. Decisions that are made by Government and quite often by individuals, whether they are involved in Government or simply as part of the economy of a country such as Malawi, are often provoked not by any desire to get rich quick—another phrase that I do not like in this context—but simply by the necessity to survive in a difficult environment. It is therefore difficult for us to balance the imposition of standards and structures that we see as appropriate with our parallel commitment to permit self-determination within a pluralist democracy. I am not entirely sure how we can walk that

tightrope. The Executive has my good will in trying to achieve that.

I am well known in the chamber for believing in markets. I genuinely believe—in this country and internationally—in the concept of the redistribution of wealth through trade. In her opening remarks, Patricia Ferguson appeared to support that concept. I have no doubt that she supports it in principle, but she went on to talk about the contribution that the fair trade system is making to the economy of countries such as Malawi. It is entirely appropriate that if we drink tea or coffee, or use sugar or cotton, from a country such as Malawi, we should pay a fair rate for what we are buying. It is ironic that a country such as Malawi is suffering from the reduced demand internationally for tobacco; Malawi's tobacco is not returning the profit that it used to return in the past. I raise that point not to criticise what the minister said—I support her in so far as that goes—but to raise an on-going problem, not only in Malawi but in many other east African countries. The economy of those countries is so agriculturally dependent that they are veering towards the production of cash crops and against the production of the domestic crops that can be staples in their diet.

A piece of history that comes to mind, relating to events much closer to home many years ago, is the Irish potato famine. If we study the history of the famine, we discover that there was no shortage of food in Ireland; the problem was that the vast majority of food that was produced in Ireland at the time was exported to the British mainland. When the potato crop failed, there was starvation in a country that should have been able to feed itself many times over. It is essential that we take steps to boost growth in the economy of Malawi and other east African countries.

However, we must take into account the fact that the pressure that we put on the Malawians to grow their economy—the pressure that we put on them by ensuring that they get a good return for the cash crops that they grow—also has the effect of putting them more and more into the dangerous position that Ireland experienced in the past. For that reason, although we need to join in the commitment that the Executive has made to trade with Malawi and other small African countries, we must prioritise that to ensure that growth in those countries happens across a broad spectrum of the economy—even if it is in the manufacture of schoolbags, which we heard about a moment or two ago.

If we force the Malawians to depend on agricultural output, they may achieve a little growth—they may achieve a lot of growth if we pay them a fair price for their products—but we could imbalance their economy yet further. Any attempts that we make to encourage economic

growth in Malawi must also support non-food production, for both internal and external reasons.

16:01

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):

It is a pleasure to speak, in the last debate before the summer recess, on a topic that is close to my heart. It is disappointing that there are not more members present. I notice that no members of the Scottish Socialist Party are present, although they proposed a debate on the subject last year.

A year ago, the spotlight was on the G8 summit and the practical contribution that Scotland could make to improve the plight of people in Africa. At that time, there was a great deal of scepticism about whether we were in this for the long term and whether we could deliver in a practical way. A little bit of that has come out in the debate today, which is disappointing. As Des McNulty said, we have travelled a long way since the First Minister's innovative speech of June last year. I find it a little bit churlish—I was not going to mention this, but I feel that I have to—that some have tried to score political points, as I feel that we have come a long way.

I do not want to dissipate the good cross-party working that has gone on in the Parliament, which the Malawian high commissioner and the consular officer mentioned to me only this week. As members will be aware, the consulate office for Malawi is based in Irvine, and Cunninghame South has a long and proud history of association with Malawi. Indeed, Malawi has had consular representation in Scotland for more than 20 years. No other sub-Saharan country has shown that level of commitment over such a period of time. The high commissioner felt that a good deal of cross-party working was going on in the Parliament, and it is important that we build on that.

I take this opportunity to praise the work of St Michael's academy in Kilwinning and Irvine rotary club. The minister will know that they have fostered the kind of school-to-school and community-to-community links that are desperately needed to develop infrastructure, improve attainment and encourage sustainable development for the people of Malawi. As other members have said, the Malawians do not want aid; they want sustainable jobs. That point was also emphasised to me on Tuesday, when I met the high commissioner in my constituency.

A year ago this month, the First Minister spoke about Scotland's unfinished business with Malawi. I am proud of the fact that ordinary people in the communities that I represent and in communities throughout Scotland are contributing in an extraordinary way to making the lives of people in

one of the poorest countries—65 per cent of the Malawian population are living below the poverty line—a little bit better.

Members have spoken about the need to improve health and education in Malawi. The pupils of St Michael's academy in Kilwinning have been involved in an exchange with St Peter's school in Mzuzu, which has enabled people in Ayrshire to get a close look at the education system in Malawi. It was difficult for us to grasp just how much had to be done and how much pupils at St Peter's valued their education. Many children walk miles to school each day.

There was a question-and-answer session involving the children from St Michael's and the children from St Peter's. The children from St Michael's asked, "What do you have for school lunches?" but school lunches do not exist in Malawi. They also asked, "What kind of clothes do you change into at the end of the day?" That practical interaction with children gave pupils from St Michael's a real grasp of what life is like in Malawi, which is important.

As we have heard, secondary education in Malawi has to be paid for—in a country where money is tight for every family. I have not been fortunate enough to visit Malawi, as some of my colleagues have, but I know from the discussions that I had with the visitors from St Peter's that their whole-school assemblies are held on the football pitch, that many classrooms have no windows, that pupils share desks and chairs, that classes include more than 70 pupils and that pupils are keen to learn and value education.

St Michael's in Kilwinning is in the process of setting up an orphan scholarship scheme through which the provision of secondary education can be supported by the donations and commitment of staff and parents. I am so proud of that kind of work at a practical, grass-roots level. Small monthly donations will allow the provision of desks, chairs and basic education to orphans.

I want to raise with the minister an issue that the high commissioner, who I had the pleasure of meeting in Irvine on Tuesday night, mentioned. The Scottish Executive is doing a huge amount of work that the consular officer and the high commissioner praised enormously—that is why I have found some of the comments that have been made inappropriate. They told me that it is essential that the money that is being put in can be absorbed in the communities. They asked whether, instead of sending officials out for a week, two weeks or a month at a time, it would be possible to have an official located in Malawi permanently, so that a door would be open and someone would be available immediately to sort out any logjams in the system. I promised to raise that issue with the minister. Members will be

aware that we have opened Scottish Executive offices in Brussels, Beijing and Washington DC. Why cannot we open one in Malawi, where we could facilitate a partnership approach with the communities there?

We must not underestimate the difficulties of ensuring that bureaucracy does not get in the way of delivery and implementation.

I turn briefly to tourism and transport links. There is a huge opportunity to develop facilities on Lake Malawi. I have said in previous debates that it would be helpful if officials and members who travel to Malawi could use the local airline—Air Malawi. Through such actions, we can assist sustainable development.

I am running out of time, so I will conclude by saying that the people of Scotland stand ready to assist. The young people of Scotland are eager to be involved. It is important that the Scottish Parliament—the people's Parliament—facilitates that partnership.

16:08

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I commend the tremendous work that has been done over the past five years at Currie high school, which has links with South Africa, and the fantastic project that is going on in Inverkeithing high school—it is a week-long, whole-school, whole-Africa project. The Executive would do well to find out what has been done.

The fact that I have not managed to grace the cross-party group on Malawi with my presence is no indication of my lack of support for what it is doing. Des McNulty summed up admirably why I am so excited about what the group is doing. I am passionate about Africa. In the late 1960s, I went to Kenya as an education officer for two years. While I was there I was head of a science department in my first year and head of a history and English department in my second year. At the moment, I am supporting a student through two years of forestry college in Uganda and in a few weeks' time I hope to be engaged as a trustee of an education project in Kenya. I have visited Soweto on two occasions. I am committed.

Mark Ruskell sends his apologies for not being available to take part in the debate; he was one of the cross-party group of MSPs who visited Malawi in February and I know that the visit affected him deeply. A few weeks ago, he became a father and he cannot be here today because he is on paternity leave. I believe that he is very much enjoying the company of his young son.

Most of us are familiar with the statistic that if everyone on the planet lived as we in Scotland do, we would need the equivalent of three planet

earths to support the population. In stark contrast, if we all lived as Malawians do, we would need only half of the planet's resources. However, we would be in extreme poverty. There is clearly a huge imbalance in our use of resources to sustain our quality of life and it is clear that that imbalance must be redressed.

Industrialised countries such as ours give aid money for health programmes, industrial development and so on, but the real way out of poverty is, as Alex Johnstone said, through internal economic development. To be stable and long lasting, that economic development must be environmentally and socially sustainable and not entirely dependent on monoculture, export-designed cash cropping.

There is in Africa an opportunity to develop in a sustainable way that we largely missed out in our history. Malawians might not have to make some of the mistakes that we in western society have made since the industrial revolution. Malawi might be able to move straight to solutions that we are only starting to put in place in Scotland. For instance, Malawi currently has only a relatively low demand for electricity and energy, but that will have to grow if the country's economy is to grow. Its energy provision could, however, come from decentralised, renewable energy resources rather than wasteful and polluting centralised fossil-fuel power stations. It is obvious. We can export the expertise that is needed to support that. In that regard, I draw members' attention to the "EuroSun 2006" conference that is going on in Glasgow at the moment.

We could have a direct impact through fair trade, which has been mentioned several times this afternoon. When Mark Ruskell visited Malawi, he and Mike Pringle visited two very different enterprises: the sugar producers and the coffee producers. The fair-trade sugar producers have an impressive organisation that even has the capacity to trade with the United Kingdom. In contrast, the struggling coffee producers in the north of the country do not yet trade with the UK under a fair trade agreement. The benefits of the fair-trade premium are truly striking in terms of the investment that the sugar producers' organisation has managed to make in health care, education and other areas that benefit its community.

On a side note, I learned yesterday that some outlets that sell fairly traded chocolate are putting incredible mark-ups on it. People think that the money is going to the producers, but it is not; they get the original price and the extra money goes straight into other people's pockets. That needs to be addressed.

Malawi's Government has relatively little to spend each year, so it is absolutely obscene that it is still paying back debts to wealthy nations and

having its development hampered. Although the UK has cancelled some debt, Jubilee Scotland's estimate is that £14 million is still outstanding. That debt really should be cancelled. I call on the Executive and the First Minister to use their influence with the UK Government on that issue.

Karen Gillon: Does the member accept that some of the debt that Jubilee Scotland has highlighted is owed to private companies and that there should be some public pressure on those private companies, not just on the Government, to cancel that debt?

Robin Harper: That is a fair point.

The west has a moral imperative to reduce the impacts of climate change on countries such as Malawi. We in Scotland must reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and press other industrial nations to follow suit. I would like the Executive to help Malawi and other developing countries by pledging to cut our overall net greenhouse gas emissions rather than pledging to make cuts only in particular areas. Africa will suffer more than any other continent if global warming gets much worse.

In summary, there are specific actions that we in Scotland can take to support international development: encouraging economic development that is truly sustainable, facilitating free trade and reducing climate change impacts. I urge the Executive to focus at least some of its efforts in those areas.

A lot of people have mentioned the importance of getting expertise into Africa. Many organisations specialise in that and I urge the Executive to give such non-governmental organisations, especially those that give business and teaching help, as much support as possible.

16:14

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): We can take great pride in the institutional links that are now working between our country and Malawi. I quote the First Minister, Jack McConnell, with approbation. He said:

"If we are not part of the solution in Africa ... we exacerbate the problem." —[*Official Report*, 1 June 2005; c 17383.]

I agree, and I suspect that everyone else does.

However, it is the personal links that disperse the value of our connections throughout society both in our country and in Malawi. Those links entrench the value beyond the period in office of a single Government and beyond a single session of Parliament.

In my case, the links are twofold. Dr Hastings Banda won his first election here in Edinburgh. He

stood for, and won a seat on, the council of the University of Edinburgh union when my father was the president of that body. I have to say that they learned different lessons from their experience. Hastings Banda learned to be captivated by the power of elected position and became a vicious despot. My father was rather different. He was always conscious of duty over power. That is a lesson that we must all learn with humility while in office. It is a gey hard task that has to be learned by each new generation of politicians. We can say with honesty that there are encouraging signs of that approach taking root in Malawi.

My other personal connection—a relatively small one—is through a gentleman called Dr Wilson, who was my father's locum. My father was a general practitioner in Fife and Dr Wilson came for a few weeks in the summer each year so that my father could get away. Dr Wilson happened to be Livingstone's grandson, so occasionally we talked about life in Africa.

I turn to the challenges and the new responses that we have to think about. First, it is a myth that trade solves all the problems. The Department for International Development in London states on its website:

"A 'successful' outcome to the World Trade Organisation ... round is likely to result in Malawi losing 11% of its export earnings. Malawi has lost its preferential access for sugar to the European Union ... Malawi's main export is tobacco whose market is vulnerable to increasingly widespread health concerns."

Progress brings challenges, and we must not assume that simple-minded knee-jerk reactions will be the solution. The absence of trade is of course a problem, but it is also an opportunity. The imposition of a perfect free market is a bigger challenge than steady, careful progress.

Another myth is that money solves the problem. Used wrongly, money can make the problem a great deal worse by separating those who have in society even further from those who have not. In local manufacturing, money is often used to import products—often engineering products—that could more appropriately be produced locally, which would build capacity and be sustainable in the long term.

There are other myths about money. One of the great myths played a part in one of the great lost opportunities for the banking industry. When apartheid ended in South Africa, none of the banks would go into Khayelitsha or the other squatter camps and lend people money for houses. They thought that that was a no-no. The reality was that people who had not used credit before were always desperate to repay loans that were made to them, and the indigenous banks that sprung up have been successful. The microcredit movement, which exists throughout the world, is

the way forward for money in less developed economies. I commend it—and any support that we can give it—to the minister. Although money is valuable, our individual time is invaluable by comparison.

Another myth is the idea that we in the west innovate and people in the less developed world do not. I point to the honeybee network, which began in India, primarily in Gujarat province, but is spreading outside India. It is a network of village innovators who produce simple innovations. The network is designed to ensure that the lessons that are learned in one village are passed on to others. It is being mentored, led and supported by some of the top profs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. By using the modern communications that are available, they need not visit Malawi to mentor and support innovation in villages.

I will give examples of what has happened. A power-free water cooler has been developed and is being sold abroad. A motorcycle has been adapted to create a tractor from almost no money, simply by recycling. A new design of pulley makes it possible to draw water from a well in a way that is more effective and involves less effort.

The third world has much to teach us. Perhaps one point is that we must stop calling it the third world, because it will overtake us by avoiding some of the mistakes that we have made. We must support it in that journey. Only a few of us will make the journey to Malawi in body, but we can all connect in our minds and in our spirit, and we must do that.

16:21

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): It is good to participate in what has been, by and large, a remarkably consensual and non-partisan debate. We have honestly recognised that, when set against the problem, our contribution and our effort are small. However, that is a start. As Des McNulty said, we are beginning to raise the public's awareness that it is not just for Governments—for others—to do something, but for each and every one of us as individuals, regardless of our political allegiances, status in society, religious affiliation or anything else, to play our part and not just talk about it. It is sad that Scottish Socialist Party members could not be with us today, particularly given the stance that they have historically taken on some of the issues.

It is tempting to take as our starting point the G8 summit last year, but it is important to remember that much of the work that we are discussing has been carried out over many years—many members mentioned that. The minister spoke of the generosity of the Scottish spirit and the

collaborative work that Scotland has for many years done with the UK Government. The minister said that the spirit of G8 built on work that was under way, which includes activities to improve health care, education and the economy in the developing world. Many speakers have alluded to all that.

Those are perhaps the best-known activities—the activities that are most readily appreciated, understood and supported in our communities and best reported in the press. Perhaps less well appreciated and understood and certainly less widely reported, although not necessarily less supported, is the work that is being done in Arabic and other nations—particularly in nations with Sharia law—to improve administrative, judicial and penal systems. I congratulate the people from Scotland—officials and practitioners, not politicians—who have put a lot of effort into that work, supported by the Executive and by the various institutions in Scotland.

Given the scale of the problem, perhaps our biggest challenge is to use our relatively small resources where they will do the most good, so that we contribute to the big picture that Linda Fabiani spoke about and, as Murdo Fraser said, make our little do a lot.

In my final two and a bit minutes, I will highlight three examples from my constituency of how Scotland's international development effort is being helped by young and old, by churches, by education, by the public and by the private sector. Pupils at Auchmuty high school in Glenrothes were so struck by the pictures that they saw from Sri Lanka after the tsunami that they teamed up with a local company called Ardmel, whose founder is Sri Lankan, and with other local companies and Fife Council. They succeeded in raising £80,000 to ship out and provide a new junior school for a village in Sri Lanka. The pupils went out there to help to set up the school and to give teachers initial support in setting up classrooms. That relationship continues to develop.

Next Monday, Newcastle primary school will present a petition to me and my Westminster colleague John MacDougall MP in support of the give my friend a teacher campaign, which, as many members will know, seeks to bring more teachers to schools in rural areas and to develop more local teachers. Indeed, Karen Gillon spoke eloquently about that very issue.

Finally, Ian Macaulay, the head teacher of Pitteuchar East primary school in Glenrothes, was given the opportunity by the Executive, the British Council and Fife Council to go to Malawi for a year. From that initial visit, he has sustained a relationship with a primary school in Namadzi that has resulted not only in collaboration between the

schools but in a project in the village that teaches the community how to use e-mail. That allows people to exchange resources and information and to request, for example, guidelines and other materials to be printed out here and posted back to Malawi. It will also support local commerce, which might help not just Namadzi and Malawi but other countries in the developing world not to make the same mistake that we made. After all, by allowing and encouraging people to move to more urban areas, we have reduced the employment potential in our rural areas. That has caused great problems in rural Scotland, and we do not want Malawi to make the same mistake.

On Monday evening, the pupils of Pitteuchar East primary launched a DVD that shows what they have learned about Malawi and what the children of Namadzi have learned about Scotland. Indeed, the minister has been invited to visit the school and see the DVD for herself. Our children learned that, in Namadzi, a pencil, a piece of paper and a book are precious. On the other hand, the children of Namadzi learned about Scotland, its weather, the closeness of the sea and the wildlife. Interestingly, they somehow have the impression that there are lions in Scotland—I am not sure that that is particularly advantageous. However, that work shows that from little acorns, big trees can grow. From these small beginnings, we can ensure that we play our part in supporting the developing world and in improving the world for us all.

16:27

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is entirely appropriate that in the final debate before the summer recess we should lift our eyes to far horizons. Like some other members who have spoken this afternoon, I have not visited Malawi. However, I have learned a great deal from this afternoon's high-quality speeches and, in the time available, I want to touch on as many points as possible.

The minister provided a very good round-up of where we have reached and where we are aiming to go and reminded us of some important statistics, including the target of increasing aid to Africa by \$25 billion a year by 2010, and the importance of targeting grants at small-scale projects. Indeed, other members touched on that issue. The minister also highlighted the area of fair trade and the evident and tangible desire of ordinary Scots—rich and poor, young and old alike—to make a difference.

Linda Fabiani touched not only on the international development fund but on public health, which is the major issue for most of Africa, and raised the interesting prospect of China being a future trade partner of Africa. She also

highlighted the lack of a democratic structure in Africa and, in particular, in Malawi.

Murdo Fraser quite correctly reminded us that Dr Livingstone and his followers went to Malawi to protect the people from the slave trade. He also highlighted the strong link with Christianity and the Church of Scotland, which is something that the two countries can build on in their work together.

Mike Pringle told us that at last night's Scottish Parliamentary Journalists Association dinner a sum of money was raised for Malawi, which demonstrates that good can come out of all kinds of events. I believe that he was the first to talk about full debt cancellation, and he also made some very interesting comments about the outdoor facilities at Likhubula House.

Karen Gillon put it simply when she said that we should do what we can to change the world and Maureen Watt very kindly paid due tribute to the First Minister for grasping this issue. Ms Watt also mentioned the potential for tourism, which I believe runs parallel to Alex Johnstone's point about trade. If I read Alex Johnstone right, he was stressing the importance of not polarising or upsetting the internal market in Malawi. There are checks and balances that we have to think of when we consider tourism.

Des McNulty gave us the chilling statistic that 50 mothers would have died since the beginning of the debate by the time that he spoke. Goodness knows how many must have died by now. That is the reality of the tragedy and it is something that we would do well to remember. He was also wise to say that we are learning as we go along. International aid is comparatively new territory for this Parliament, but providing that we learn and that we do an audit to see what we have achieved and what we could have done better, we will be able to improve.

I return to what Alex Johnstone said, because I must give him credit for raising a crucial point about corruption. He said that corruption is often based on fleecing the system for the sake of it, but in some cases the simple, bleak necessity of surviving drives people to corruption. Some of those people have no choice. However, I would like to make my own contribution on this matter. How dare some countries be so hypocritical as to wave the finger at Africa for corruption, when we read about the tragic case of a banker who took £20 million from a bank in our own country or about the man who collapsed a bank in the far east? The money that can be nicked out of the system here, tragic as that may be, would make such a difference in some parts of Africa. Corruption and breaking the law are, unfortunately, to be found all round the world, and we should not suggest that Africa has a monopoly on them.

Irene Oldfather drew our attention to the consular presence in Scotland, and Jack McConnell's own expression last year was that supporting development in Africa was Scotland's unfinished business. Irene Oldfather talked about what is being done at St Michael's academy in Kilwinning, and that underlines the fact that young people are keen to be involved, which gives one enormous hope for the future.

Robin Harper talked about lifestyles that use the resources of three earths and lifestyles that use the resources of half an earth. I hope that it is not true, but if there is anything at all in what he said about fair trade profiteering, that is indeed reprehensible. I ask the minister to look into the issue. If there is nothing in it, there is nothing in it, but if there is something to the notion that people are profiteering, shame on them.

Stewart Stevenson took us on a truly awe-inspiring tour of his experience and knowledge. There is never a speech that he makes that does not make me sit up and come away with something that I had not expected, and now I know about Dr Hastings Banda. I thought for a minute that Stewart Stevenson was claiming to be Dr Livingstone's grandson, but the minister put me right on that. I thought that he must look younger than he is.

Christine May reminded us that this is a non-partisan debate, and that is hugely important. I started my contribution by saying that we have lifted our eyes to far horizons. There are not many watching us from the press gallery, but we can say privately that our involvement in Malawi is something that we can be proud of. It is not a huge amount of money, but we are giving what we can and we are targeting it. We have the noblest of reasons: if just one life is saved—or perhaps better—that is an inestimable reward for those who regard life as sacred, as I do. That is why our small contribution makes the difference between despair and hope for those who are being helped.

It has been a real pleasure to take part in the debate. It only remains for me to wish my colleagues a relaxing and restful summer before we come back refreshed to debate matters further in September.

16:33

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Jamie Stone summed up the theme of the debate when he talked about the importance of making a difference. The debate has been of the highest standard and it has served an invaluable purpose in highlighting the special relationship between Scotland and Malawi.

I became aware of that special relationship on visiting the museum dedicated to David

Livingstone in Blantyre, adjacent to Hamilton in Scotland. David Livingstone was not just a great explorer; he was a man who repeatedly confronted the slave traders, whom he regarded as the scum of humanity. His expeditions in Malawi were those of a man who had set forth from Scotland with nothing more than the clothes he wore, his medical equipment, his bible and his moral fervour, all of which stood him in good stead. The friendship that followed between Malawians, missionaries, doctors and teachers became an important part of our mutual history, which is highly valued in a great many quarters both in Scotland and in Malawi.

The Executive is now working with Voluntary Service Overseas to find successful ways of enabling Scots teachers and education managers to work up educational development proposals that will help Malawi. In addition, other Scots are contributing substantially. For example, the Strathclyde partnership is distributing 32,000 school books in Malawi and it has provided computers that talk to visually impaired children at Montfort College. Similarly, the primary objective of the Malawi millennium project is to train the trainers by providing sustainable tertiary education in priority areas of need. That will have long-term results as it will provide Malawi with more skilled employees.

I am glad that the CPA branch in the Scottish Parliament has built up a strong and enduring relationship with the Malawian Parliament. It is particularly pleasing that the first major visit to Africa by a Scottish Parliament CPA delegation was to South Africa and Malawi and that all its significant recommendations were acted on. I cannot help expressing pride that my friend and colleague Ted Brocklebank was able to complete the donation of many bags of golf clubs to Malawi's new golf course through the most ingenious use of the diplomatic bag.

Maureen Watt touched on the sensitive subject of corruption in Africa. The issue has been a problem not only for this Administration but for successive Governments since overseas aid became a reality of modern life. The President of Malawi dealt with the subject on his visit here, when he spoke from the Presiding Officer's seat. One way of dealing with the matter is to ensure that funds are awarded for agreed projects or to charities with clear purposes. I hope that the funds from the Scottish Administration, which amount to £2.4 million, will reach those for whom they are intended. Perhaps the minister can reassure us on that point. I am sure that she would wish to do so.

It would help if the Executive gave its support to the development of business and trade communications between Scotland's business community and that of Malawi. It would also help if

the Executive assisted businessmen in Scotland to provide scholarships for Malawians to gain the necessary expertise in Scotland before going back to Malawi. I ask the minister to confirm that she would give her blessing to such possibilities.

We welcome the fact that the £2.4 million will go to projects such as the University of Stirling's project to empower local communities by giving them relevant education and practical knowledge to make their farming and fishing more sustainable and productive. The University of Strathclyde's goal of reducing maternal and infant mortality in a cluster of villages in the Chikwawa district of Malawi is necessary. Through means of a separate programme, it plans to provide basic health training to health workers and better facilities at the local hospital. A further example is that funds going to Tearfund UK will reduce the impact of AIDS on affected individuals, families and communities that are unable to cope.

Of course, we could do a great deal more. Karen Gillon and Irene Oldfather mentioned the importance of tourism, transport and infrastructure developments and Robin Harper talked about internal development. I mention to the minister the pressing need for teaching courses for teachers and health workers.

In February, the second parliamentary group that went to Malawi heard from the staff of the nursing and midwifery training colleges that they would welcome twinning or support from health institutions or colleges in Scotland. I ask the minister whether there are specific plans in place for a greater exchange of students to study medicine and teaching in Scotland. In her opening speech, the minister made comments that seemed to point in that direction.

I will deal quickly with the argument that whatever we do is a drop in the bucket. I do not accept that argument. If everybody puts a drop in a bucket, it adds up to a surprising amount. The Parliament can act as a catalyst to draw in a great deal of extra help from other sources. After all, politicians should be dealers in hope. If we succeed in our purpose, it will result, as Mike Pringle said, in serious, practical help.

We express profound gratitude to those generous individuals in Scotland who sustain charitable links with Malawi. We believe passionately that what has happened so far has built sure and certain foundations for future progress. However, as Karen Gillon relevantly pointed out, this must at all times be done on the basis of a willing and genuine working partnership between our two nations. We wish to broach this subject with humility but also with commitment and conviction. If we are allowed to do that, I believe that the special relationship will flourish.

16:40

Linda Fabiani: This has been an interesting debate and I have enjoyed every speech. There is much to be answered. I will do the big UK picture first because I feel that the things that were said about that require answers.

Mike Pringle talked about the UK's commitment to achieving the UN target for aid of 0.7 per cent of gross national income. There is no reason why that target cannot be achieved now—after all, we signed up to it decades ago through the UN but never achieved it. Des McNulty spoke about the UK being a trailblazer. Although I think that Gordon Brown has done rather well, I would not go beyond that. I put it to members that the Scandinavian countries have been the trailblazers because they, unlike the UK, met the UN target some time ago. Small independent countries throughout Europe have also met that commitment and Scotland, too, could do that. Many members spoke of what people do, and have been doing for years, to help in Malawi, other parts of Africa, and, indeed, in places all over the world. I suspect that what is now happening is that the Government is falling behind the aspirations of the people, who are looking for much more.

I am going to be nice now because the holidays are coming up. We will finish on a positive note. As I said, there were many interesting contributions to the debate. Murdo Fraser, Karen Gillon and Irene Oldfather, particularly, spoke of school links. I was also interested in what Murdo Fraser said about households in Malawi being headed by seven-year-olds. I learned a lot about that during my short trip to Malawi.

Karen Gillon said that primary education is now free in Malawi. That is great and it is wonderful that Malawi has achieved that, but when I was there I learned that in many rural areas people still pay for primary education because knowledge about the law that such education should be free has not filtered through to those areas. That relates to the lack of a democratic and governmental infrastructure to feed information to people. Even if education is free, how can a seven-year-old who heads a household go to school to take advantage of education if their day-to-day existence involves trying to earn a living to be able to feed their siblings? I welcome the statistics, but I think that we should look behind them and recognise that there is still a lot to do.

I was particularly taken by one of Karen Gillon's stances. Other members mentioned this, too, but she started the strand of discussion on the point that we cannot be seen as imposing ourselves on others, which is right. One thing that always concerns me is the perception that we get from the media here that Africa is always in trouble and needing handouts and that Africans are not quite

able to manage things for themselves. Some of the most vibrant, educated people whom I have ever met, who are spot on about how to achieve things, have come from African communities. It is a shame that Africa is never shown in a positive light in countries such as ours but always portrayed negatively. It is also patronising to assume that what we regard as the best way of life in our countries and the best way of doing things should just be imposed on others.

When I was in Malawi, quite a few African folk spoke to me about another aspect. The discussion, which I found fascinating, was about the dependency culture that can be created when the west comes in with great intentions and imposes things. A Malawian chap gave me an example of that. He said that although it is wonderful to see secondary schoolchildren from Scotland—or France, Germany or Spain—taking part in a project to build a small rural school, when that happens the Malawian schoolchildren stand and watch. The Malawian children do not have the opportunity to volunteer and take part in a joint effort, which does not promote the sense of the common good that is required if communities are to be able to build themselves up. We are getting better at acknowledging that aid of all types must be delivered differently.

Alex Johnstone talked about cash cropping, which was a huge issue under corrupt Governments in Latin America, where people starved while asparagus and other crops were shipped round the world to people who could afford to buy them. Such cash cropping remains an issue in Africa. We must learn from the mistakes that were made in the past and, thankfully, Latin America is turning a corner in that regard—politically and environmentally.

As Alex Johnstone said, food is sometimes available but unobtainable. I talked to a fantastic woman from the north of Malawi who is a community activist. She told me that in her area some fruit is not recognised as food, although it would be a sustainable food. Folk in the village think that only animals eat the fruit, so she is taking part in a project through which fruit trees are planted in people's gardens and well-known, respected local people are recruited to go about eating apples and bananas, so that the villagers start to regard such fruit as normal food. I was fascinated to learn about that project.

Another form of cash cropping leads to the environmental degradation of Malawi's forests. The sale of charcoal across the border to Mozambique is a huge problem. The trade is illegal but represents an example of a law that cannot be properly enforced, for various reasons—it is easy to criticise that from a secure standpoint. As Irene Oldfather said, there is a

need for sustainable jobs, so that people do not have to degrade their environment and living conditions in order to feed their families.

James Douglas-Hamilton talked about health training, which is crucial. Hospitals and clinics are needed, but health staff must also be trained so that they can work with people in rural communities. I was fascinated to hear about a project at the University of Dundee, which provides distance learning for nurses in Eritrea and Kenya. I hope that nurses in Malawi will be able to take advantage of that project. People do not need just a standard health course; they need to learn about the health care that their communities need.

In Malawi, we should aim for security in jobs, food, energy, health and the environment. When there is a measure of such security, we will be able to say that we have made a difference.

16:49

Patricia Ferguson: I thank members for their speeches in an almost entirely positive debate, which has demonstrated that it is possible to reach a broad consensus on how Scotland should try to alleviate international poverty.

I hope that no member would disagree with the fact that, as Des McNulty said, we all have an obligation to look beyond our borders and support the countries of the developing world in meeting the challenges that they face. I hope that no one would disagree that the historic values of fairness, equality and mutuality should continue to drive forward our international development policy today.

The debate has focused on the huge amount that Scotland has to offer in terms of skills and knowledge. There are a number of people in the Parliament today who are now quite familiar with Malawi and with the enormous challenges that are faced by the country, which is one of the poorest in the world. I particularly value the support from members of different parties for our common goal of building a better future for Malawi.

I will probably not have time to respond to all the points that have been made and I apologise to members in advance if I do not manage to do so. However, I will try to write to members about any substantive point in the debate that I do not manage to respond to now.

In her opening speech, Linda Fabiani asked whether the database that the University of Edinburgh is working on is to include small agencies. I understand that the directory is intended to focus on institutions in Scotland with a specific expertise in Africa, as well as bodies and associations that aim to represent Africans in

Scotland. In the discussions that my officials and I will have with the university, we will take up that issue and find out whether there is some possibility in that regard.

Murdo Fraser has had to leave us, for understandable reasons, but I put on record my thanks to him, both for his considered speech today and for his support for the work that we have been doing on fair trade. That has been worth while and Murdo Fraser has played an active part.

As a member of the Co-operative Party—as are many of my colleagues—I thank Mike Pringle in particular for his reference to the Co-operative Society's early commitment to fair trade products. It has led the way and has encouraged people to realise that fair trade works and that it is not just about charity.

It is important to reiterate a point that Linda Fabiani and Maureen Watt made about the Westminster Government reaching the target and fulfilling its obligation on assistance. It is important to mention that this is the first Government ever to have such a target. The fact that we have a target is a measure of the commitment that our Westminster colleagues have shown. Gordon Brown has been pivotal in that regard and he deserves a great deal of praise from us, which I am happy to give. Anyone who heard Hilary Benn speaking in the chamber last week should have no doubt about the commitment of our Westminster colleagues to ensuring that those aims are reached and the wider agenda is addressed.

Mike Pringle was right to focus on the issue of maternal health. We can help a great deal there. We have an obligation to focus on that area in a country where women have a one in 25 chance of dying in childbirth. As with many other aspects of our work in Malawi, we do not want simply to train midwives; we want to train the people who train the midwives. By training the trainers, we can fan out the effect, allowing that training to trickle down into the country in a way that will not be achieved simply through training individual midwives.

Karen Gillon correctly identified the partnership approach that we are trying to take to our work with Malawi. A good, early, practical example is the relationship that has been built up between Minga community day secondary school in Malawi and Sanday community school in Orkney. The relationship that was formed between those two schools was partly responsible—along with the great work of Glenys Hughes of the St Magnus festival, who has also visited and worked in Malawi for a time—for ensuring that this year's St Magnus festival had a focus on Malawi.

We have heard a lot about the fact that primary education is now free in Malawi, whereas secondary education still has to be paid for. I

asked people at Minga school whether that factor inhibited children from completing their education. It does, of course, particularly if there is more than one child in the family, and girls will perhaps come off worse than boys. I asked how much a year's education at Minga school would cost and learned that it translates to approximately £21 per annum. That brings home to all of us the fact that small actions can achieve a great deal in our work in Malawi and that we can all play a part. That amount of money should not be an inhibitor to anyone's education—not when we have such resources at our disposal.

As Karen Gillon rightly said, teachers and midwives are dying. That is a great problem. There is the proliferation of AIDS and the average life expectancy is only 35. We are therefore concentrating on programmes for training the trainers, to help the numbers to reach a critical mass.

I say to Maureen Watt that the President of Malawi is dedicated to wiping out corruption. He has made that a keystone of his Administration. However, to be frank, the existence of corruption is not a reason for us to do nothing. Alex Johnstone was right to say that the corruption that Maureen described in Malawi is not about people getting rich quick but about people being able to find the next meal for their family. The choices are that stark. We are talking about people who are often surviving on the equivalent of 6p a day. For them, the opportunity to get some other money will always be a huge temptation.

I congratulate Des McNulty on a particularly thoughtful speech but also on the leadership that he has shown in the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on international development. He is right to emphasise the responsibility that we all share. I hope that our approach to our relationship with Malawi—which is about partnership, not about the building of a large hospital or school that the people cannot then populate or use—will ensure that we can build capacity at an early stage.

Irene Oldfather mentioned the Malawian High Commissioner; I too had the pleasure of meeting the High Commissioner. I congratulate the schools in Irene's constituency on the good work that they have done.

I want to mention one thing that the High Commissioner told me when he was here on Monday. A key thing that his President asked him to do while in Great Britain was to make the co-operation agreement with Scotland a priority. We welcome the fact that the High Commissioner and the consul are committed to the work that we are doing.

Robin Harper mentioned Currie high school and Inverkeithing high school, which should be congratulated. Robin's comment about Malawi learning from our mistakes was very interesting. I had a similar conversation with one of my counterparts in Malawi. We were talking about trade and the conversation drifted on to the subject of packaging. I suggested to him that one thing that Malawi must not do is replicate the mistakes that we have made in that and in many other areas.

Stewart Stevenson gave us an interesting family history of his connections with Malawi—I have to say that it came as no surprise to many of us. Stewart's story was similar to that of many people in Scotland, which is one reason why our partnership with Malawi is so important. Links go back a long way, as can be seen in the missionary graves of 150 years ago. People as young as 24 died while trying to help Malawi.

I say to Stewart Stevenson that the Malawian finance minister, in a recent report to Parliament when he was presenting his budget, said that he hopes that Malawi will be able to have its debt cancelled very soon. He believes that the country is very much on track towards meeting the criteria.

Christine May mentioned schools in her constituency. I know that Pitteuchar East primary school has issued me with an invitation, and I would very much like to go—not least to talk to the teacher who has spent time in Malawi. At lunch time, I had the pleasure of briefly meeting Karen Gillon's constituent who is in the public gallery for the debate. I heard about her experiences in Malawi. I have now visited Malawi myself and feel that I understand the country a little better, but it is always good to hear from people who have spent a considerable amount of time working in the country. Their experience is particularly valuable.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked for reassurance on how money that the Executive has given to projects is being used. He is right. Our approach is to give it to organisations that work on the ground. Although we work with the Government in support of its objectives and priorities, money goes directly to projects.

It is important that we do not forget the challenges that we still face. The wave of public support for the make poverty history campaign brought those challenges right to the top of the political agenda and sent a stark message to the world leaders who met at Gleneagles. A year on, we need to keep up the fight and, as representatives of the Scottish people, we have a duty to respond to the demands that have been made and to keep the issues of aid, trade and debt on the agenda.

I am delighted to have had the opportunity to speak to the Parliament and to provide an update on the Executive's international development policy and, in particular, the progress of our work with Malawi. I am rightly proud—as I am sure we all are—of the tremendous contribution that Scottish organisations and individuals make in that area.

Our commitment to Malawi is long term. My visit to Malawi and today's debate have reinforced my view that our approach and the priorities that we have set are the right ones. Through our unique relationship with Malawi and our wider international development policy, we will continue to encourage Scots to learn more about global issues and to act where they see injustice.

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S2M-4612, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, that the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill, 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)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (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)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (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)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (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)
 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)
 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)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (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)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 83, Against 0, Abstentions 14.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The second and final question is, that motion S2M-4634, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on the Compensation Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the UK Parliament should consider those provisions of the Compensation Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 2 November 2005, which will legislate in the devolved area of damages law in respect of joint and several liability, as laid out in LCM(S2) 8.1.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time; it also concludes our summer term. I wish everyone a good and productive recess. See you in September.

Meeting closed at 17:03.

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